

DEPARTAMENTO DE  
**EDUCACIÓN**



# ROAD TO **New Schools**

SIGNED MARCH 2022

PUBLIC POLICY PLAN  
FOR RECONSTRUCTION  
OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS  
IN PUERTO RICO



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## Executive Summary

The Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) aims to provide our students quality, innovative and effective education to promote their interest and the maximum development of their abilities, becoming adults who contribute to the well-being of our global society. PRDE has a historic opportunity with more than \$3 billion dollars assigned to improve school infrastructure. To maximize this opportunity, PRDE identified eight strategic pillars, as the foundation of the most important infrastructure plan ever implemented in the schools of Puerto Rico.

These pillars, for the most part, do not seem to be directly related to structural aspects, but rather academic. This is because PRDE aims to take into account how infrastructure impacts, shapes, and drives in a determinant manner the productivity, focus, and execution of academic and social-emotional development goals.

A comprehensive infrastructure plan must carefully address these needs that, at first glance, appear to outweigh the scope of the structural aspects.

This unprecedented funding opportunity will allow PRDE to rethink, reassess and redesign infrastructure as a significantly influential factor in the academic experience. That is why this plan, through these pillars, intends to contemplate the correlation between infrastructure and the present and future needs of the learning and teaching processes.



1. **Resilient Schools:** Improving existing public-school facilities to withstand health crisis and severe weather conditions goes along with designing resilient facilities to keep our students and school communities safe. Investing in modern and safe school facilities will enable a faster response to disasters when they occur, mitigate the extent of damage and suffering that communities endure, and speed the recovery of critical functions. PRDE's goal is to equip 100 % of its school shelters with generators, water storage tanks, and other mitigation measures against natural disasters.
2. **Refocus on Special Education spaces:** When a student has a disability that significantly affects its academic progress, PRDE has the responsibility to provide, not only a free public education, but an appropriate one. This group of students requires a highly designed and tailored education. To achieve this, PRDE has found imperative that the physical facilities provide an environment that allows the optimal development of academic skills. Is through the Infrastructure plan, that PRDE plans to invest in sensory labs for all primary schools, develop independent living laboratories in all secondary schools and add appropriate spaces for therapy and regular teaching sessions throughout the Island. Special need guidelines will be incorporated in all school designs.
3. **STEM Schools:** STEM is a centerpiece of the Federal Department of Education comprehensive agenda. The existing STEM is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. At the end, the benefits of a strong STEM foundation cannot be fully realized until all members of society have equitable access to STEM education and there is much broader participation by those historically underserved and underrepresented in STEM fields and employment. PRDE's goal is to invest to increase two (2) fold the number of STEM schools in the island and align the public educational system with the competitive global trends and sector growth areas of Puerto Rico.
4. **Career and Technical Schools:** One current strategic goal to achieve a recovery plan is the development of a modern workforce with relevant skills to meet the demands of an evolving labor market. To begin, Puerto Rico

must first overcome the acute workforce challenges and structural problems that have impeded economic growth for more than a decade. The PRDE has set out a course of action that strengthens the post-secondary education to help develop career pathways for individual workers that would improve their employment trajectories, and better aligns workers' skills with employment opportunities and the needs of local businesses.

5. **Bilingual Schools:** In today's global world, the importance of English cannot be denied and ignored since English is the greatest common language spoken universally. Through consultation efforts, stakeholders raised a concern regarding the limited number of bilingual schools at the public school system. Through the Infrastructure Plan, PRDE seeks to develop at least one bilingual school at each of the 78 of municipalities, increasing by 3.5 times the number of Bilingual schools in the public system.
6. **Fine Art Schools:** PRDE understands the set of skills fine arts brings to our students. As the many benefits of arts education has been thoroughly researched—is that the arts can teach life skills, inspire students, and allow them to experience the world in a different way. During consultation activities, students also stated their interest in having more fine arts programs at schools. This pillar also aligns to Puerto Rico's Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) strategic projects, aimed to help improve Puerto Rico's economy in the entertainment and filming industry. PRDE's goal is to increase by 20 %, the number of fine arts schools that it currently has. It will also modernize the facilities of existing fine arts schools and provide them with new equipment and resources.
7. **Sports Schools:** Sports can serve as a vital tool to boost a student's development by encouraging goal setting, teamwork, effective communication, memorization, adaptability, and discipline. According to stakeholder's consultation, students raised their interest on having more sports programs throughout the Island. The goal is to develop two (2) times the number of Sports schools with a special focus in community interests such as Basketball, Volleyball and Baseball.
8. **Montessori Schools:** The Montessori educational method develops students who are capable, accountable, knowledgeable people who have the strong sense of self they will need to thrive in the real world. Reason for this, is

because Montessori classrooms are thoughtfully designed to offer children opportunities to develop their own capabilities, for each classroom is filled with developmentally appropriate activities that encourage children to interact with specific learning materials, as well as to work cooperatively with others. Through the implementation of the Infrastructure Plan, PRDE's goal is to increase a hundred (100) schools with Montessori offerings, specifically focused on the Primary levels.

Through the implementation of these pillars, PRDE will not only positively impact our students' academic, socio-emotional, physical and health needs, but also will contribute to our region's economy in the forthcoming future.

However, due to the scope and complexity of the various projects that constitute working on these pillars, PRDE identified certain essential elements necessary to achieve an effective implementation of its Infrastructure Plan.

- **Program Management Officer (PMO):** To assist in effectively and efficiently administer the complexities of a recovery project and the rules applicable to the obligated funds, PRDE hired a Program Management Officer. The PMO will assist with the development of a Master Construction and Recovery Plan, aligned with PRDE Strategic Plan, which will include individual scopes of work for each school building selected to be restored, re-designed, replaced, or repurposed. The PMO will also help ensure the effective administration and compliance with all federal and state regulations with their grants management expertise.
- **Talent Pipeline:** Through a collaborative network and coherent plan, PRDE seeks to effectively increase student access to key support staff within schools. Increasing efforts to have knowledgeable and skillful professionals committed to all students and their learning, who work in contexts that support meaningful, equitable learning and individual children's needs, including educator preparation, licensure, accreditation, and developing professional development policies that ensure teachers and leaders can teach rich and relevant content to diverse learners in culturally and individually responsive ways, and
- **Monitoring and Internal Controls:** PRDE understands the importance of implementing appropriate fiscal monitoring and internal controls to the

disaster relief funds, as to address potential sources of waste, fraud, and abuse of these funds.

DRAFT

## Legal Background

The Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE or Department) was organized under Article V, Section 6 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. PRDE is the entity responsible for the planning and administration throughout Puerto Rico of all elementary, secondary and some post-secondary<sup>1</sup> public education schools.

The public policy for Puerto Rico's education is established by Act No. 85 of March 29, 2018, as amended, *Puerto Rico Education Reform Act*<sup>2</sup>, creating a public education system focused mainly on the students, and the establishment of an agile administrative structure. *Puerto Rican schools must be an effective tool to build a just and democratic society, by fostering ethics, solidarity, and social conscience. Schools must be a dynamic unit of change capable of explicitly developing the aptitudes, skills, and knowledge that provides students with the necessary competence and creativity to meet the challenges of the modern world. Education must address the varied needs and talents of students, by diversifying the offerings with creative learning and assessment alternatives, during both regular and extended school hours. We recognize the importance of developing knowledge and academic competence in harmony with the emotional and social development of students.* Act No. 85-2018, *supra*.

The Act also establishes that *any student of the public education system with a physical, intellectual, or sensory impairment or disability shall have the right to receive the services necessary for their impairment, in accordance with federal and local laws in effect, and subject to the provisions of federal and state laws pertaining to students with disabilities. It is the public policy of the Department of Education that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education based on an evaluation especially designed to address their unique needs in the least restrictive environment.* Act No. 85-2018, §10.01, *supra*.

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<sup>1</sup> Instituto Tecnológico de PR (Manatí, Guayama y SJ), María E Archeval Sálamo de Valdés, Ponce, Escuela de Troquelería y Herramientaje, Bayamón, PRAMI, Fajardo, Vocacional Agrícola Soller, Camuy, Agrícola de Bucarabones, Toa Alta, and Jose B Barceló Oliver, Adjuntas

<sup>2</sup> [Act No. 85 of March 29, 2018, as amended](#)

Furthermore, the school shall *provide services for students with disabilities, as provided in state and federal laws and regulations applicable to this population, among which is Act No. 51-1996, as amended, known as the "Integral Educational Services for Persons with Disabilities Act".* Act No. 85-2018, § 6.02, *supra*.

*The Department shall also offer educational and support services to the regular adult population and to the at-risk children and youth population.* Act No. 85-2018, § 12.10, *supra*.

The PRDE's *mission is to guarantee a free nonsectarian education that develops the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of all students to prepare them to succeed in a global labor market, provides them with the necessary competence and creativity to meet the challenges of the modern world, and transform them into individuals who are independent, lifelong learners, law abiding, mindful of nature, and capable of contributing to the common good.* Act No. 85-2018, *supra*.

*The Secretary of the PRDE shall be responsible for the effective and efficient administration of the Public Education System in accordance with the law, the duly established education policy, and the public policy adopted by the Legislative Assembly and the Governor, in order to achieve the purposes, set forth in the Constitution of Puerto Rico and in this Act for the Public Education System. Furthermore, the Secretary has the authority to prescribe, through regulations, the plans and strategies pertaining to the use, management, and budgetary matters of all school facilities, including those administered by other government entities.* Act No. 85-2018, *supra*.

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## Introduction

Schools are a safe shelter for children and adolescents, where their health and academic needs are prioritized. However, our school communities and students have been severely affected by the hurricanes, earthquakes<sup>3</sup>, and the COVID-19 pandemic, negatively impacting their health, security, and academic achievement. This is aggravated due to the vulnerability and outdated construction of our school buildings. The average Puerto Rican school is now 53 years old, presenting outdated layouts that are not aligned with the modern forms of education.

In Puerto Rico, public-school officials are responsible for the safety of more than 259,000 students. Since 2017, there have been thirteen (13) Presidential disaster declarations in Puerto Rico alone.<sup>4</sup> In the aftermath of Hurricane María in 2017, 22,000 children left Puerto Rico for the mainland, with more than half enrolling in Florida schools alone, primarily in Orange and Osceola counties.<sup>5</sup>

According to a 2017 FEMA School Natural Hazard Safety report<sup>6</sup>, “older school facilities are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters”. Our public schools also serve as community-based shelters in times of emergency and crisis; helping communities recover afterward natural disasters. Improving existing public-school facilities to withstand severe weather conditions and natural phenomena must be prioritize within the joint FEMA and Puerto Rico Department of Education infrastructure policy.

The Puerto Rico school's facilities no longer meet the educational needs of our students and communities, where flexible spaces are needed, laboratories are part of the learning process, and professionals, such as psychologist, therapist, and nurses, don't have a space to provide their very much needed services. Improving the existing public-school facilities to withstand severe weather conditions and designing new resilient facilities needs to be a key part of the federal government and the Puerto Rico Department of Education's infrastructure policy going forward.

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<sup>3</sup> [Natural Disasters, Armed Conflict, and Public Health | NEJM](#) – Table 1: Classification of Natural Disasters.

<sup>4</sup> [Presidential disaster declarations in Puerto Rico](#)

<sup>5</sup> [305 Schools Face Closure as Hurricane-hit Puerto Rico Tackles Budget Crisis. \(2018, February 1\). Their World.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [FEMA P-1000 \(June 2017\) - Safer, Stronger, Smarter: A Guide to Improving School Natural Hazard Safety – pg.29](#)

Furthermore, Puerto Rico's fiscal crisis and economic recession, high unemployment rates, and population decline, have also affected the Department's economic ability to maintain and repair the school buildings.

In response to these situations, the federal and state governments have provided support to the education system, through the assignment of funds and executive orders. For the first time, the Puerto Rico's school communities and students, will have the opportunity to be **concurrently** benefited from millions of federal funds, from the: Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Grants, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance Program, the Immediate Aid To Restart School Operations (RESTART) Grant, the Governor's Emergency Relief (GEER) Fund, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). These funds provide the necessary fiscal resources to support the safe reopening, renovation, and rebuilding of the school buildings and facilities, each within the availability of its funds.

*"Education is a pillar of society. It is of great satisfaction that in FEMA we can contribute to teaching in safe and resilient schools. Without a doubt, it is an essential part of the commitment that we have with the recovery of Puerto Rico, not only from María, but also from the earthquakes that caused so much damage,"* José G. Baquero, Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator in Puerto Rico.<sup>7</sup>

PRDE recognizes the need to invest in measures that ensure students, staff, and communities are kept safe within the walls of our schools. The Department will seek to renovate and build schools, specifically designed for greater resistance to and maximum functioning during and after natural disasters or emergency. Some schools will require retrofitting that meets and exceeds current building codes, setting the standard for modern design that prioritizes safety, regardless of impending catastrophe.

To administer and achieve this, PRDE reorganized the resources and created the Infrastructure and Recovery Office to supervise the PRDE's school infrastructure construction and restoration, and integrated the Office of

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<sup>7</sup> FEMA Press Release - NR 051 (Release Date: October 6, 2021)

Public Schools Improvement to provide the maintenance services to the school facilities, in compliance with the requirements of Act No. 2018-85, as amended, *supra*. This reorganization strategy will provide PRDE with the necessary tools to:

- restore and maintain the infrastructure,
- create resilient schools and positive learning environments,
- establish a sustainable capital improvement program capable of adapting to the school communities' changes and necessities, not dependent of the federal fund's assignments.

The Infrastructure and Recovery Office is responsible for the funds and grants management from projects related to PRDE, FEMA, CDBG, USDE, among others, and for the maintenance, construction and rebuilding of the school's infrastructure.

Moreover, as part of the recommendations from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) audit in 2020, and to comply with the federal applicable federal regulations, the Office will develop Standard Operating Procedures and guidance's to administer the funds and complete the school buildings restoration and construction.

PRDE also issued a memorandum<sup>8</sup> appointing a panel of representatives to act as PRDE's Infrastructure Committee. This select, diverse committee of stakeholders were strategically identified and tasked with the responsibility of developing an Infrastructure Public Policy Plan, aligned with the agency's strategic plan, and in compliance with Act No. 2018-85, as amended, *supra*.

To achieve this, PRDE identified eight pillars, upon which, the foundation for the most important infrastructure plan ever implemented in the schools of Puerto Rico. These pillars will not only positively impact our students' academic, socio-emotional, physical and health needs, but also will contribute to our region's economy in the forthcoming future.

Through the implementation of this plan, PRDE will be able to appropriately and adequately serve all of its students, particularly those in schools identified

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<sup>8</sup> [PRDE Infrastructure Public Policy Plan and appointment of Committee Members](#)

as needing repair or to be newly built. The eight (8) pillars will provide our students quality, innovative and effective education to promote their interest and the maximum development of their abilities, becoming adults who contribute to the well-being of our global society.

This plan also identifies the planning, professional management, execution and measurement strategies that promulgate and guarantee an efficient and effective administration of the Public Education System, facilitating the provision of services and the mechanisms that allow for the efficient and agile administration and operation.

The Plan is a living document, that will be updated based on the stakeholder's needs and priorities identified over the duration of the available funds.

