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Levy: Schools need millions from feds

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Schools Chancellor Harold Levy says he'll request hundreds of millions of dollars in federal disaster aid to help the Board of Education recover from the World Trade Center terrorist attacks.

"Obviously, I'm hopeful we'll get it. We'll see," Levy said following a kickoff of the board's Penny Harvest program aimed at getting students to raise more than $1 million in pennies for Twin Towers relief efforts.

Levy deputy Tony Shorris said the school system wants to be reimbursed for emergency expenses related to the relocation of students, cleanup efforts and increased food and transportation costs.

Shorris said using the Oklahoma City bombing as a model, the board could be eligible for more than $100 million in federal funds just to cover the costs of providing counseling for traumatized students.

And the board will request another $100 million to make up for lost school time — possibly by lengthening the school day for a period of time.

Kids at schools directly affected lost about a week; others at least a day.

"We're putting together a request for additional resources. We have incurred tens of millions of dollars in direct, out-of-pocket expenses responding to the disaster," Shorris said.

The board proposal will be part of the city's disaster-relief package submitted to the Federal Office of Emergency Management.

Shorris insisted the emergency-aid request will not offset $200 million in budget cuts the chancellor announced last month.

In fact, he said the reductions, including cuts in after-school and sports programs will continue to be implemented — with the exception of trimming counseling services.

Levy said the situation is stabilizing, noting that attendance is almost back to normal. But there's a ways to go.

"There's a healing period and we need to go through that. There's been a lot of damage here. It's going to take us awhile," he said.

But the chancellor added, "The concern I have is that we also get back to focusing on reading and writing."



HAROLD LEVY
Budget cuts not affected.

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