



June 18, 2025

Executive Summary: Saint Louis Public Schools' Comprehensive Tornado Response

On May 16, 2025, a devastating tornado inflicted severe damage across the City of St. Louis, profoundly impacting the Saint Louis Public Schools (SLPS) community, including its facilities, students, families, and staff. This document details the comprehensive, multi-faceted response undertaken by SLPS, demonstrating an initiative-taking commitment to immediate recovery, educational continuity, and long-term community well-being.

SLPS assessed damages, secured federal and state assistance, implemented emergency student relocation plans, provided critical family support informed by direct feedback, and fostered robust partnerships for broad community outreach. These actions underscore the district's resilience and dedication to its mission amidst unprecedented challenges. The coordinated efforts reflect a deep understanding of the immediate and prolonged needs arising from such a disaster, positioning SLPS as a central pillar in the community's recovery.

I. Immediate Response and Building Damage Assessment

Immediately following the May 16th tornado, SLPS initiated rapid assessment efforts to understand the full scope of the storm's impact on its schools. This swift action was crucial for prioritizing safety and emergency planning for subsequent steps for recovery and educational continuity.

A total of twelve SLPS schools were directly impacted by the tornado. This substantial number highlights the widespread nature of the disaster across the district's infrastructure. Among these, seven schools sustained substantial damage requiring temporary emergency student relocation for the start of the upcoming 2025-26 school year. These included Ashland, Hickey, Washington Montessori, Yeatman, Soldan, Sumner, and Beaumont. Additionally, five other facilities—Dewey, Bryan Hill, Pamoja, Columbia, and Blewett—were also affected, primarily experiencing power outages. The distinction between schools requiring relocation due to structural damage and those with temporary power issues was critical for transparent communication, transportation rerouting, and efficient resource allocation.

In addressing the structural integrity and safety of its properties, SLPS collaborated closely with the City of St. Louis Building Division.

The city conducted comprehensive damage assessments across the affected areas, utilizing a system of color-coded tags to communicate risk levels for several of our

schools. The integration of SLPS' efforts into this established city-wide assessment framework and expertise was helpful.

The specific repair costs for SLPS buildings are estimated and have been the source of information for conversations with the insurance carrier. The overall damage across the city is projected to exceed \$1.6 billion, affecting over 5,000 buildings. Given that many SLPS schools were directly impacted, SLPS' repair costs will undoubtedly result in a significant unbudgeted expense. Securing every possible dollar from federal and state programs becomes paramount to mitigate the financial strain on local taxpayers and the district's operational budget.

In addition to the repairs, Mayor Cara Spencer and her team reached out to SLPS to utilize 4 buildings to serve as a space to collect tornado related debris managed by the Missouri National Guards for a period of two weeks.

II. Navigating Federal and State Assistance: FEMA and SEMA Engagement

Following the May 16th tornado, the City of St. Louis initiated a meeting with the Land Reutilization Authority (LRA) and SLPS to determine if the total tornado damages exceeded \$12 million. During the meeting, the LRA shared estimated damages in the amount of \$28 million and SLPS shared an estimated total of \$77 million. Given that the amounts exceeded \$12 million, the City of St. Louis submitted information to declare the City of St. Louis a disaster area. The City of St. Louis and State of Missouri swiftly engaged federal and state emergency management agencies to secure vital recovery assistance. A critical milestone occurred on June 10, 2025, when the President of the United States approved Governor Kehoe's requests for Major Disaster Declarations for Missouri, specifically including the City of St. Louis. This declaration, designated as Disaster 4877, was a crucial step in unlocking federal aid and providing a formal framework for recovery efforts.

The Presidential Disaster Declaration makes both Individual Assistance (IA) and Public Assistance (PA) available. Individual Assistance provides financial and direct services to eligible individuals and households for housing, medical, transportation, and personal property aid, directly benefiting SLPS families and staff affected by the storm. Public Assistance, on the other hand, allows certain non-profits—which includes SLPS as a public entity—to apply for grants to repair disaster-damaged infrastructure. This approach ensures comprehensive support for both the community's residents and its public services.