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## A. Historic Events – Natural Disasters and Pandemic

In the past four years, our public-school system has been affected due to the natural disasters that have impacted the Island and the global pandemic of COVID-19.

### Hurricanes

Puerto Rico was impacted by two consecutive hurricanes during September 2017, the most catastrophic being Hurricane María. Hurricane María is the third costliest (\$99.9B), hurricane in U.S. history, behind Katrina (2005, \$178.8B) and Harvey (2017, \$138.8B), and was by far the most destructive hurricane to hit Puerto Rico in modern times.

Hurricane María, a Category 4 rated storm, struck Puerto Rico with sustained winds of 155 mph, uprooting trees, downing weather stations and cell towers, and decimating wooden and tin roofs. Electricity was cut off to 100 percent of the Island for extended periods of time. With no access to alternatives, such as solar or wind power, residents went without this basic necessity, jeopardizing health and safety, and exacerbating the medical challenges.

This outage is known as the largest blackout in U.S. history and plunged 3.4 million citizens into a desperate humanitarian crisis. Over the last three years, daily power outages – some for days at a time – are still plaguing the Island, and remaining mold and water pollution are still prevalent throughout most of the school buildings.

The Department was part of the immediate response efforts after the disasters, the school buildings served for months as community refuge centers that provided safety, food, and shelter for thousands of displaced families. Impeding the full resumption of the school's services until August 2018, almost a year after the passing of the hurricanes.

These severely destructive atmospheric events exacerbated the economic recession, health crisis, and contributed to a steady population loss of Puerto Ricans, due to the limitations in the: supply chains, and essential

services, and the need to seek better opportunities for their families elsewhere, thus making migration a prevailing narrative of quality of life.

## Earthquakes

On December 29, 2019, when Puerto Rico was beginning to achieve the recovery goals, the Island began experiencing seismic events. During the Christmas holiday recess, on January 7, 2020, 6.4 and 5.8 magnitude earthquakes struck in all parts of the Island, impacting the southwestern area the most. The seismic activity has continued ever since, with varying degrees. The economic impact of these disasters could rate them among the top five most expensive earthquakes in U.S. history, if compared to the data from the Insurance Information Institute and the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

Among the structures that suffered the most significant damage during the earthquakes were the schools' buildings in the southern portion of the island. Many of these schools had the "short columns effect"<sup>9</sup> structural problem, which makes them more vulnerable against seismic events.<sup>10</sup> The *Agripina Seda* school building, located in the southern coastal city of Guánica, is an example of the destruction and magnitude caused by these earthquakes. The top two floors of the three-story middle school building collapsed, leaving their 274 students without a school.

The earthquakes have further tested and aggravated the structural integrity of our schools, higher education institutions, and operational facilities. They further contributed to already fragile structures and facilities that had yet to be properly addressed after hurricanes Irma and María. Subsequently, President Trump declared Puerto Rico to be in a state of major disaster on January 16, 2020, ordering Federal assistance and aide to support the Commonwealth's recovery efforts. A total of 14 out of 78 municipalities, specifically located in the southern, western and central parts of Puerto Rico, were the most affected during the seismic events.

## Pandemic COVID-19

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<sup>9</sup> 4,014 school buildings

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20220104/fema-remains-focused-recovery-earthquakes>

On March 11, 2020, just two months after experiencing the seismic events, the World Health Organization decreed a pandemic because of the global spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), followed in Puerto Rico by an Executive Order on March 12, 2020. The Governor required all government agencies to implement all of the necessary measures to prevent and control the spread of this virus, including the complete closure of the school facilities.

Classrooms sat vacant and school buildings remained closed due to COVID-19 until March 2021, allowing the growth of mold, fungus and rust on desks, computer equipment, walls, bookcases, books, air conditioner filters and ceilings. In January 2021, the Department developed a plan for the safely reopening of the schools, providing all the equipment and materials required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC's), and cleaned and disinfected the school buildings.

However, decaying buildings clearly show that deep cleaning and sanitizing is not sufficient to attend the infrastructure problems that have been festering for years. The reconstruction of Puerto Rico's public schools, its fundamental right to equal school funding; and the students' right to be educated in a safe, healthy, high-quality learning environment must become and remain a priority and topic of daily discourse, until the work has been adequately and appropriately completed. It is imperative to recognize and respond to the urgency of reconstructing public school's buildings, as well as to advocate for full funding and flexibility to employ design solutions that fit Puerto Rico's unique context.

### **Understanding the impact of historic events**

Puerto Rico's decades-long economic crisis and the population drain of thousands of families to the U.S. mainland after Hurricanes Irma and María, has resulted in a sharp decline in pre-K-12 student's enrollment. This mass exodus not only attributed to an astounding decrease in student enrollment, but a brain-drain of a significant portion of the workforce, including educators. According to the 2020 Census report, Puerto Rico reported a reduction of 439,915 in population or 11.8%, when compared to the 2010 Census report.<sup>11</sup>

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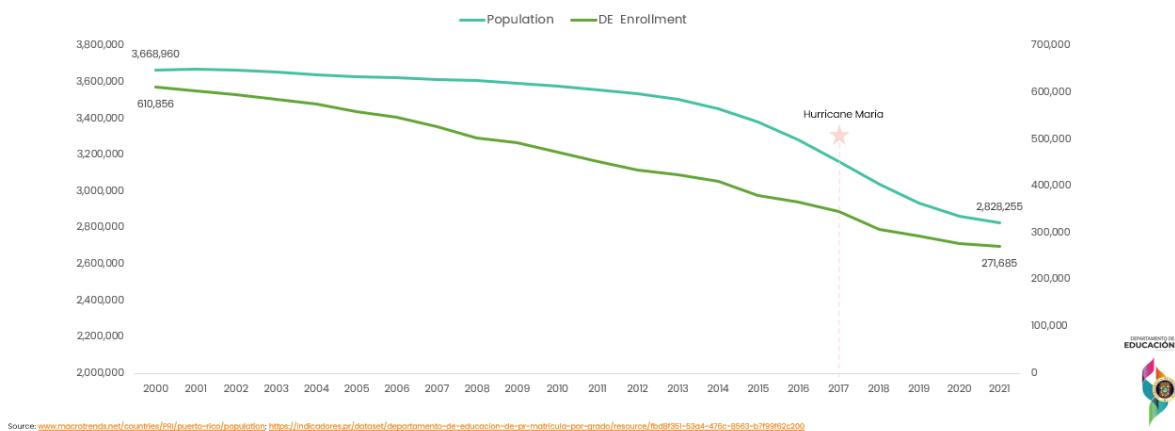
<sup>11</sup> [PUERTO RICO: 2020 Census](#)

Continued disintegration of political and financial stability and deteriorating infrastructure has contributed to steady population loss of Puerto Ricans seeking better opportunities for their families and themselves, thus making migration a prevailing narrative. For PRDE, the population drain reinforces an austere pattern of declination of quality of life, employment rates, educational programming provision, continuous school closures, and increased poverty, further widening already existing achievement and equity gaps across the Island. This continuous depopulation for residency on the U.S mainland, reflects a historic cultural shift, in terms of volume and duration recorded in the 2020 Census report, with a reduction of 439,915 in population or 11.8 %, when compared to the 2010 Census report.<sup>12</sup>

This decline in student population, along with the high cost of maintaining outdated and unstable school infrastructure, has led to the closure of 283 schools across the Island. For the 2021-2022 academic year, only 860 schools remain open.

## PRDE Student Enrollment vs. Population Trends

Puerto Rico's population has been steadily declining since 2001. However, the pace increased significantly after Hurricane Maria and has more aggressively impacted student enrollment.



<sup>12</sup> [Puerto Rico 2020 Census](#)

Below, PRDE describes the data sources used to identify the extent of any impact these historic events may have had on student learning, their well-being, including identifying the student subgroups most impacted by these events.

### Academic Impact

Studies<sup>13</sup> have measured overall building condition and its connection to student performance; these have consistently shown that students attending schools in better conditions outperform students in substandard buildings by several percentage points. School building conditions also influence teacher effectiveness. Teachers report those physical improvements greatly enhance the teaching environment.

Other studies<sup>14</sup> have compared the building conditions obtained through an assessment of certain components or features that have a direct influence on student achievement. These studies mirror those that used the age of the building as a variable in correlation to student achievement. However, in these studies, the evaluative instrument provides a more complete and holistic assessment of the condition of the building. These correlation studies are focused on their approach and use measurable data for statistical analysis. As a result, the data from these studies document, in rather precise terms, the differences in academic achievement of students in substandard buildings and those students in functional buildings.

Well-designed studies have used a composite building condition to measure the relationship it has upon student achievement. Berner (1993) compared the condition of elementary schools in Washington, DC to student standardized achievement scores.

A committee, organized by several groups of maintenance workers, engineers, and architects, were responsible of assessing the building condition and determining whether the building was in overall poor, fair, or excellent condition. Based upon this classification, the study correlated the

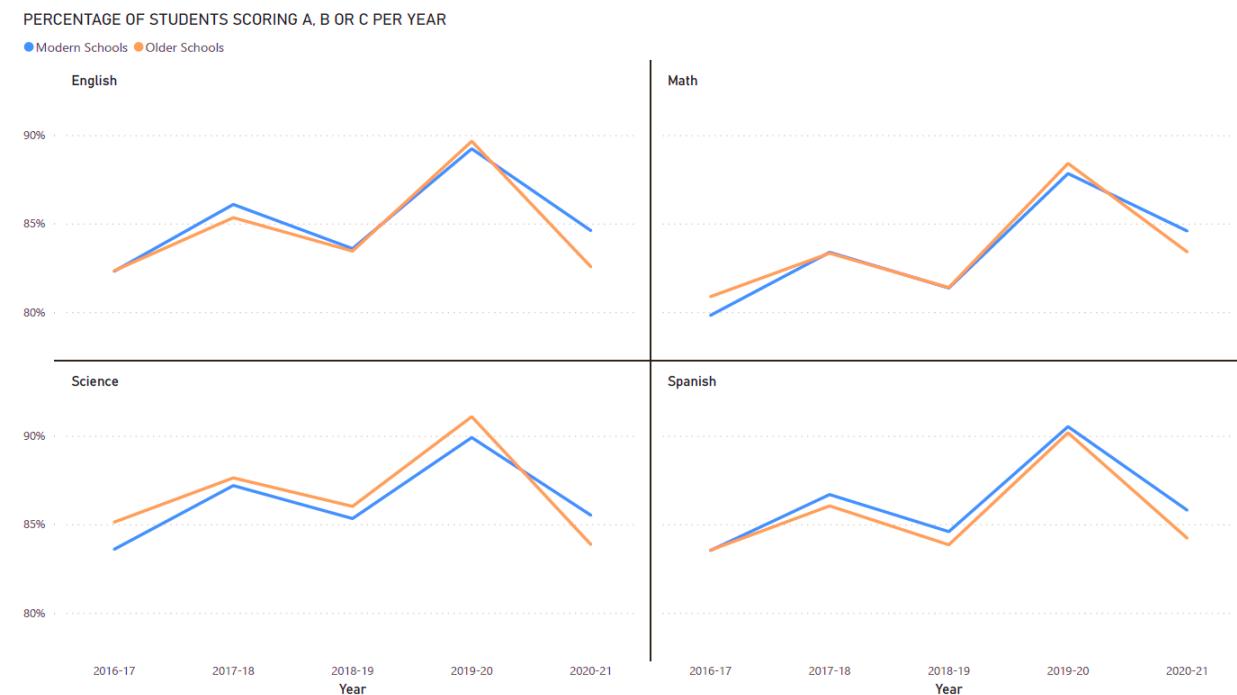
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<sup>13</sup> Earthman, G.I. (2002). School facility conditions and student academic achievement. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access.

<sup>14</sup> Berner, M.M. (1993). Building Conditions, Parental Involvement, and Student Achievement in the District of Columbia Public School System. Georgetown University

building rating with student achievement scores. The percent of students participating in the free/reduced lunch program, mean income in the census tract, and percentage of white students in the census tract were used as a control for the socioeconomic status of the school. The study indicates a significant difference of 5 percentile points in the achievement scores of students in buildings of poor condition compared with scores of students in buildings of excellent conditions. The study also states that based upon the parameter estimate that if a school were to improve its conditions from poor to excellent, the achievement scores would increase by an average of 10.9 points.

PRDE has gathered information, disaggregating the student population from those attending modern (21<sup>st</sup> Century or built after year 2000) and older schools. PRDE observed the change in percentage of students scoring A, B, or C in the core subjects, and compared those between students enrolled in modern and older schools.

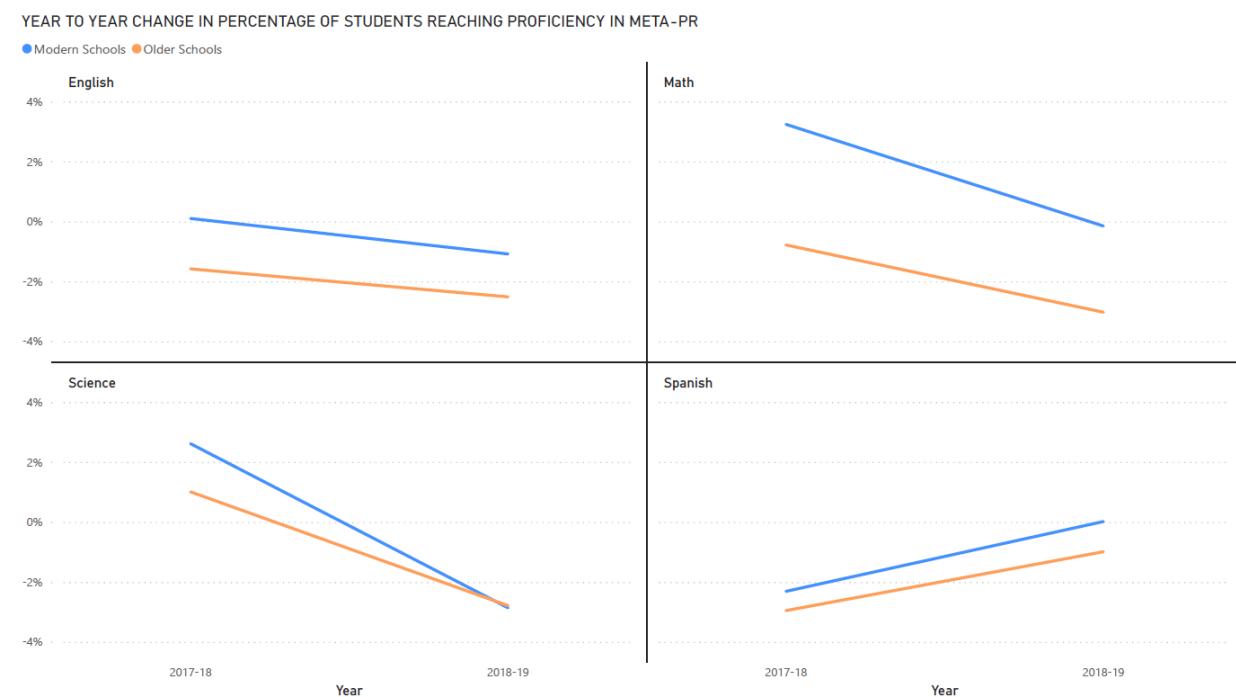


PRDE was able to identify that at the end of the academic year 2020-2021, after all of the catastrophic events that occurred between 2017 and 2020, the change in percentage of students scoring A, B, or C is seen in those students who were enrolled in modern school buildings. Therefore, PRDE

was able to find a correlation that the negative effect caused by all the disaster events was less in students that attended modern school buildings, than in those who attended older school buildings.

