Badly damaged Abbeville High could be closed up to 2 months

ERATH — Abbeville High, the largest school in Vermilion Parish with more than 800 students, could be closed up to two months, according to officials at a special meeting of the School Board on Tuesday.

Scores of parents, teachers and others gathered at the Erath High School gym to get an update on school damage from Hurricane Lili. Some schools with relatively little damage could open Thursday or Friday.

But Superintendent-elect Joey Hebert said even some schools with electricity restored may not be able to open until next week because of a lack of food in cafeterias. Every school in the parish lost its entire food inventory, which spoiled after the storm knocked out power. Some restocking is under way.

A decision will be made sometime today on which schools will open and when. Principals at Abbeville High and J.H. Williams Middle schools also will meet to try to work out a “platoon” plan to share the middle school campus since the two schools share bus routes.

Assistant Superintendent Cliff Alleman said trying to move the high school students around to other schools would create further problems in transportation planning and other areas. He said the high school and middle school students may go to school half a day each until the high school is ready to open.

Consulting architect Gene Sellers Jr. said a two-month closure to replace the entire roof at Abbeville High is the worst-case scenario. He said the school could possibly open in a matter of weeks, depending on the availability of construction materials.

On other recovery fronts, the Red Cross opened a mobile kitchen in the parking lot of the former National Food Store on the corner of La. highways 14 and 82 in Abbeville, next to McDonald’s. Coordinator Tim Creswell of Abbeville said the kitchen can turn out up to 20,000 meals a day.

The parish Office of Emergency Preparedness command center at the courthouse also got a 500-kilowatt generator from the Federal Emergency Management Agency replacing two 60-kilowatt generators used since Lili struck Thursday. The extra power ensures that elections will go on as scheduled Saturday.

Three evacuation shelters remained open at Erath High, Rene Rost Middle School and Galliano High School in Kaplan and Pecan Island High School in Pecan Island. Large portions of Abbeville remained without power late Tuesday.

Mayor Mark Piazza urged residents to be careful of downed wires that have gone unnoticed under debris when power is restored. A mobile home in the Maurice area burned down Monday after power was restored, along with an outdoor kitchen at another residence, village volunteer Fire Chief Matthew Trahan said.