



## WILLIAM V. HUSFELT, III

It's always been challenging to run a school system with more than 25,000 students and 3,500 employees, but Bill Husfelt, superintendent of Bay District Schools, has never been one to shy away from difficult decisions. The extreme damage wrought in his community by category five Hurricane Michael, however, brought with it a set of unique challenges that troubled even a seasoned leader like Husfelt.

"I can honestly say that I've never seen anything like the damage in our community after Hurricane Michael," he said. "And the challenge of leading us through that, with no power, water, sewer or communication for the first few weeks was immense." Children were back in school, despite more than \$500 million in damages districtwide, in 29 days according to Husfelt. "That was nothing short of a miracle and it's a true testament to the incredible team we have here and their collective determination to get the job done."

While Husfelt thought coming back from such devastation was the most daunting challenge he would ever face as a superintendent, it's taken a back seat to the ongoing difficult decisions associated with opening schools back up in a pandemic. "At least after the storm we had a clear path; we knew what needed to be done and we just had to figure out how to make it happen and how to pay for it," he said. "This Covid-19 situation is a moving target with guidance changing daily, and sometimes multiple times a day, and lives literally on the line."

But with a bachelor's and master's degree from Florida State University and 32 years of experience in the school system, Husfelt is not afraid to make difficult decisions. "When I was first elected in 2008 I walked into the Great Recession," he said. "We had to close schools, repurpose schools and cut staff just to balance the budget."

Husfelt is concerned that another recession is just around the corner. "We know we're spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on PPE, sanitation, cleaning, extra staff etc.," he said, "and I know that districts across the state and country are doing the same thing. We know the state is going to have to make cuts but we just don't know when, how much and where those cuts will be."

In the meantime, Husfelt keeps on visiting schools every chance he gets and encouraging the employees who are working directly with the children. "That's why we're here," he said, "the kids keep us coming back day after day and they depend on us for everything from food to clothing to love, encouragement and academics."

Husfelt and his wife of 38 years, Theresa, reside in Panama City, Florida. A grandfather of ten, with one more on the way, Husfelt was recently re-elected to an unprecedented fourth term in office and will serve as the superintendent until November of 2024 when he plans to retire.