From another perspective, PRDE also analyzed student results in the annual state assessment (META-PR), given in the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years. Results present a similar correlation to the change in percentage of students scoring A, B, or C.

The effect of the 2017 disaster events (Hurricanes Irma and María) is clearly presented below. The decrease in proficiency percentages was evident in students enrolled in modern school buildings, when compared to those enrolled in older school buildings.

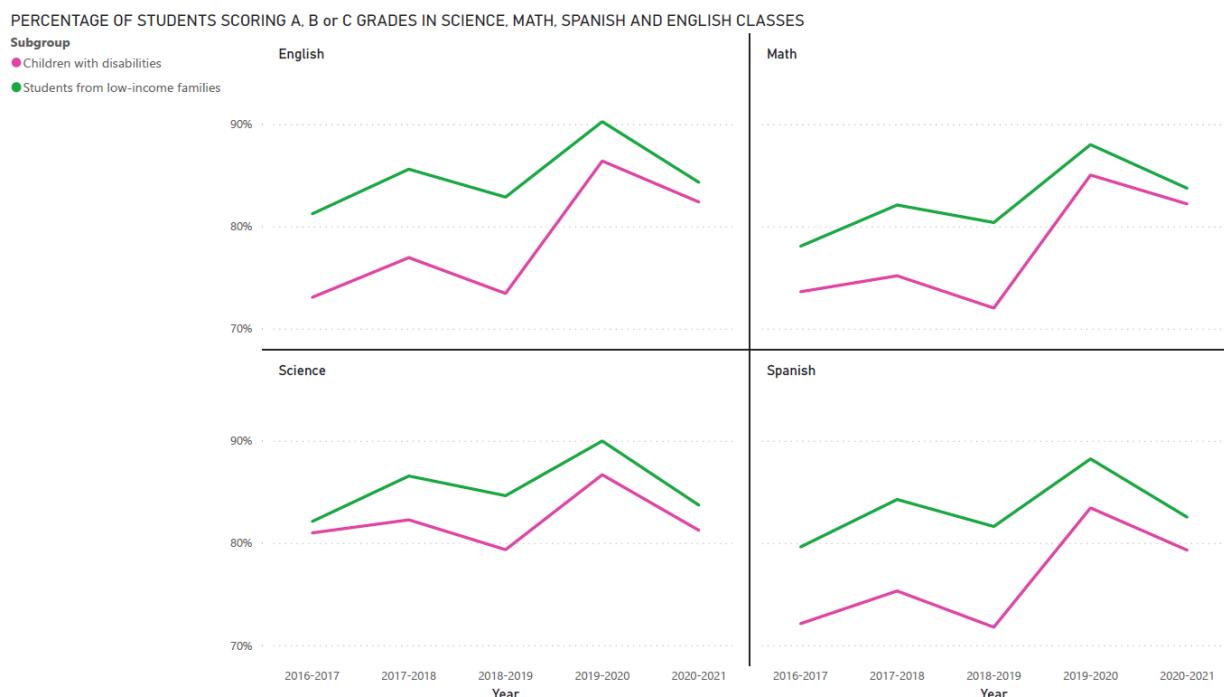


Another article<sup>15</sup> that focuses on Louisiana's public-school students, states that  $\frac{1}{4}$  of its students were displaced as a result of the Katrina and Rita storms, back in 2005. The article explores the experiences of students and the effects of student movements on student achievement and on the state's public education system during the first academic year following those hurricanes.

<sup>15</sup> John F. Pane, Daniel F. McCaffrey, Nidhi Kalra & Annie J. Zhou (2008) Effects of Student Displacement in Louisiana During the First Academic Year After the Hurricanes of 2005, Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR), 13:2-3, 168-211, DOI: 10.1080/10824660802350169

Detailed examinations showed that some displaced students had problems such as non-enrollment or poor attendance, mental health or behavioral problems, and academic setbacks. Negative achievement effects, which were small overall, were most pronounced among students who remained displaced for the duration of the academic year and appeared to be mitigated by students' tendency to be enrolled in schools with higher student performance than their original schools. Additional results show that the negative effects were associated with both the number of schools attended and the amount of school time lost.

PRDE has gathered information from its two-largest student subgroups, to analyze the grades obtained in the core subjects.



PRDE was able to identify that the year after Hurricanes Irma and María, 2018, both subgroups showed an increase in percentage of students scoring below D in Science, Math, Spanish, and English classes. Another increase in percentage is observed again, the year after the Earthquakes and COVID-19, school year 2020-2021.

The COVID-19 has been detrimental to student academic achievement, data show that many students struggled with remote learning<sup>16</sup>. In the United States there is an estimate of 3 million students that have either been absent from or have not been actively participating in remote learning since the beginning of the pandemic.

These students were more likely to be students with disabilities, students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, and students from low-income backgrounds. For example, students with disabilities served under IDEA or Section 504 who have been learning remotely might not have been able to access the same assistive technology devices and services they would receive if they were attending school in person.

Based on all the above, and the results from the school communities' assessments, PRDE plans to improve its students' academic performance by providing high-quality instructional materials, including equipping classrooms with 21<sup>st</sup> century technology. To do so, PRDE will invest ARP funds to equip classrooms still lacking a dashboard with projectors and touch screens that support basic instructional needs and practices. The basic configuration of a HyFlex classroom supports the ability for both in-person students and remote students alike to interact and actively participate in class, ensuring equity of access to all students, including those with special needs who benefit from and require use of such technology.

PRDE recognized and places high priority on the educational importance of technology. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the overdue need to integrate technology into regular educational processes and practices. Integration of well-designed technology allows teachers to enrich the overall learning experience for all students, contributing to the necessary skills students need in order to close achievement gaps and meet IEP goals.

In addition, PRDE has identified classrooms that cannot accommodate a reasonable minimum number of students. Therefore, PRDE is identifying schools with classroom spaces that need to be extended or modified, necessary to respond to COVID-19 management and containment efforts,

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<sup>16</sup> Children, Coronavirus, and the Digital Divide: Native American, Black, and Hispanic Students at Greater Educational Risk During Pandemic. (2020, Sept. 2). Population Reference Bureau. Retrieved from: <https://www.prb.org/coronavirus-digital-divide-education/> Lost in the Masked Shuffle & Virtual Void: Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness Amidst the Pandemic. (2020, Nov. 19). SchoolHouse Connection. Retrieved from <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/lost-in-the-masked-shuffle-and-virtual-void/>

or, to prevent and minimize effects of other future health-related crises. Once a rigorous assessment is properly completed , PRDE will use ARP ESSER funds to improve the school facilities, allowing the creation of environments that could better sustain social distancing and learning.

### Teacher performance and satisfaction

Researchers have also found that school facility quality affects educators. A survey of teachers in the Chicago Public Schools and the District of Columbia found that when teachers consider their school to be in poor physical condition, they are far more likely to report that they plan to leave their school or to leave teaching altogether than teachers in facilities they consider to be in good or excellent condition.<sup>17</sup>

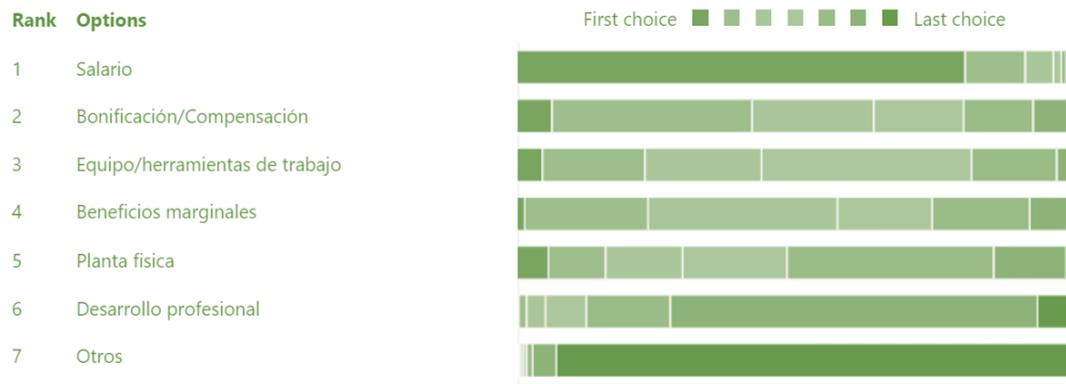
In short, it appears that good facility conditions can improve the teaching experience and reduce teacher turnover, while poor school conditions can hinder teachers' work (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Aging school buildings that have not been modernized often lack important features such as adequate classroom space and lightning, that are necessary for teachers to provide quality instruction and create comfortable and safe environments conducive for learning.

PRDE was able to confirm this through an online survey were a total of 2,489 teachers and 34 school directors participated. 83 % of teachers and 27 % of school principals (directors), stated that PRDE should give priority to the school's infrastructure. Below, PRDE has included an extract of the teacher survey that demonstrates that teachers have identified school infrastructure as a priority to be addressed.



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<sup>17</sup> Buckley, Jack & Schneider, Mark & Shang, Yi. (2004). LAUSD school facilities and academic performance.



Based on these results, PRDE was able to conclude that the condition of the school infrastructure can have a direct impact on the teacher's performance and satisfaction.

### Social-emotional and Student health

Substandard school buildings can negatively affect the health of children and adults in schools. Researchers<sup>18</sup> have found that exposures to mold, poor ventilation, uncomfortable temperatures, inadequate lighting, lack of running water, overcrowding, and excessive noise all have potential to harm student and teacher health, contribute to absenteeism, and reduce cognitive abilities; all of which affect academic achievement.

Researchers<sup>19</sup> and education practitioners<sup>20</sup> now see school climate and positive social relations as necessary ingredients for academic achievement, and facilities play a strong role in these areas. Properly planned, designed, and maintained, school facilities promote the health, well-being, and performance of children and adults in schools and even encourage children to want to come to school<sup>21</sup>. In her study of 236 New York City middle schools, Cornell University environmental psychologist Lorraine Maxwell (2016) found that school building condition is linked to the social and

<sup>18</sup> Fisk WJ, Paulson JA, Kolbe LJ, Barnett CL. Significance of the school physical environment - a commentary. J Sch Health. 2016; 86: 483-487.

<sup>19</sup> Bryk, A.S. & Schneider, B.L. (2002). Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement. New York: Russell Sage Foundation Publications.

<sup>20</sup> Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Higgins D'Alessandro, A., & Guffey, S. (2012). School Climate Research Summary: August 2012. School Climate Brief, No. 3. National School Climate Center, New York, NY.  
([www.schoolclimate.org/climate/research.php](http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/research.php)).

<sup>21</sup> Lorraine E. Maxwell, & Suzanne L. Schechtman. (2012). The Role of Objective and Perceived School Building Quality in Student Academic Outcomes and Self-Perception. Children, Youth and Environments, 22(1), 23-51.  
<https://doi.org/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.22.1.0023>

educational environment at a school, commonly known as school climate, student attendance, and higher ratings of school social climate predicted lower student absenteeism, which in turn predicted higher standardized test scores.

### Inadequate facilities disproportionately affect disadvantaged students

National reports have raised concerns about the physical accessibility of public-school facilities for people with disabilities. These facilities serve important roles as schools, voting locations, and emergency shelters, among other things.

The Government Accountability Office<sup>22</sup> (GAO) was asked to examine the physical accessibility of public-school facilities through a national survey. This survey represented various states and the District of Columbia. It examined 55 schools across six states, selected for variation in size and other characteristics and analyzed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance on facilities. It also included interviews of federal, state, and school district officials, and national disability groups.

Findings showed that two-thirds of U.S. public school districts have school facilities with physical barriers that may limit access for people with disabilities; representing a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Barriers such as a lack of accessible door hardware and steep ramps, can make it, not only challenging, but dangerous for students, teachers, and others with disabilities to use public school facilities.

A significant number of students in Puerto Rico's Public-School systems reported at least one major disability. Accommodating and meeting needs of students with disabilities needs to be a primary focus of any recovery agenda since they are among the most affected by disaster events. For these students, a school interruption or simply attending to structures in poor condition, means much more than not receiving an education. School is where they received therapies and specialized health services. In many

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<sup>22</sup> Nowicki, Jacqueline M. K-12 Education: School Districts Need Better Information to Help Improve Access for People with Disabilities. Report to Congressional Requesters. GAO-20-448 – June 2020

cases, school personnel play a leading role in assessing Special Education student needs and managing their health struggles.

The above barriers have been identified across many schools in Puerto Rico. Specific examples include those stipulated by court case, *Rosa Lydia Vélez y otros vs. Department of Education y otros*, No. K PE 1980-1738 (505), where PRDE is required to comply with various provisions regarding architectural barriers.

#### *Section 1 - Stipulations related to architectural barriers*

1. *The Special Education Program, through its officials will ensure that the mobility and access needs of students with physical disabilities are considered when preparing the Individualized Education Program. (Stipulation 69)*
2. *The Department will offer students with physical disabilities with mobility difficulties, schools free of architectural barriers that in turn have educational programs that respond to the needs of the students. (Stipulation 70)*
3. *If the student is already located in a school that has barriers, the Department will ensure that the school organization provides so that the programs and services that the student needs are made accessible to them, through the appropriate use of physical facilities, taking the necessary measures and / or offering the required accommodations so that the student can participate in equal conditions of school life. (Stipulation 71)*
4. *The Department of Education, in consultation with the Assistant Secretary for Comprehensive Educational Services for People with Disabilities (SASEIPI) and the Office for the Improvement of Public Schools (OMEP), annually identify the adaptation needs of the physical plant that limit or prevent access to the services and the way in which they can be corrected to guarantee access to the programs (Stipulation 72)*

#### *Section II - Data on inspections carried out and needs identified*

*DE annually inspects schools in coordination with a Special Education parent. Needs identified through an inspection are sent to the budget*

*area so that they can be considered as part of the agency's budget request.*

The value and importance of ensuring an equitable, universally accessible, and safe environment should not be underestimated. However, it is necessary to recognize the challenges Puerto Rico faces in addressing these needs. This is particularly true for Puerto Rico public school system where 80 % of the students live with incomes below the poverty line, close to 30 % of students report at least one disability, and about one in four faces both vulnerability conditions.

The above statements indicate that the duration of school interruptions and the degree of impact from a disaster increases direct and indirect adverse academic effects, especially for vulnerable populations. Therefore, it is PRDE's focus to restore and improve school infrastructure as quickly as possible, emphasizing the needs of the students participating in the Special Education Program.

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DRAFT

## B. Infrastructure Public Policy Plan

In compliance with Chapter VIII: School Facilities, from Act No. 2018-85, as amended, *supra*, and aligned with the agency's strategic plan, PRDE developed the Infrastructure Public Policy Plan.