SLPS' efforts to assess and address damages are intricately linked with the support from FEMA and the Missouri State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA). Individuals within the SLPS community are able to apply for FEMA assistance online or by phone.

SLPS' engagement with FEMA and SEMA is crucial for identifying and recouping repair expenses. The City of St. Louis also issued several Executive Orders that created a supportive financial environment for all damaged properties, including schools.

For instance, Executive Order 84 clarified the focus of funds for building stabilization and tornado recovery efforts, while Executive Order 85 allowed for the waiver of certain insurance claim payouts for tornado-damaged properties. These city-level actions, though not directly SLPS initiatives, indirectly support the district's ability to address damages and identify costs by easing the financial burden on property owners and facilitating recovery.

The following table outlines key milestones in the broader governmental response that directly impacts SLPS' recovery efforts:

Table 1:
Key Milestones in SLPS' Engagement with FEMA/SEMA (May 16 - June 12, 2025)

Date	Event/Action	Relevant Agency/Authority	Significance for SLPS
May 16, 2025	Tornado/Severe Storms Impact St. Louis	NA	Initial damage to 12 SLPS schools and community.
May 18, 2025	SLPS Statement and News Conference	SLPS Superintendent Dr. Borishade	Initial communication of district response and available resources.
May 19, 2025 – May 23, 2025 at SLPS	After the Storm Community Outreach Fair	SLPS Student Support Services, Little Bit Foundation, Walmart, Parsons Blewett, SLPS Foundation	Immediate provision of resources and community referrals.
May 20, 2025	Walkthrough of Ashland	SLPS Superintendent, Dr. Borishade, Chief Operations Officer, Mr. Square Watson, E. D. of Communications, Mr. Poole	The staff of Ashland wanted to return to their building. Doing the walkthrough helped to create a level of understanding regarding the impact of the tornado and information to begin an insurance claim.
May 29, 2025	Tornado Family Impact Survey Launched Met with City of St. Louis and Mo National Guards	SLPS	Critical data collection to inform targeted family support.
June 2, 2025	Metro High School Resource Center Opens	SLPS, Little Bit Foundation, SLPS Foundation	Establishment of a sustained hub for essential items and case management.

June 9, 2025	Disaster Assistance Center (DAC) Opens	City of St. Louis	Centralized access for residents to various recovery agencies and services.
June 10, 2025	Presidential Disaster Declaration Approved (Disaster 4877)	U.S. President, Governor Kehoe, FEMA	Unlocks federal Individual and Public Assistance for St. Louis, including SLPS.
June 11, 2025	Resources and Care Packages delivered to Ashland families	SLPS Superintendent, Dr. Borishade along with Safety and Security	Ensure SLPS families receive resources/care packages and to let them know SLPS is here for continued support.
June 12, 2025	Resources and Care Packages delivered to Washington Montessori families	SLPS Superintendent, Dr. Borishade along with Safety and Security	Ensure SLPS families receive resources/care packages and to let them know SLPS is here for continued support.
June 13, 2025	FEMA application submitted	Mr. Tim Shultz	This begins the process for SLPS' request for Public Assistance eligibility review.

III. Ensuring Educational Continuity: Student Relocation and Re-entry Plans

Between May 19, 2025, and May 22, 2025 (last day of school), the average daily attendance at impacted SLPS schools was approximately 52%. For this reason, SLPS requested Attendance Forgiveness from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Recognizing the extensive damage to several school buildings, a critical decision was made to temporarily relocate students from the most impacted schools for the start of the 2025-26 school year. This initiative-taking measure aims to provide stability and continuity in education and plans for transportation, while long-term plans will be made by the Board of Education.

Seven schools required relocation due to severe damage: Ashland, Hickey, Washington Montessori, Yeatman, Soldan, Sumner, and Beaumont. Each has been assigned a specific host school within the SLPS district to ensure a smooth transition for students and staff. For instance, Ashland students will be taught at Jefferson, Hickey students at Walbridge, and Washington Montessori students at Ames. Yeatman students are being taught at Gateway Middle School, Soldan students to Gateway STEM, and both Sumner students and Beaumont programs will be housed at Clyde C. Miller College Prep Academy. All host schools were decided based on bell schedules, proximity from the original schools, space utilization, athletics and principal input.

