

\$10.5 Million Federal Grant Will Bring Humphreys County's Flood-Impacted Students Under One Roof Temporarily in the Fall

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– Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee joins with FEMA today in announcing a \$10.5 million federal grant to be used to reunite Humphreys County elementary and middle school students in a temporary facility following the damage to their schools from the deadly August 2021 flood.

“I applaud the local, state, and federal effort underway devoted to bringing a sense of normalcy to the citizens of Humphreys County and their schoolchildren,” Gov. Lee said. “This is one of many steps to be taken in a joint, long-term recovery commitment for Humphreys County.”

FEMA is obligating the funds through its Public Assistance program as part of the federal Major Disaster Declaration designated to the State of Tennessee following the August 2021 flood.

About 1,000 students, who have been dispersed in different schools throughout the county since last year, will attend fall classes in a renovated Acme Boot Company factory, once one of the town's largest employers.

“Some of our school staff used to work summer jobs in that factory many years ago,” said Richard Rye, Director of Schools for Humphreys County. “Now it will be ours. We saved \$2 million by moving into that building instead of bringing in portable classrooms.”

Unlike the schools damaged in the August 2021 flood, the temporary facility is not located in a floodplain. Last year's flood inundated two of the county's schools with up to eight feet of floodwater in some places, causing ceilings to collapse and sending heavy fire doors off their hinges and desks and chairs floating through the halls.



FEMA

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Rye had pulled into the school parking lot early that Saturday morning with a truck full of sandbags after he learned the creek was rising. Before he could unload one sandbag the water rose “like a tsunami.” He, along with a few other staff members, were forced to climb on the roof where they stayed for three hours before the water receded.

“Had that happened on a weekday when all the kids were in class, I don’t know what we would have done. There would have been many lives lost,” said Rye. “Sometimes it still keeps me awake at night. After that, I swore that I’d never put our kids back in those schools again.”

The factory will be retrofitted to include 69 classrooms, a cafeteria, and a playroom. Walls will be constructed and a reception area with secure vestibules added for the administration. A parking lot in the back will be turned into a playground, drop-off and pick-up point for parents along with a play gym. A larger parking space for faculty will be constructed in the front with bus lanes.

“Local, state, and federal officials came together quickly to collaborate with a positive outcome in mind,” said TEMA Director Patrick Sheehan. “A significant representation of this teamwork is the funding Gov. Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly made available in the 2023 state budget for the Humphreys County school system to purchase the ACME Boot factory, allowing local and state school officials, and FEMA, to begin working toward securing the PA grant quickly. Because of this close cooperation, Humphreys County students will have a safe place to attend classes this fall.”

School officials are in the process of locating a site to build the new permanent school and working with FEMA on funding. When the new school facilities are completed, the former factory will serve as the school system’s central office, technology, maintenance and transportation offices and garage.

The total cost of constructing the temporary facility is \$11.7 million, with FEMA covering 90 percent, the state paying five percent and the local government responsible for the remaining five percent.

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