### Standards

As required in Act No. 2018-85, as amended, *supra*, the Plan shall include *standards for the construction, repair, maintenance, inspection, and use of school facilities* that must:

- i. Be reasonable and practical;*
- ii. Ensure the health and safety of students and staff;*
- iii. Contribute to student learning;*
- iv. Be based on performance and the established goals; and*
- v. Be established in accordance with a professional standards development process endorsed by a professional organization specialized in infrastructure.*

*Furthermore, the Secretary shall consult with the community to be affected.*

Any construction plans and contracts for school facilities to be entered into with public or private entities, must be approved by the Secretary. The location must be endorsed by a study conducted by an outside professional entity that includes the area's projected growth and service demands.

*The Secretary, in consultation with School Principals and Regional Superintendents, shall promulgate operational regulations regarding the procedures and performance of school facilities as well as the evaluation of the conditions thereof, or shall review existing regulations, as necessary.*

### Infrastructure and Recovery Office

PRDE created the Infrastructure and Recovery Office<sup>23</sup> to supervise the resources for the PRDE's school infrastructure construction and

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<sup>23</sup> The Office was approved by the Puerto Rico's Office of Management and Budget on March 13, 2019.

restoration, in compliance with the requirements of Act No. 2018-85, as amended, *supra*. The creation of this office arises as part of the emergency protection measures applied by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This office would be in charge of managing and supervising the necessary resources for the construction and restoration of the school infrastructures that were adversely affected.

This office is responsible for the funds and grants management from Projects related to FEMA, CDBG, USDE, among others, and for the construction and rebuilding of the school's infrastructure.

As part of the recommendations from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) audit in 2020<sup>24</sup>, and to comply with the federal applicable federal regulations, the Office must develop Standard Operating Procedures and guidance's to administer the funds and complete the school buildings restoration and construction.

### Consultation

For the development of the Infrastructure Public Policy Plan, the Department will consult with the community to be impacted, and consider the needs of the school community, as well as the results from the study of the area's projected growth and service demands.

Based in Act No. 2018-85, as amended, *supra*, *the study<sup>25</sup> shall contain performance indicators that enable the assessment of the school based on each of the following criterion:*

1. *The current student enrollment and projected enrollment for the next five (5) years of the school;*
2. *Infrastructure conditions: the school building's age and condition, any recent or necessary maintenance, and improvements, and the special characteristics thereof, if any, including whether said school is used as a shelter during emergencies;*
3. *The school's academic achievement indicators;*
4. *The number of employees per category;*

<sup>24</sup> Recommendation No. 2, re: Capacity Audit Report, OIG-20-26

<sup>25</sup> This study shall be made available to the people in the School District of the school to be reorganized and on the website of the Department, and a copy shall be delivered to the School Principal of the reorganized.

5. *The operating costs, including the per-pupil expenditure;*
6. *An academic cost-benefit analysis and the savings achieved through the reorganization of the school;*
7. *The school's location;*
8. *The impact the school's reorganization shall have on the students and the community;*
9. *The disposition of the school, including the description of any proposed or potential use for a different educational program or for administrative services;*
10. *The effect that the school's reorganization shall have on personnel needs, teaching costs, the administration of transportation services, and other support services;*
11. *The certified capacity of the recipient school located in the school district of the community in order to make room for students upon the school's reorganization;*
12. *The manner whereby education services shall continue to be provided to the students;*
13. *The projected date for the school's reorganization;*
14. *A detailed explanation of the reasons for the school's reorganization;*
15. *Any other information the Secretary deems pertinent.*

As a starting point, in November 2021, the Department engaged in meaningful consultation with the school communities' stakeholders.

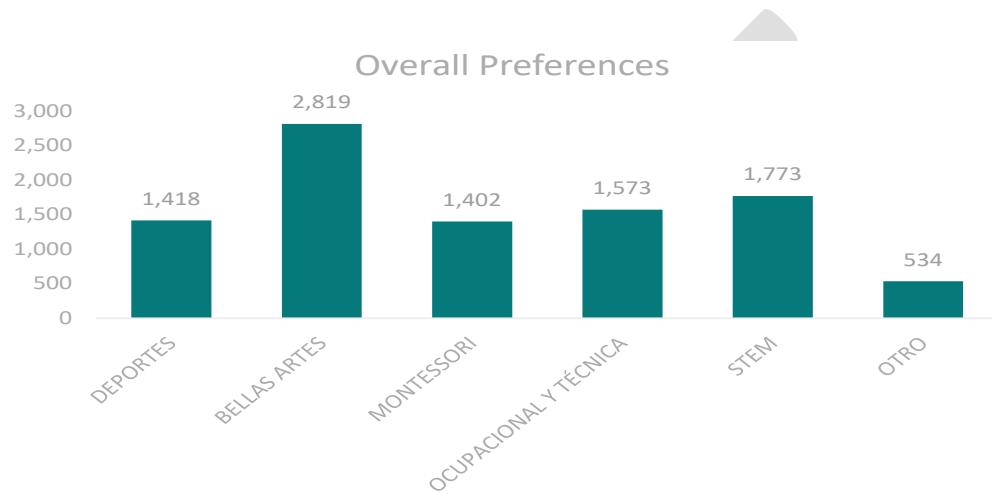
**Focus Groups:** PRDE held a focus group activity in collaboration and consultation with various stakeholder groups. The group recommended the expansion of PRDE's academic offer by increasing the number of bilingual, STEM, Montessori, Fine Arts, Sports, and Career and Technical education schools.

**Surveys:** Through an online consultation survey, PRDE gathered input from approximately 9,400 stakeholders on the structural condition of the school buildings. Almost 44 % of the participants were teachers, 30 % were parents, and 87 % of the school's directors completed the survey<sup>26</sup>. As a result of this preliminary online consultation, 92 % of the participants reported interest in

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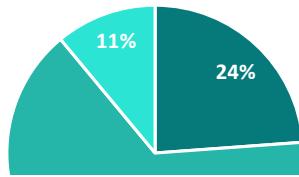
<sup>26</sup> Participation: 868 students, 2,866 parents, 4,157 teachers, 696 school personnel, 755 school directors, 24 teacher facilitators, and others representing regional/auxiliary superintendents, charter schools, school community, members of Civil Rights Org., Special Education students, Spanish learner students, homeless students, and Alt Education students.

having their school be specialized in a specific method of instruction or academic discipline: Fine Arts (theater, music, arts) by 28 %, STEM (science, technology, engineer and math) by 22 %, Montessori by 13 %, Sports (Basketball, Volleyball, Athletics) by 13 %, Technical and Occupational school by 13 %, Arts, Audiovisual, Technology by 12 %, and Information of Technology by 17 %.



Regarding current school infrastructure conditions, 11 % of stakeholders stated their school infrastructure is in critical condition. Another 65 % of stakeholders stated their school's infrastructure required repairs or construction efforts.

School's Infrastructure Conditions



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■ EXCELLENT CONDITIONS   ■ NEED REPAIRS   ■ CRITIC CONDITIONS

It is important to highlight that through the ongoing consultation that PRDE plans to follow, this Infrastructure Public Policy Plan is considered a

live document and subject to modifications. Therefore, PRDE invites all who hasn't yet participated of the consultation, to do so. Survey is available through the following link: <https://forms.office.com/r/jZL9zF55yj>

To understand the effectiveness of the school models, various metrics of public interest were considered by the PRDE's Infrastructure and Recovery Office and the Auxiliary Secretariat of Planning, Transformation and Performance (SAPTRE, per its acronym in Spanish).

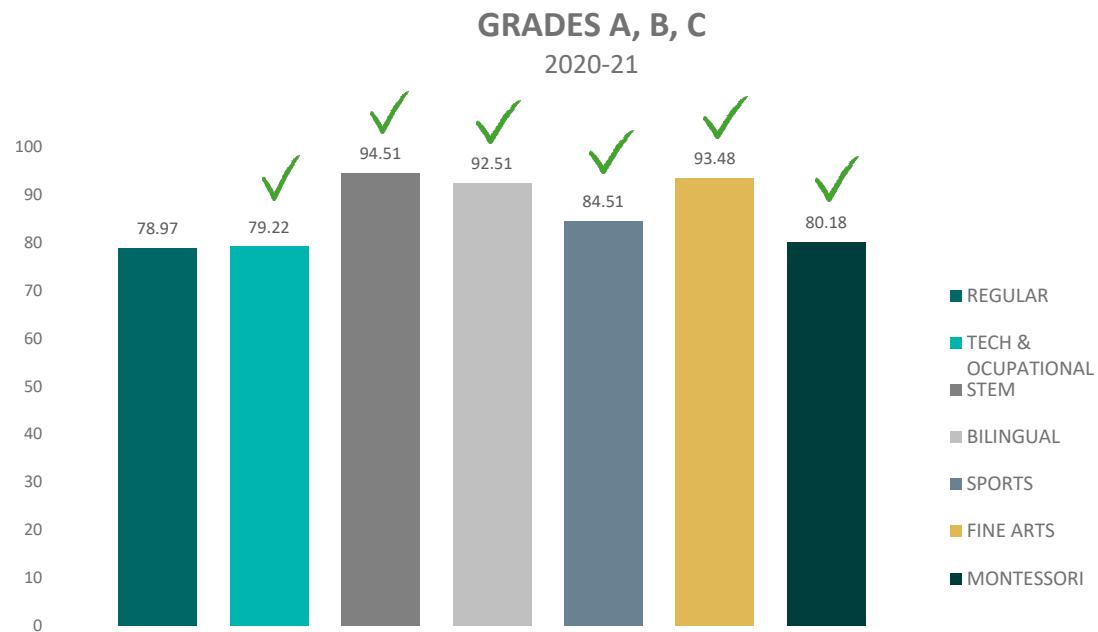
PRDE also analyzed student's grades, as a metric of academic performance. Due to widespread school closures related to COVID-19, USDE waived<sup>27</sup> the statewide assessment for the 2020 and 2021 school years. Therefore, PRDE was not able to analyze academic performance using the results of statewide assessment. On the other hand, recognizing the importance of preparing students to begin their college career, the High School Graduation Rate was also analyzed. Similarly, to promote student retention in the education system, the annual dropout rate of all schools was considered. Finally, to incorporate other topics relevant to the integral performance of schools beyond the academic area, PRDE used the *StarFramework* model<sup>28</sup>, published annually in the "*Conoce tu Escuela*" Platform. Later in this section, PRDE explains in detail the *StarFramework* model.

For the school year 2020-21, PRDE observed that under the metric of academic performance, the Occupational, STEM, Bilingual, Sports, Fine Arts and Montessori schools, showed a superior execution when compared to the other schools.

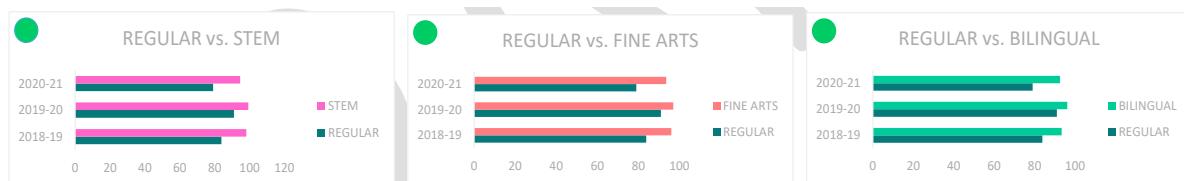
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<sup>27</sup> [PR Covid 19 2020 Assessment waiver](#) and [PRDE Covid 19 2021 assessment waiver](#)

<sup>28</sup> <https://conocetuescuelapr.dde.pr/escuelasPorEstrellas>



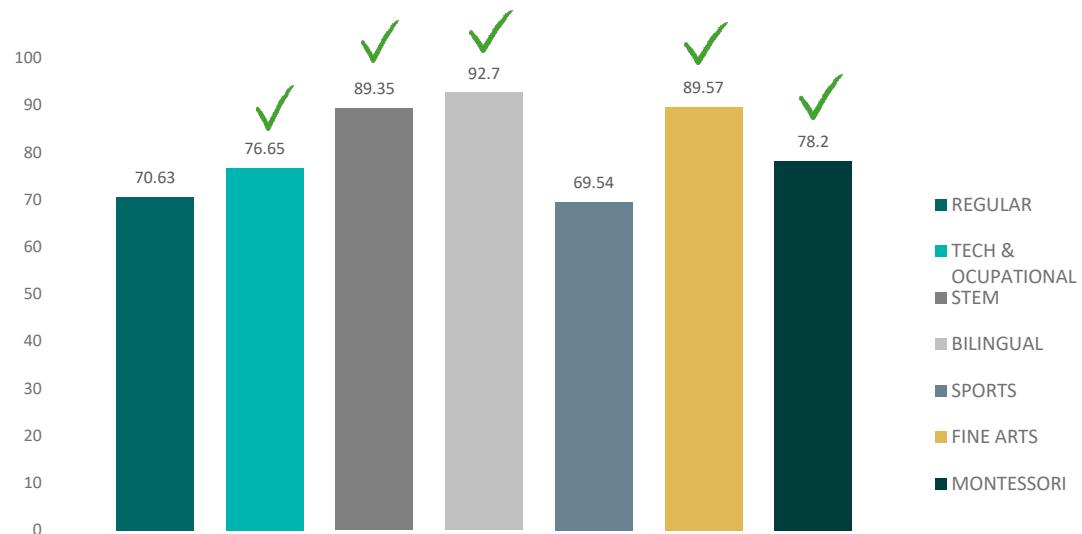
Particularly, **STEM**, **Fine Arts** and **Bilingual** schools outperformed regular academic schools by 12 % consistently the last three academic years.



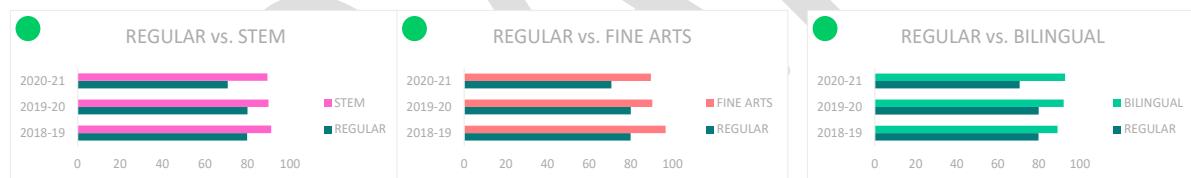
Similarly, Occupational, STEM, Bilingual, Fine Arts, and Montessori high schools achieved a higher graduation rate, than those obtained by the other schools.

