

Students at Rosa Parks School in Orange show Haiti earthquake relief support

By Barry Carter/The Star-Ledger

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ORANGE -- Red everywhere. And blue everywhere. In classroom after classroom. In the cafeteria, the gym, the principal's office, too.

These are the main colors of Haiti's national flag, the tiny Caribbean island fighting for survival in the wake of a massive earthquake that has killed and injured an untold amount of people.



Amanda Brown/The Star-Ledger
Anakia Jones (left) and Jessica Lopez, both sixth graders at Rosa Parks School in Orange, work on math problems during the school day. Like Anakia, many students and teachers wore red and blue to show their support for the people of Haiti. As the world copes with the devastation — shipping donations, supplies, money — students, teachers and staff at Rosa Parks School in Orange stood up today for the impoverished country another way. They draped themselves in the color of that nation's flag.

A shirt, a scarf, a bracelet, a bag. Patches of red dominated the landscape. Some students even had a replica of the flag dangling from their jean pocket. It was as small as handkerchief or big as towel. That student wore it like a sash, letting it hang from his shoulder.

The sea of red was comforting for Haitian students. Some of them have relatives who didn't survive, others are still waiting to hear the fate of uncles and cousins.

They are family in this grade school, a band of support, a shoulder to lean on.

"That's what we are here," said Nancy Lasher, a third grade math teacher. "Their loss is my loss."

So she embraced one of her students, a 9-year-old boy who lost three cousins and an aunt.

Tamica Miller did the same for a 7-year-old girl in her second grade class. The little one had not heard from her mother and father.

"That's the heart wrenching part," Miller said.

And with that, Miller gave the girl a teddy bear from a friend with this message.

"Whenever you get sad, hold onto this bear."

They're holding onto each other at the school, trying to keep busy and not think of the worst.

But it's hard when it's the news of it is everywhere.

And it doesn't help, said 15-year-old Widline Jean Paul, when people's fear of more destruction or violence in the streets get passed around.

She said it makes her nervous until she gets to school, where class and friends are a diversion, a safe haven to cope.

That's why she wore her red today. She says she has her country on her back its song in her heart.

"Our country has pride," said Jean Paul. "I'm doing it with pride. Don't look at us as hopeless. See us as your brothers and sisters and help."

The school district, like many across the state, is pitching in with relief efforts to collect supplies. In Irvington, Mayor Wayne Smith said he would be meeting with officials from Beth Israel Medical Center in Newark to set up an area in town so people can talk with someone if they are stressed or overcome with grief.

In the meantime, township Hall and all of its fire stations continue to serve as drop centers for people to make donations.

This is how Marcdaline Jean has gotten through each day after teaching at Rosa Parks. She's also the coordinator for the New Jersey Haitian Student Association and has been working non-stop with fundraising organizations. Ten of her relatives and friends are missing. She said her family — cousins, uncles, aunts — had a home in the epicenter of the earthquake. She has called many times to reach someone. There's a dial tone, but no one answers.

"No news is good news," she said, "But as the days go on, I get more worried"