In contrast, five other facilities—Dewey, Bryan Hill, Pamoja, Columbia, and Blewett—were affected by the tornado but primarily experienced power outages.

These schools have been assessed and are already being prepared for the new school year, demonstrating a swift resolution for less severe impacts and allowing students to return to their original buildings without delay.

These decisions were made to "provide stability and continuity for our students while SLPS meticulously work through the complexities of restoration". SLPS is extremely grateful for the flexibility and understanding shown by students, families, and staff during this challenging period, underscoring an ongoing commitment to transparent communication. The choice to temporarily relocate students represents a proactive risk mitigation. This approach prioritizes student well-being and academic consistency. It reflects a student-centered approach to crisis management, acknowledging that predictable learning environments are paramount. This also recognizes that rebuilding after the significant damage will take time.

The following table provides a clear overview of the relocation plans for the heavily impacted schools:

Table 2: Heavily Impacted SLPS Schools and Their Relocation Sites

Heavily Impacted School	Relocation Site	Nature of Damage
Ashland	Jefferson	Significant Damage, requires relocation
Hickey	Walbridge	Significant Damage, requires relocation
Washington Montessori	Ames	Significant Damage, requires relocation
Yeatman	Gateway Middle School	Significant Damage, requires relocation
Soldan	Gateway STEM	Significant Damage, requires relocation
Sumner	Clyde C. Miller College Prep Academy	Significant Damage, requires relocation
Beaumont Program	Clyde C. Miller College Prep Academy	Significant Damage, requires relocation
Dewey	Original Building	Power Outage, ready for re-entry
Bryan Hill	Original Building	Power Outage, ready for re-entry
Pamoja	Original Building	Power Outage, ready for re-entry
Columbia	Original Building	Power Outage, ready for re-entry
Blewett	Original Building	Power Outage, ready for re-entry

Additionally, principals of both the impacted and hosting schools have been meeting and planning for the successful start of the school year as co-located school communities, including addressing unique opportunities and challenges they will face as leaders, particularly helping students acclimate to the new environment while maintaining their school identities and pride.

As a result of schools being co-located, the district will need to plan for an unbudgeted expense for June – July for a grand total of approximately \$121,000.

IV. Prioritizing Student and Family Well-being: Support Initiatives

The tornado impacted more than 2,800 families. Many people were displaced from their homes. This significant number underscores the urgent need for comprehensive support beyond just school facilities.

A critical component of SLPS' response was the deployment of a "Tornado Family Impact Survey" on May 29, 2025. This survey was designed to be intentional in meeting the needs of SLPS impacted families, explicitly seeking to understand how they were impacted, the challenges they faced, and their specific support needs. The responses from this survey directly informed SLPS' actions by enabling the coordination of targeted resources and assistance. This proactive data collection allowed the district to tailor its support efforts, ensuring that help was responsive to the actual, expressed needs of our community. The utilization of this survey demonstrates a commitment to data-driven decision-making in crisis response. This approach builds trust within the community by demonstrating that SLPS is actively listening and adapting services based on real-time feedback from affected families. It also implies a deeper understanding of the diverse challenges faced by SLPS families, from housing displacement to mental health needs, allowing for a more effective and equitable distribution of resources.

SLPS, in partnership with community organizations, provided various levels of direct support to families. This included the provision of essential items such as clothing, shoes, toiletries, and food, as well as critical services like counseling and case management. The support provided was described as "tailored, dignified, and ongoing," emphasizing a commitment to long-term recovery rather than just immediate relief. Case managers, Family Support Specialists from SLPS and The Little Bit Foundation worked directly with SLPS families, completing needs assessments, procuring resources, and providing continuous follow-up until families achieved stability.

Beyond students and their families, SLPS partnered with Parson's Blewett and the SLPS Foundation who extended support to SLPS educators and staff who experienced loss. This included helping to pay deductibles for those whose cars were damaged by the tornado.

This approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of SLPS' school community, recognizing that the well-being of the staff directly impacts their ability to support students. The provision of "tailored, dignified, and ongoing" support, coupled with comprehensive case management and assistance for staff, indicates a commitment to

holistic community care. This goes beyond immediate relief to address the deeper, long-term needs for stability. By partnering with the Foundations to support staff with deductibles, SLPS recognizes that the well-being of staff directly impacts their ability to support students.