## GRADUATION RATE

2020-21

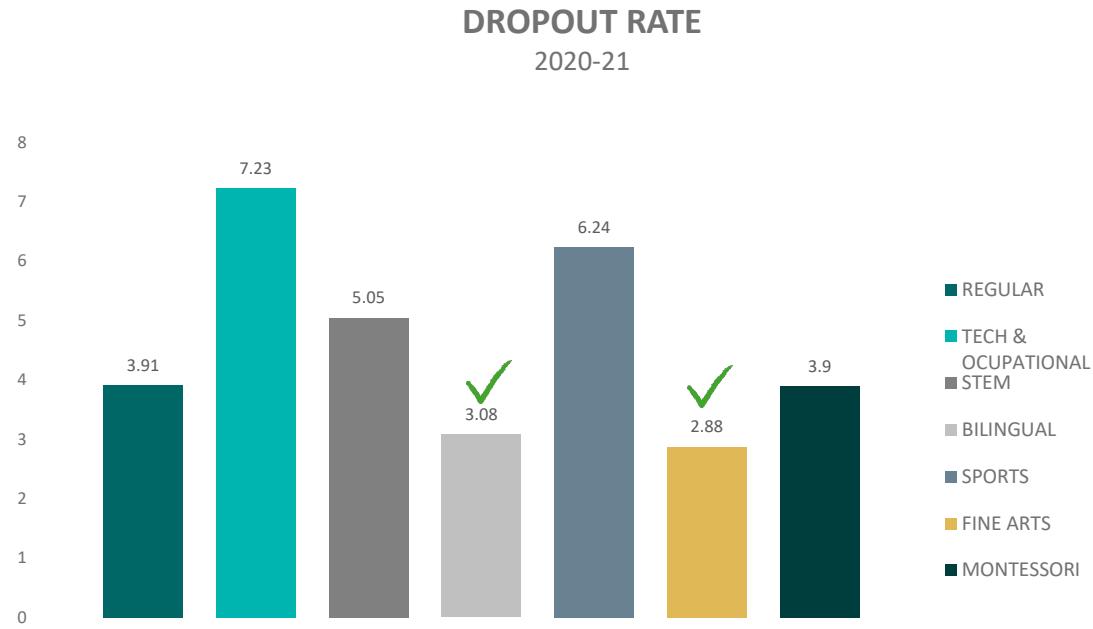


Particularly, STEM, Fine Arts and Bilingual schools showed that they outperformed regular academic schools by 18 % consistently for the last three academic years.



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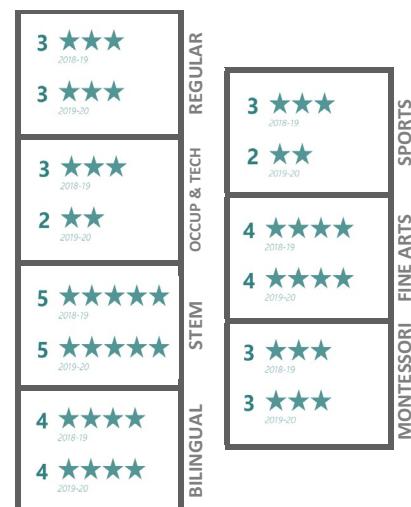
As for the annual dropout rate, **bilingual** and **fine arts** schools were shown to maintain **higher student retention** when compared to regular academic schools.



Finally, a value (stars) was calculated and assigned, using the average obtained by the schools of each of the categories according to the *StarFramework* model<sup>29</sup>.

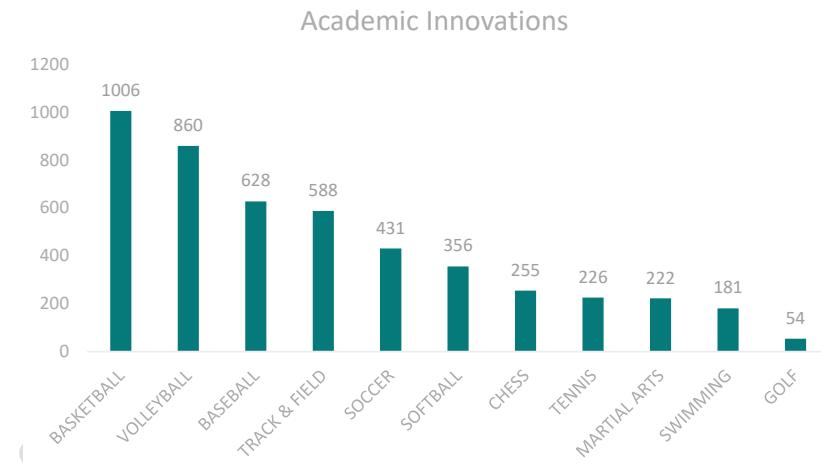
This analysis showed favorable growth during the 2019-20 academic year for STEM, Fine Arts and Bilinguals. In this line, STEM schools reach an average score of 5 stars for the academic year evaluated, as well as for the previous year; distinguished in a particular way.

In general terms, PRDE concludes that by observing the trends and analyzing the metrics, STEM, Fine Arts and Bilingual schools excel in their academic performance and retention capacity against the universe of regular academic schools.



<sup>29</sup> The *StarFramework* model incorporates 36 metrics at the academic (e.g., META-PR, Graduation Rate), administrative (e.g., PEI Compliance, Teacher Assessment) and school quality (e.g., Attendance Rate, College Board) domains.

Finally, students that participated from the survey, expressed their interest in incorporating additional skills that would temperate the school's academic offerings to the current social interest of the population. The following graph shows that at least 21 % of the students surveyed are interested in including basketball in their school offerings, 18 % are interested in volleyball, 13 % are interested in baseball, and 12 % are interested in track and field. These interests coincide with the sports disciplines in which Puerto Rico has historically obtained world titles and represent Puerto Rican culture and make our talent be known internationally.



PRDE will continue an ongoing consultation with stakeholders, considering that the Infrastructure Plan is a live document and subject to modifications.

### Current Status, Needs and Challenges

PRDE intends to give priority to school infrastructure with FEMA's, Restart and ESSER funds. Through the investment of these funds, PRDE was able to safely reopen the school's operations, is improving the school's buildings infrastructure, and will create school environments with classrooms that meet the accessibility and safety standards, fundamental for teaching and learning.

Is imperative for Puerto Rico to transform the K-12 education system to dramatically improve student outcomes and contribute to an effective workforce in the long-term. According to the 2021 Commonwealth's

certified Fiscal Plan, Education reforms are projected to add 0.15 % to the GNP growth rate between FY2037-FY2051.

In effort to manage and mitigate consequences related to Puerto Rico's economic and fiscal crisis, PRDE has identified and prioritize challenges that must be overcome in order to efficiently resume provision of appropriate services. FEMA's Public Assistance funds require PRDE to work through a reimbursement program, facing PRDE with the challenge of identifying the initial funds required for the recovery projects, and rigorous fiscal controls<sup>30</sup>. In addition to the increased workload from the different disasters, the limited workforce and the constrains of resources due to the stay-at-home orders, and other safety measures related to COVID-19.

To address these issues, FEMA deployed additional staff to support after the earthquakes and issued an operating environment COVID-19 guidance. Furthermore, in September 2020, FEMA granted a request by the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3) to eliminate what is known as the "2019 Agreement" and provided COR3 with a tool to avoid any de-obligation of funds and sole responsibility for ensuring that all reimbursements meet the statutory, regulatory, and programmatic requirements established by FEMA.

FEMA obligated the total amount of \$2,294,678,676.06<sup>31</sup> from the PW 6059 for the schools and administrative facilities permanent (Category Z) recovery work related to the hurricanes, and \$190 million for permanent work and approved hazard mitigation measures for the damage registered through the earthquakes in the Zero Zone. The Department also assigned \$63 million, to match the funds approved for the mitigation efforts related to the earthquakes.

To assist in effectively and efficiently administer the complexities of a recovery project and the rules applicable to the obligated funds, FEMA required PRDE to contract a Program Management with grants management expertise.

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<sup>30</sup> A manual disbursement process was implemented that required a review of 100 % of the documents, before the FEMA's Public Assistance program applicants could receive the allocated money.

<sup>31</sup> 90 % (\$2,065,210,808.46) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's ("FEMA") Public Assistance funds and 10 % (\$229,467,867.60) from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

The PMO will assist with the development of a Master Construction and Recovery Plan, aligned with PRDE Strategic Plan, which will include individual scopes of work for each school building selected to be restored, re-designed, replaced, or repurposed.

FEMA also allocated more than \$253.6 million under Section 406 Hazard Mitigation to perform work that combines structural reinforcement and shear walls to reduce the impact in case of seismic events caused by the structural condition known as short column and other damaged caused by Hurricane María. Other \$107 million under the Risk Mitigation were also allocated by FEMA. These mitigation efforts are aimed at increasing the capacity of the facilities to resist further natural and atmospheric events and help reduce the time it takes for schools to return to normal operations right after.

Meanwhile, to address the school safety and health issues, PRDE is investing the Restart funds in the installation of solar power poles, school's security cameras, wiring for Wi-Fi connection systems, Wi-Fi access points in the classrooms, power generators, water tanks, meshes to prevent bird nesting, and suppression systems for school's cafeteria.

Additional funds were identified from ESSER to:

- repair the filtrations, damages from cracks and humidity, fungus and asbestos, HVAC's systems, and in need of painting, schools identified as those with the most deteriorated infrastructure,
- replace the equipment and furniture contaminated with mold, fungus, and rust that build up during the lockdown, and,
- provide well-ventilated spaces<sup>32</sup>, by replacing and updating the windows that are not properly functioning, and the installation or replacement of the air conditioning (HVAC) systems that meet standards identified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Below the full breakdown of the federal funds assigned to impact PRDE's school infrastructure:

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<sup>32</sup> Physical conditions exacerbate health problems in a pandemic disproportionately affecting communities experiencing poverty and communities of color, those health problems cause students to miss school, negatively affecting academic achievement.

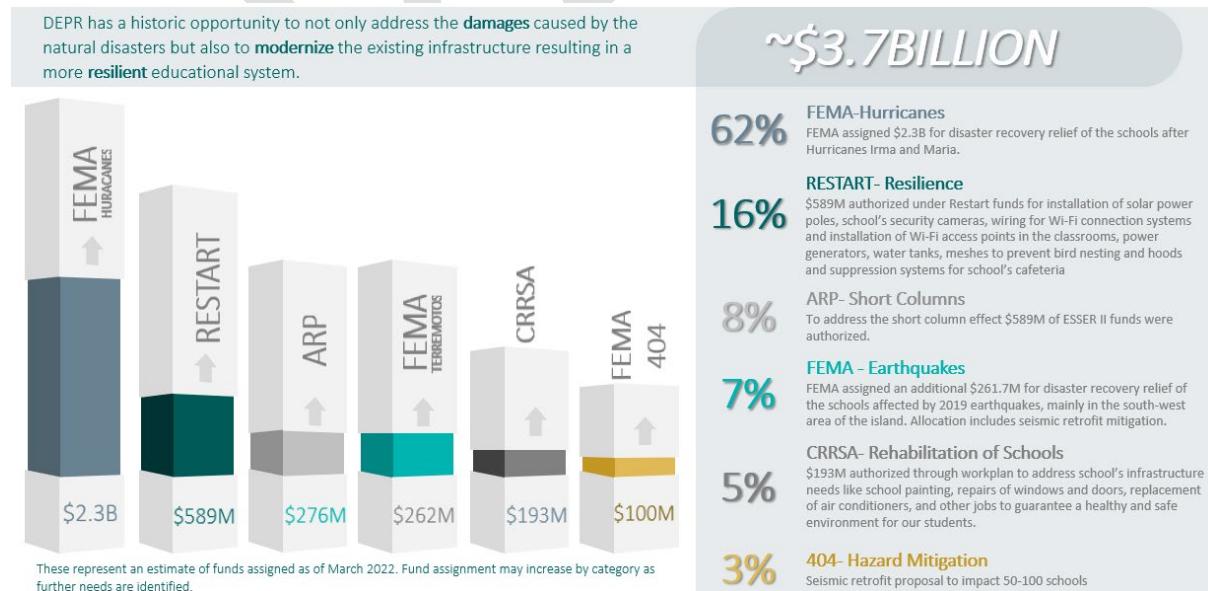
Figure 1 Breakdown of Federal Funds Available for Infrastructure Initiatives as of April 2022

## Foundation for new schools

PRDE's school facilities should be the last setting to close and the first to reopen when they can do so safely, and be able to address the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of our school communities.

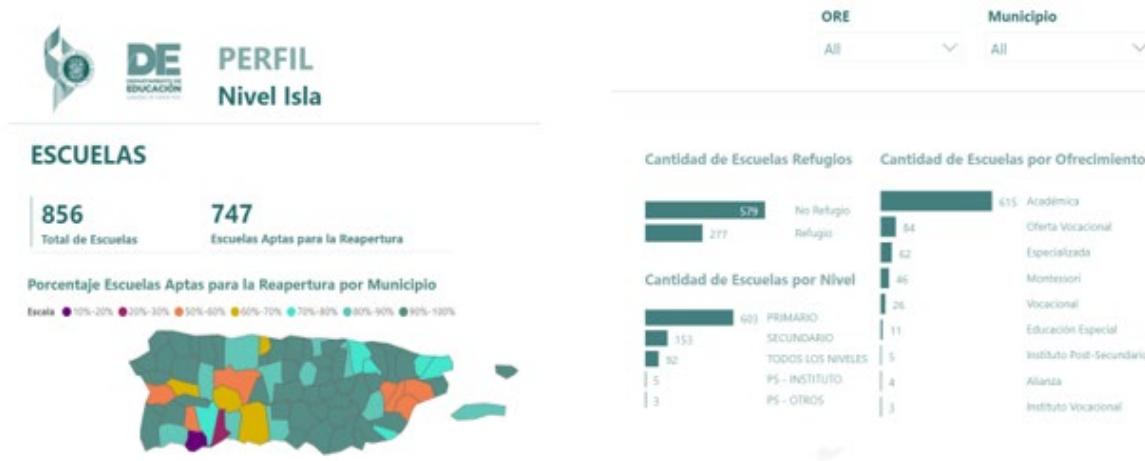
To guarantee our students and personnel a safe and healthy school environment, school buildings should:

- incorporate sustainable principles and standards found in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System, and long-term maintenance saving considerations,
- consider academic sector trends around flexible spaces, remote learning and considerations that improve academic performance,
- incorporate expansive community access and use, and
- incorporate FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Planning (HMP) best practices to increase resiliency, able to resist future natural hazards, reducing or eliminating the risk of damage.



As to where PRDE stands today, in its 2021-2022 academic year, PRDE is able to identify the number of schools' that are shelter ready, or how many provides students specific academic offerings, such as STEM, Career and Technical, Bilingual, Sports and Montessori.

The following image represents PRDE's current academic offering per level, and how many schools are shelter ready.



PRDE used this data and compared it with a study<sup>33</sup> released on 2020 by a Non-for-Profit entity. The study presents a list of schools within the Puerto Rico's public school system, with the highest graduation rate and College Board scores. PRDE analyze the data and identified that 19 of the schools reaching the top 20 list, provided one of the following academic offerings to the students it served: STEM, Bilingual, Career and Technical or Fine Arts.

Based on all the information gathered and explained within this document, PRDE has identified eight pillars that will reinforce the needs identified and will provide resilient schools, including spaces for the different academic offerings, such as Special Education, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), Career and Technical, Bilingual, Sports, and Montessori.

The pillars will determine a reachable goal and provide our students quality, innovative and effective education to promote their interest and the maximum development of their abilities, becoming adults who contribute to the well-being of our society. This Plan also specifies the planning, professional management, execution, and measurement strategies that promulgate and guarantee an efficient and effective administration of the Public Education System, facilitating the provision of services and the mechanisms that allow an efficient and agile administration and operation.

<sup>33</sup> [Informe de Perfil de las Escuelas de Puerto Rico \(2020\) - AbreTuEscuela.org](#)

It also enacts school buildings, to provide an environment where the entire school community feels comfortable and free from danger, optimal for developing the academic achievement of our students.

### Pillar 1 – Resilient Schools

Improving existing public-school facilities to withstand health crisis and severe weather conditions goes along with designing resilient facilities to keep our students and school communities safe.

PRDE will invest in mitigation efforts aimed at increasing the capacity of the facilities to resist hurricane winds or lateral movements that typically result from earthquakes; putting lives and property at risk. Through strategic and targeted investment of these funds, PRDE will also be able to reduce the time it takes for schools to return to normal operating procedures after any atmospheric or health crisis event. This includes installing structural reinforcements in existing school buildings that were built with Unreinforced Masonry (URM), known as short columns, which are known to be outdated and weak in the face of severe atmospheric or seismic events.

PRDE is also investing funds for schools to have alternative power sources including generators, solar systems, and water tanks to ensure running water. All of these tools will maintain continuous and necessary supply of basic needs to the school community during an emergency.

In addition, PRDE will also be able to rebuild schools where flexibility is the norm and access, and equity are ensured. At the onset of COVID-19, schools and districts were forced to make immediate and major changes, resulting in what has been a period of crisis schooling for many. Therefore, when it comes to rebuilding schools, PRDE needs to make sure physical distancing is also doable on times of crisis like the one faced with COVID-19.

PRDE is also aware of the importance of technology in a resilient school. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the overdue need to integrate technology into regular educational process. Integration of well-designed technology allows teachers to enrich the overall learning experience for all students. PRDE will invest federal funds to equip classrooms still lacking a dashboard with projector and touch screens. The basic configuration of a

HyFlex classroom supports the ability for both in-person students and remote students alike to interact and actively participate in class.

Another task that supports increasing structural resiliency of our school facilities is improving air ventilation to guarantee the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff. Therefore, PRDE will use ARP ESSER and FEMA funds to replace and update windows that are not properly functioning. Through the investment of these funds, PRDE will also be able to create instructional environments that meet standards for accessibility and safety, both considered fundamental for teaching and learning.

Investing in modern and safe school facilities will enable a faster response to disasters when they occur, mitigate the extent of damage and suffering that communities endure, and speed the recovery of critical functions. PRDE's goal is to equip 100 % of its school shelters with generators, water storage tanks, and other mitigation measures against natural disasters.

## Pillar 2 – Schools that address Special Education student's needs

The Department is responsible for providing a free public education to all students at the elementary and higher levels, as established in section 5 of the Constitution of Puerto Rico. Its goal is to bring the student, as close as possible, to the development of essential skills for life, at the elementary level, and skills for employment and for adult life, at the higher level (ESSA).

When a student has a disability that significantly affects its academic progress, PRDE has the responsibility to provide, not only a free public education, but an appropriate one. This group of students requires a highly designed and tailored education. To achieve this, PRDE has found imperative that the physical facilities provide an environment that allows the optimal development of academic skills. Therefore, as part of its infrastructure plan, PRDE seeks an "accessible to all" school that will provide the following:

- Sensory classrooms for primary schools.
- Classrooms with direct or close access to the bathrooms and storeroom.
- Meet with bathrooms measurements and accessories for people with disabilities.

- Appropriate spaces to provide therapeutic services, such as occupational, physical and speech therapies.
- Appropriate spaces for professional counseling and social work.
- Laboratory room for the development of skills for independent living.
- Fun and leisure spaces that comply with the accessibility recommended in the ADA Law.
- Access to the school cafeteria or other types of accessories that allow mobility.

In addition, as stipulated in court, in *Rosa Lydia Vélez y otros vs. Department of Education y otros*, Case No. K PE 1980-1738 (505), schools must meet with the minimum requirements at certain common areas, such as parking lot, sidewalks, entrances, other access routes, ramps, doors, ladders, public use areas, health services, and dining services. Through the Infrastructure plan, PRDE's goal is to invest in sensory labs for all primary schools, develop independent living laboratories in all secondary schools and add appropriate spaces for therapy and regular teaching sessions throughout the Island. Special need guidelines will be incorporated in all school designs.

### Pillar 3 – STEM Schools

STEM is a centerpiece of the Federal Department of Education comprehensive agenda. The existing STEM priority has been used across the US Departments' discretionary grant programs to further its mission, which is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access."

According to a recent report published by the Committee on STEM Education of the National Science & Technology Council (2018)<sup>34</sup>, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) have been a source of inspirational discoveries and transformative technological advances, helping the United States develop the world's most competitive economy and preserving peace through strength.

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<sup>34</sup> [Charting a Course for Success: America's Strategy for STEM Education](#)

PRDE shares the same view, knowing that the pace of innovation is accelerating globally, and with it the competition for scientific and technical talent.

The US Federal strategy is set for the next five years and is based on a vision for a future where all Americans will have lifelong access to high-quality STEM education and the United States will be the global leader in STEM literacy, innovation, and employment. This vision will be achieved by pursuing three aspirational goals:

- Build Strong Foundations for STEM Literacy by ensuring that every American has the opportunity to master basic STEM concepts, including computational thinking, and to become digitally literate. A STEM-literate public will be better equipped to handle rapid technological change and will be better prepared to participate in civil society.
- Increase Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in STEM and provide all Americans with lifelong access to high-quality STEM education, especially those historically underserved and underrepresented in STEM fields and employment.
- Prepare the STEM Workforce for the Future—both college-educated STEM practitioners and those working in skilled trades that do not require a four-year degree—by creating authentic learning experiences that encourage and prepare learners to pursue STEM careers. A diverse talent pool of STEM-literate Americans prepared for the jobs of the future will be essential for maintaining the national innovation base that supports key sectors of the economy and for making the scientific discoveries and creating the technologies of the future.

PRDE considers this strategy to be aligned with the priorities set forth by our stakeholders. At the end, the benefits of a strong STEM foundation cannot be fully realized until all members of society have equitable access to STEM education and there is much broader participation by those historically underserved and underrepresented in STEM fields and employment.

Puerto Rico is known worldwide for its talented workforce through a rigorous STEM-oriented education system that produces top-notch technical, engineering, and bioscience professionals. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Report, Puerto Rico has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest available of scientist and engineers in the world. This is due to the more than 60 % of university graduates holding a STEM degree.

For all the reasons above, our public school system should target for more STEM schools. Currently, PRDE has 15 schools with STEM offerings within its public-school system.

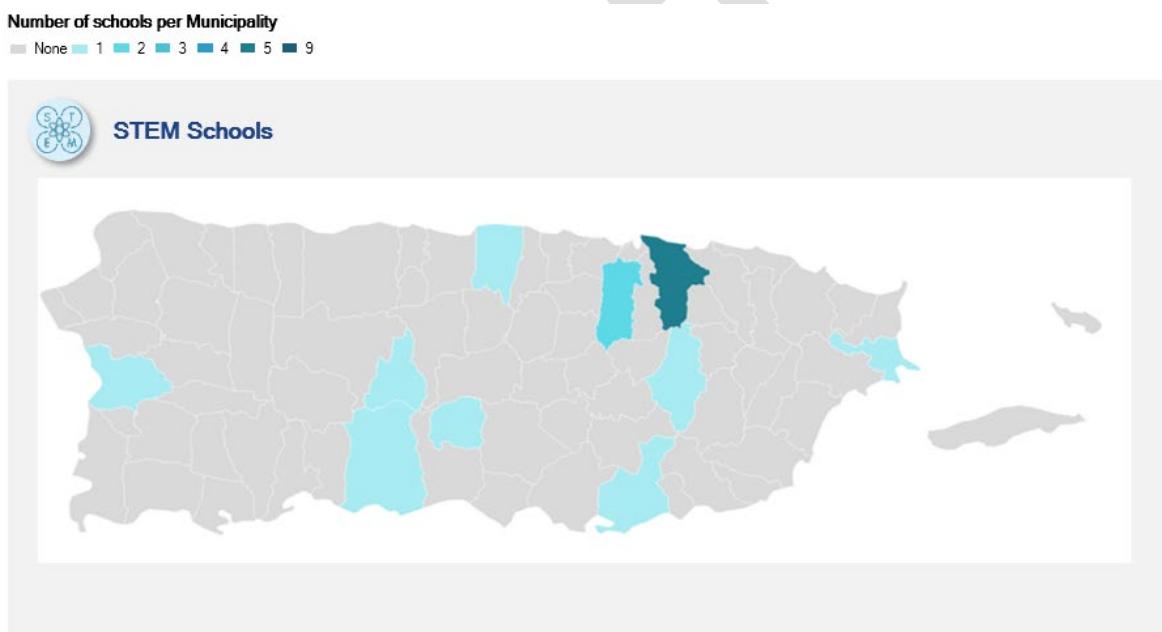


Figure 2 Current distribution of STEM schools in Puerto Rico

In addition, in 2018 PRDE initiated a graduate certification process for 300 teachers across the Island, which are now certified in STEM.

Through the Infrastructure Plan, the design of STEM schools must include STEM labs that will support core curriculum, incorporating science tools and math manipulatives during lessons. A successful STEM space allows room for building, testing, and collaborating between students. Building and testing of designs require ample space per group, either considering using modular student stations or large tables for team meetings and building sessions along with an open space for testing. Ideally, STEM Schools require flexible spaces to accommodate individual student work. The goal is to

develop two (2) times the number of STEM schools in the island and align the public educational system with the competitive global trends and sector growth areas Puerto Rico has.

#### Pillar 4 – Career and Technical Schools

Just prior to Hurricanes Irma and María, between 3.3 million and 3.5 million people resided in Puerto Rico. Compared with the continental United States plus Hawaii, per capita economic activity was low, with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of \$19,430 for Puerto Rico for 2016 while the comparable figure is \$56,810 for the continental United States plus Hawaii.

Total employment in June 2017 was about 853,000, with the largest sectors including public administration (15 percent), retail trade (15 percent), and health care and social assistance (11 percent). Manufacturing comprised approximately 9 percent of all employment, declining by 30 percent overall from 2007 through 2016. Given its natural amenities and resources, tourist was about 8 percent of GDP. Fisheries and the ocean economy also accounted for a similar share of overall activity.

Outmigration (largely to the continental United States plus Hawaii) has been significant over the past decade, largely driven by differences in economic opportunity between Puerto Rico and the continental United States plus Hawaii complemented by low transaction costs (as Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens).

One current strategic goal to achieve a recovery plan is the development of a modern workforce with relevant skills to meet the demands of an evolving labor market. To begin, Puerto Rico must first overcome the acute workforce challenges and structural problems that have impeded economic growth for more than a decade. The PRDE has set out a course of action that strengthens the post-secondary education to help develop career pathways for individual workers that would improve their employment trajectories, and better aligns workers' skills with employment opportunities and the needs of local businesses.

Therefore, is important to highlight that youth and workforce development are essential components to achieve the economic growth and development that Puerto Rico needs. Continuous calibration and alignment between education, industry and government is a must to address skill gaps, industry needs concerning competitiveness and innovation. As of today, PRDE's CTE schools provide more than 58 program offerings for most of the above-mentioned areas/industries.

The Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) is currently promoting a strategy<sup>35</sup>, that will bring diverse manufacturing economy, considering industries from various strategic groups, including biotechnology, medical devices, pharmaceuticals, agroecology, aerospace, outsourcing of knowledge services, electronics, computing, engineering and construction, and apparel manufacturing.

Below, PRDE is including details of DEDC strategy and a brief explanation on how each will bring diverse economy to Puerto Rico. How PRDE collaborate with this strategy is relevant for the benefit of our future.

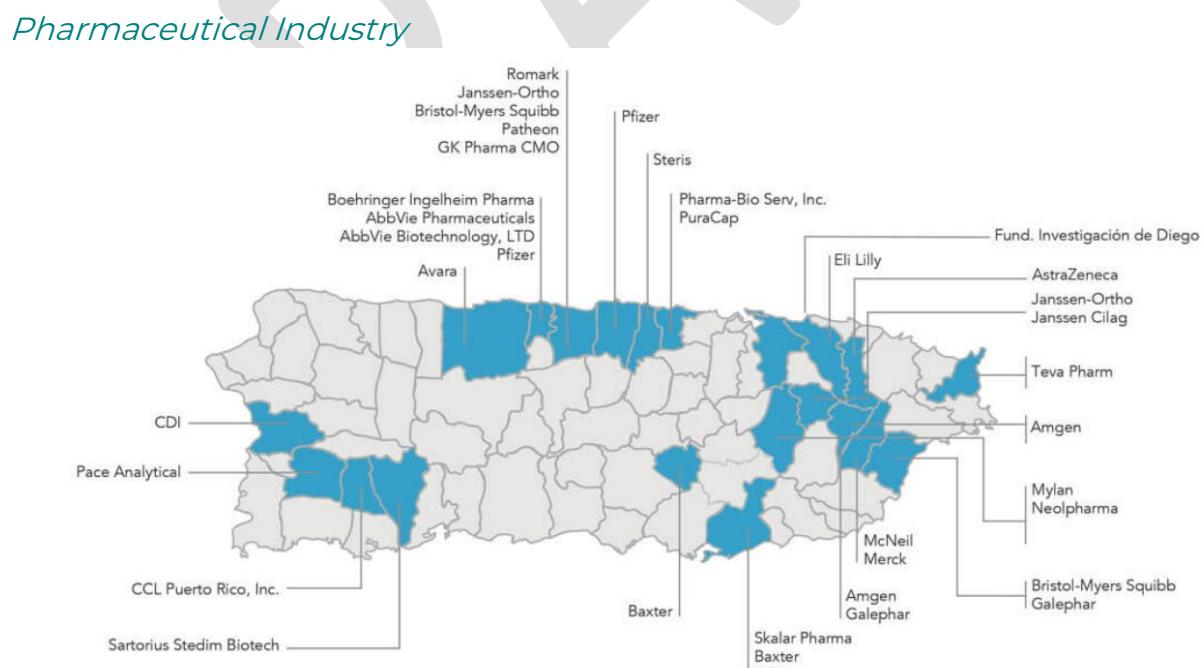


Figure 3 Economic clusters- Pharmaceutical Industry

<sup>35</sup> [Industries Department of Economic Development and Commerce \(pr.gov\)](http://pr.gov)

Puerto Rico is one of the most important biopharmaceutical manufacturing centers in the world, with more than 50 years of experience in pharmaceutical manufacturing and more than 30 years of experience in sterile pharmaceutical manufacturing. Puerto Rico is home to the main multinational pharmaceutical companies. It offers competitive and experienced workforce with an average of \$72,000 salary, and 153,997 jobs through the Island.