This comprehensive approach aims to restore a sense of normalcy and psychological safety, which are critical for learning and recovery, and positions SLPS as a true cornerstone in the community.

The following table summarizes the purpose and actionable impact of the May 29th Tornado Family Impact Survey:

Table 3: Purpose and Actionable Information from the May 29 Tornado Family Impact Survey

Survey Purpose	Key Information Collected	Examples of Support Provided Based on Survey Data	Implied Benefits to Families/District
To understand how families were affected and what support they need.	Challenges faced, specific support needs (e.g., housing, food, clothing, mental health).	Coordination of targeted resources and assistance; provision of essential items (clothing, food, toiletries); case management; referrals to community services.	Tailored support, efficient resource allocation, increased trust, faster recovery, and stability for families and the educational environment.

V. Community Outreach and Strategic Partnerships for Recovery

SLPS demonstrated exceptional speed and proactive mobilization in community outreach efforts. Just three days after the tornado, on Monday, May 19, 2025, SLPS hosted an "After the Storm Community Outreach Fair" at its Central Office. This immediate response fair provided essential resources, including consultations from various district departments, community referrals, hygiene supplies, socks, underwear, and sack lunches. Students In Transition, Little Bit Foundation, also joined this initial fair, signifying early collaboration; the Midas Family also supported SLPS families by covering the cost of hotels for families who were displaced. This rapid response was crucial for addressing immediate, acute needs and establishing SLPS as a central point of contact and support from day one. It signaled to the community that the district was not waiting for external directives but was taking immediate action to alleviate suffering and connect families with vital resources. This swiftness is a key differentiator in effective crisis management.

Building on this initial outreach, while Vashon was initially going to serve as a hub, due to the construction that was scheduled to take place nearby, a more sustained effort was launched with the opening of a temporary resource center at Metro Academic and Classical High School (4015 McPherson Ave.) on June 2, 2025. This center operates Monday through Thursday, from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, serving as a centralized hub

where families can receive essential items and engage with case managers for ongoing support. The operational scope of the center is comprehensive, offering case management for diverse needs such as housing, transportation, employment, public assistance, and school transfers, alongside essential supplies like clothing, shoes, and toiletries.

Most importantly, the center serves *anyone* affected by the tornado, not exclusively those connected to SLPS, emphasizing a broader commitment to our entire community.

SLPS' outreach efforts are significantly bolstered by authentic family and community partnerships. The establishment and operation of the Metro High resource center are a direct result of a collaboration SLPS has with The Little Bit Foundation and the Saint Louis Public Schools Foundation. Additionally, Operation Food Search provides food items at the center, further expanding the range of support available. This partnership allows schools to serve as a much-needed resource beyond educating students.

Conclusion: Sustained Commitment to Recovery and Resilience

SLPS will remain steadfast in its commitment to the long-term recovery and rebuilding process following the devastating May 16, 2025 tornado. SLPS' actions since the event reflect a deep dedication to restoring facilities, ensuring educational continuity, and providing comprehensive support to students, families, and staff. Through rapid damage assessments, emergency student relocations, and proactive engagement with federal and state assistance programs, we have laid a robust foundation for the journey ahead.

This summary highlights the action-orientation and remarkable strength and resilience of the entire SLPS community, reinforced by strong partnerships with city agencies, federal and state entities, and local non-profit organizations. The strategic utilization of tools like the May 29th Family Impact Survey underscores a commitment to data-driven actions ensuring that support is precisely tailored to our community's expressed needs. This collaborative spirit, characterized by immediate mobilization and sustained outreach efforts, will continue to serve as a guide through the ongoing recovery.

SLPS will continue to communicate transparently with the community as permanent solutions for building restoration are finalized and as families transition towards long-term stability. The focus remains on fostering a safe, stable, and supportive environment for all members, ensuring that the educational mission continues uninterrupted, and that our community emerges stronger.

Dr. Millicent Borishade



Superintendent
Saint Louis Public Schools