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### *Agricultural Biotechnology Industry*

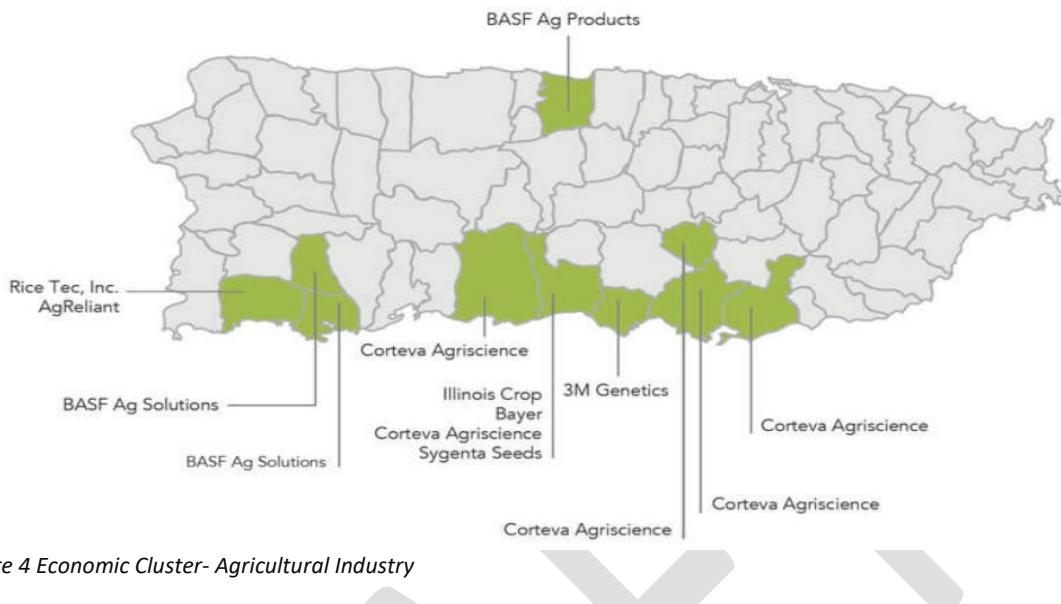


Figure 4 Economic Cluster- Agricultural Industry

One of the fastest growing sectors of our economy and Puerto Rico offers many advantages, among them – year-round stable climate and environmental conditions, skilled and professional workforce, soil quality, proximity to the US, rapid transit system, and academic agricultural research centers. It generates 5,000 direct and indirect jobs, invest \$34.9 million in the Island's economy activity, offers an average hourly salary between \$9.30 and \$17.49.

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## Medical Devices Industry

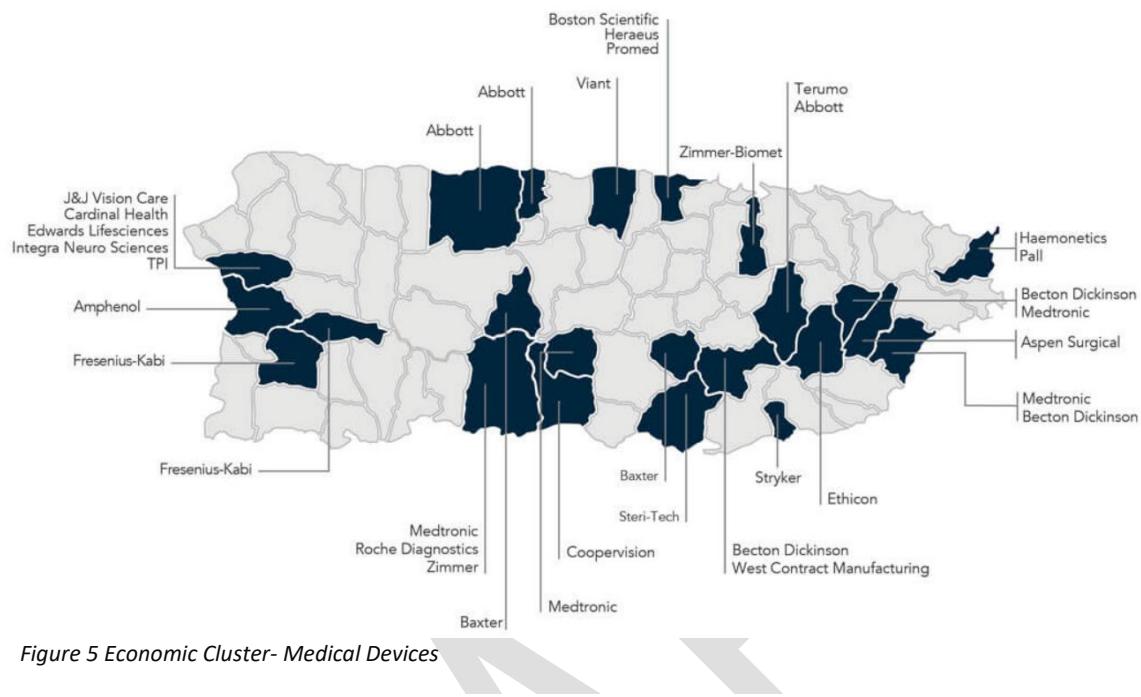


Figure 5 Economic Cluster- Medical Devices

Puerto Rico is home to several medical device manufacturing plants. Surgical and medical instruments, ophthalmic products, dental equipment and supplies, orthodontic products, dentures and appliances, laboratory appliances, and furniture. Medtronic, Abbott Medical Optics, and Coopervision are among the top international medical equipment and supplies companies that have found Puerto Rico to be a profitable place to manufacture.

It offers competitive and experienced workforce with an average of \$42,000 salary, and 21,000 jobs through the Island.

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## Biotechnology - Life Sciences Industry

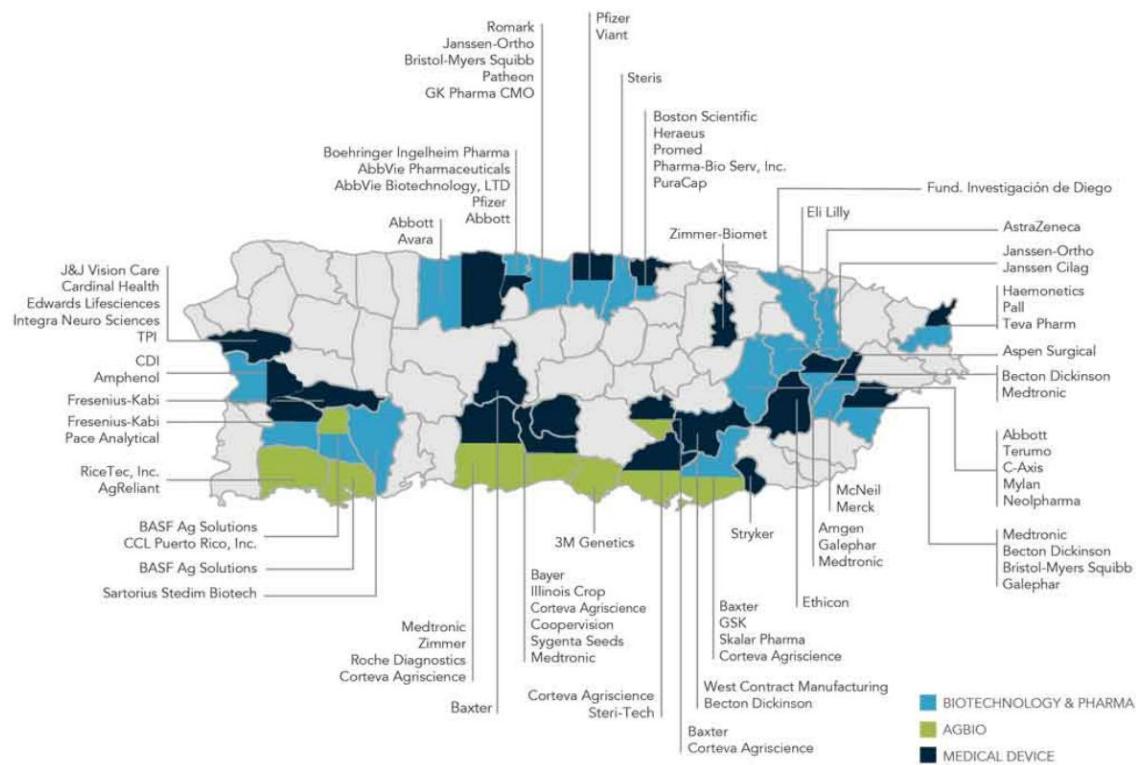


Figure 6 Economic Cluster- Life Sciences Industry

Puerto Rico has become a major center for agricultural biotechnology. Many seed companies have found the Island to be fertile ground for R&D with our tropical climate, constant water supply, ease of trade with the U.S., attractive incentives, and high-quality agricultural science talent.

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## Information Technology

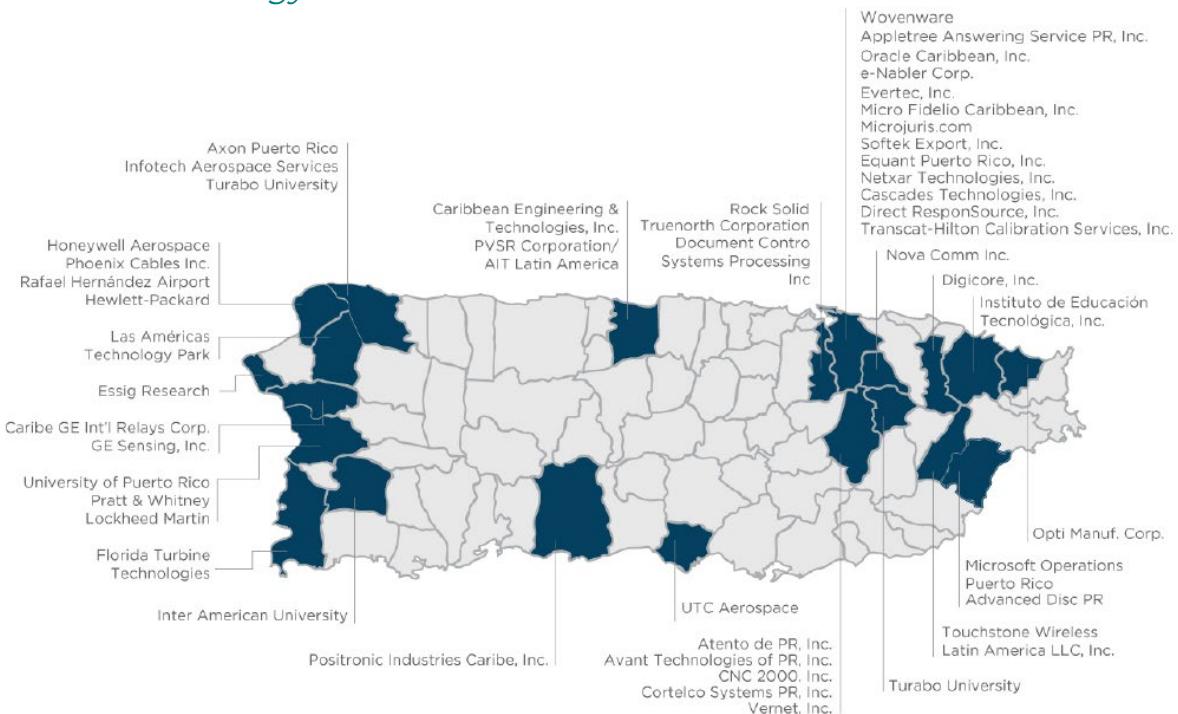


Figure 7 Economic Cluster- Information Technology Industry

Puerto Rico is home to two of the country's 35 largest engineering programs at the Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico and the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus.

Every year, the Island's universities award more than 20,000 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) degrees in science, engineering, and technology.

The Island's bilingual workforce is known for its high productivity with extensive experience in process development, automation, quality control / assurance, storage and more.

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## Aerospace Industry

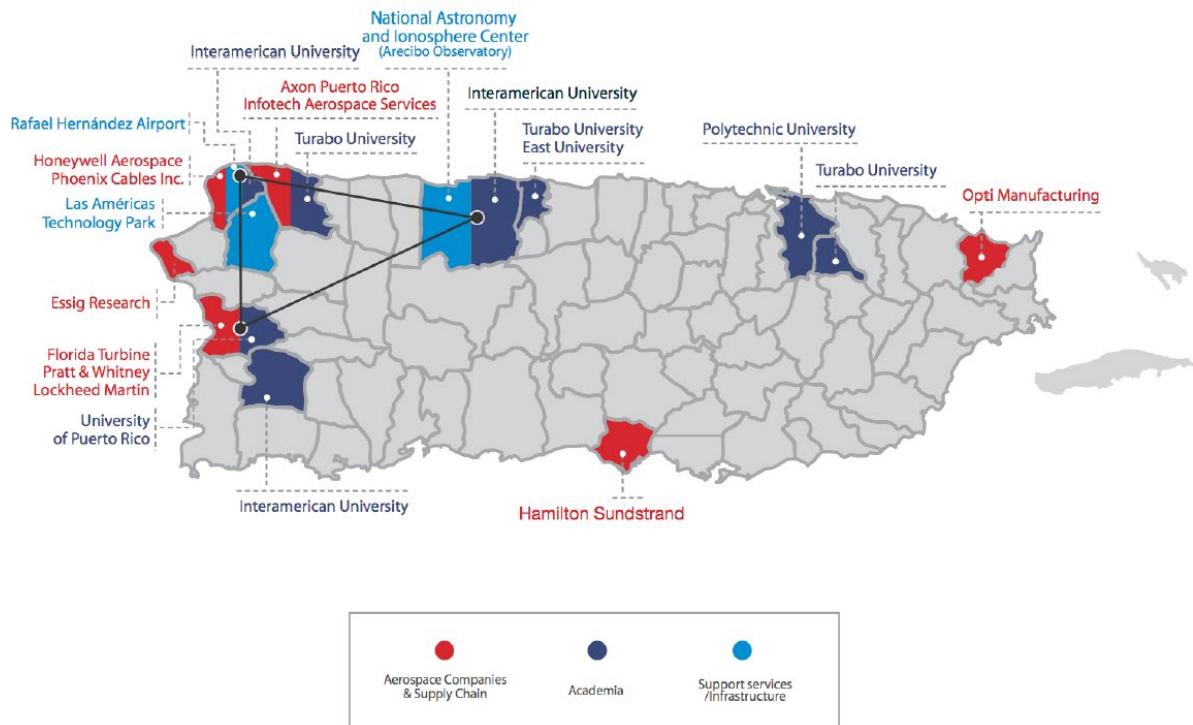


Figure 8 Economic Cluster- Aerospace Industry

Puerto Rico has become a magnet for some of the world's leading aviation and aerospace companies. With a long history of manufacturing experience and a strong portfolio of engineering talents, the Island has attracted multi-million-dollar investments from these and other major companies in recent years.

Puerto Rico is well positioned to capture much of the research, innovation, engineering, and production related to the aerospace sector.

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## *Electronic and Electric Manufacturing Industry*

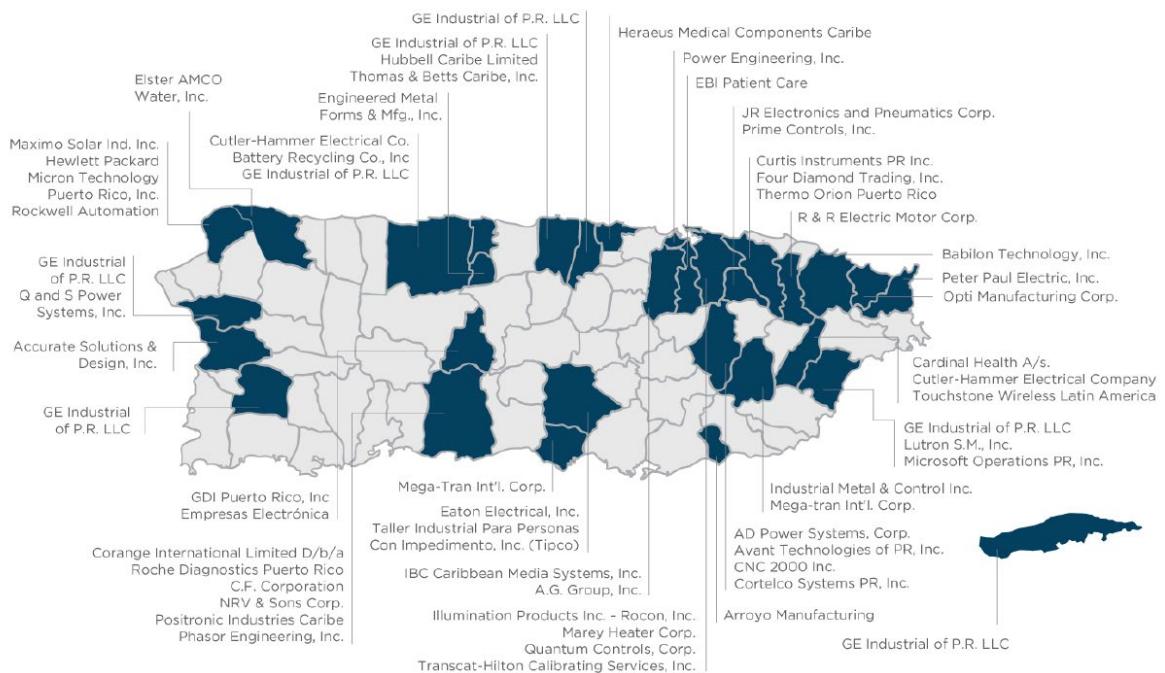


Figure 9 Economic Cluster- Manufacturing Industry

Large companies have identified Puerto Rico as the ideal place to establish their subsidiaries. Favorable tax rates, incentive programs, infrastructure, and a highly skilled workforce, such as engineers and other highly technical workers, facilitate the establishment of electronic manufacturing companies.

The Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico and the campuses of the University of Puerto Rico, Bayamón and Mayagüez, provide education related to Computer Engineering and Electronic Engineering Technology. It is the best interest of PRDE to collaborate and align PRDE's Infrastructure plan by strengthening its post-secondary education in a way that will help develop the above career pathways, ensuring employment opportunities for our youth. For this reason, through the implementation of the infrastructure plan, PRDE's goal is to develop at least one (1) Aerospace and (3) Agricultural CTE school aligned with the economic clusters.

Within each design, PRDE will consider the quantity and space classrooms should have, aligned to the program that is offered in each school. Some

Career and Technical Schools will require laboratories, workshop areas, creative and recreation areas, as well as other learning resources, which are needed to support the learning process, including the use of information and technology.

### Pillar 5 – Bilingual Schools

Although English is the co-official language of Puerto Rico, 71 % of its inhabitants (2.8 of the almost 3.5 million in the country) acknowledge that they do not speak it well and that they barely speak it, according to the US census.

In today's global world, the importance of English cannot be denied and ignored since English is the greatest common language spoken universally. The kind of feeling that succeeds among students is that it is not possible to achieve fluency or mastery over the English language. This kind of tendency prevents students from learning English.

According to a focus group activity held by PRDE, a group of representatives contributed to an in depth-analysis regarding the school's infrastructure, its opportunity to expand and innovate for the benefits of its students. From that analysis, a concern regarding the number of bilingual schools was raised and discussed with management. Currently, PRDE has 17 Bilingual schools within its public school system. Therefore, it is the best interest of PRDE to address this need and increase the number of schools that provide a bilingual education in the public system.

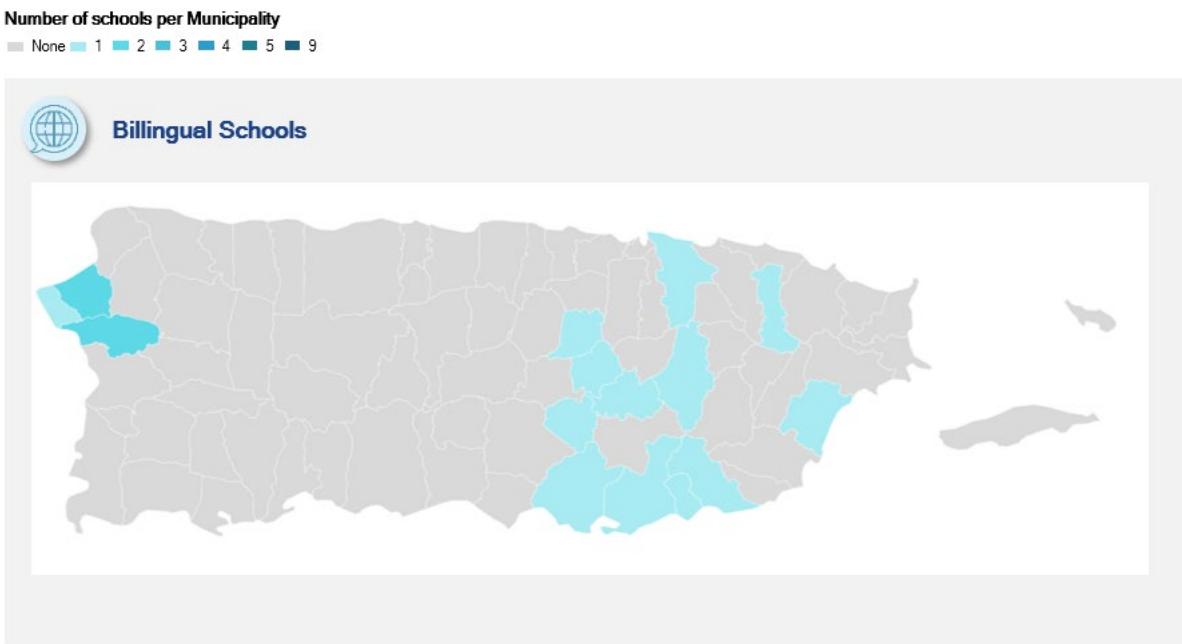


Figure 10 Current Distribution of Bilingual Schools in Puerto Rico

The goal is to develop at least one bilingual school at each of the 78 of municipalities, reaching 3.5 times more the number of Bilingual schools, PRDE currently has.

Additionally, the Institute of Professional Development and University Relations of PRDE is implementing, since December 2021, the Accelerated Professionalization Project (PADS, per its Spanish acronym project (*Proyecto de Profesionalización Acelerada*) in partnership with the University of Puerto Rico and their 11 campuses. The purpose of this project, through targeted professional development, is to impact both career professional teachers and those in transitory status in receiving to receive undergraduate and graduate study credits, in both synchronized and asynchronous formats, so that these teachers can complete the requirements established in the current Certification Regulation #8146.

Through the Infrastructure Plan, Bilingual schools will become a complete language learning facility equipped with the latest multimedia equipment and systems, computer labs, and smart classrooms that will facilitate quality language learning.

## Pillar 6 – Fine Arts Schools

As the many benefits of arts education has been thoroughly researched—is that the arts can teach life skills, inspire students, and allow them to experience the world in a different way.

PRDE understands the set of skills fine arts brings to our students. Arts teach a number of valuable skills. The first skill people think of when they hear the word “art” is creativity. It is an incredibly important thing to foster, as creativity can be applied to just about every aspect of life—problem solving, everyday writing, projects, and business.

Painters will tell you that practice makes perfect, so will musicians, writers, actors, and just about any type of artist out there. To get better, one must be persistent in their craft. Learning to have this diligence early on will leave a lasting impression on the student, who can take their hard-earned diligence and apply it to other parts of their life. Photographers must have a perfect sense of timing and might have to wait quite a while for the perfect shot. To get better at any skill—artistic or otherwise—a lot of patience, time and effort will have to be put into it. Instead of rebelling in potentially harmful ways, teens who are introduced to various arts can express themselves in a positive way through a creative outlet.

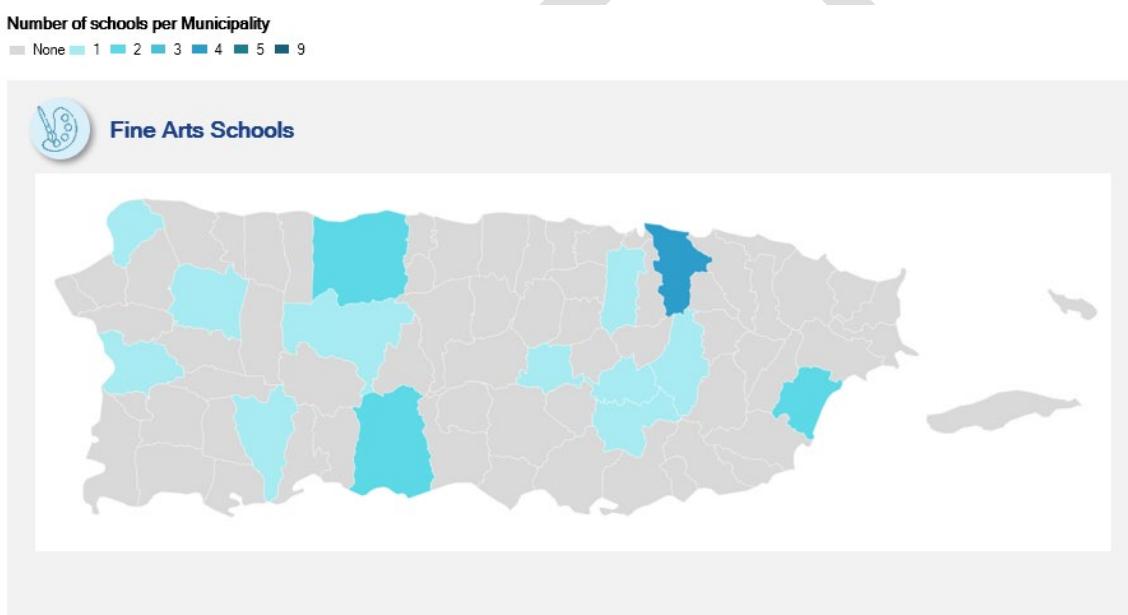
Many different forms of fine arts require more than one participant. Band/Orchestra, choir, drama, and film are team efforts, and so students can learn the value of working with others and understanding their contribution to the bigger whole. Marching band, for example, requires students to master their placements—if one person is off, the entire picture is jeopardized. This emphasizes the importance of the individual within the larger organization, a skill and mindset that will be vital down the road.

Part of our stakeholder’s consultation, PRDE was able to identify that student are interested in having more fine arts programs at schools.

Not only will PRDE be developing more fine arts schools, but this have been set as one of Puerto Rico’s DEDC strategic projects to help improve Puerto Rico’s economy. Recently, the District Live was recently built as one of Puerto Rico’s most attractive entertainment place to provide a wide range of events, including concerts, banquets, DJs, fashion shows, festivals, award

ceremonies, corporate events, musical shows, circuses, and graduations. Certainly, this strategy aligns accordingly with creating workforce opportunities for our students.

Another DEDC Strategic project considered a great opportunity is the Puerto Rico's Film District. This will become a fully digital studio, located in the Cinema District of Puerto Rico. Upon completion, the film district could create more than 1,325 direct and indirect jobs. The Film District will consist of five sound studios, administrative offices, conference rooms, post-production and editing facilities, locker rooms, storage space, an industrial kitchen, a "university" and laundry services. Currently, PRDE has 20 schools with Fine Arts offerings within its public school system.



*Figure 11 Current Distribution of Fine Arts Schools in Puerto Rico*

Through the

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implementation of the Infrastructure Plan, the design of fine art schools' facilities must allow students prepare for a career, creating a culture that supports curiosity, investigation, and production. Depending on the program offered at each school, facilities must include the appropriate lightning, equipment, painting/drawing classrooms, multimedia rooms, theatres, areas with ballet barre and other dancing spaces, sculpture

classrooms, music/recording studios, amphitheaters, darkroom to process photographic films, and any other space or area needed. PRDE's goal is to increase by 20 %, the number of fine arts schools that it currently has. It will also modernize the facilities of existing fine arts schools and provide them with new equipment and resources.

### Pillar 7 – Sports Schools

Sports are a very important aspect of the Puerto Rican culture. The birthplace of great high-performance athletes has represented the Island at the Olympics since 1948. As a territory of the United States, and a nation of only 3.2 million people, Puerto Rico exhibits its share of nationalistic pride. Through other national and cultural symbols, Puerto Rico can make a name for itself on an international stage.

According to stakeholder's consultation, students raised their interest on having more sports programs throughout the Island. Sports can serve as a vital tool to boost a student's development by encouraging goal setting, teamwork, effective communication, memorization, adaptability, and discipline. Currently, PRDE has 7 schools with sports offerings within its public school system.

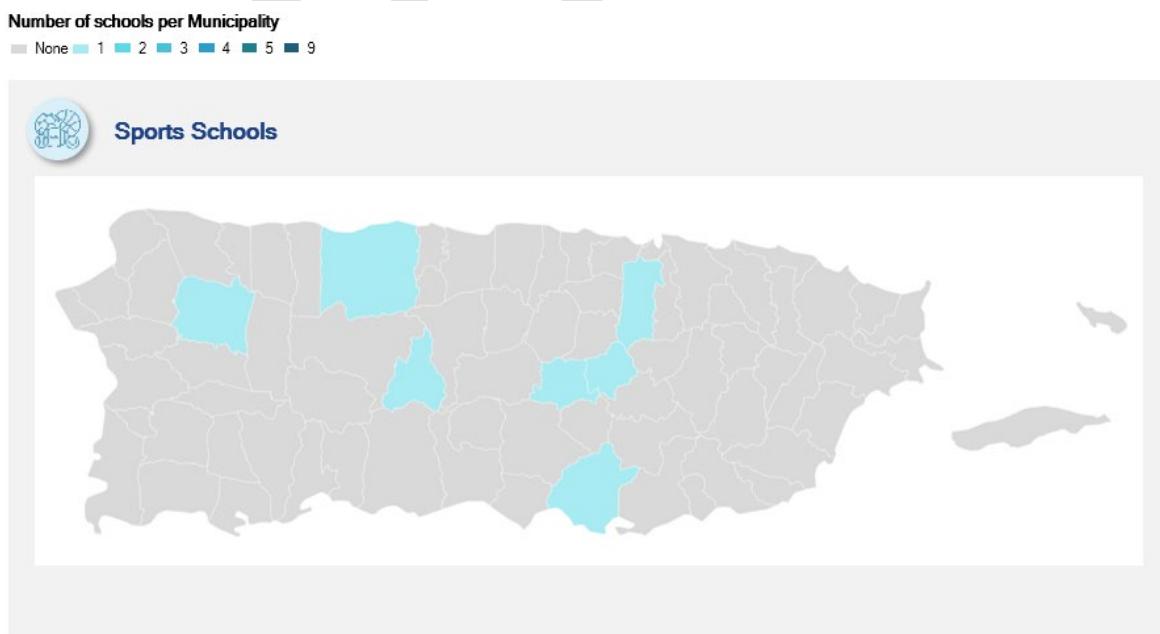


Figure 12 Current Distribution of Sports Schools in Puerto Rico

Therefore, due to the many benefits that sports programs bring to our students, PRDE will extends sports programs, through the implementation of PRDE's Infrastructure Plan. Depending on the sports program offered in each school, facilities will include the necessary fields, open areas, courts, pools, and storage area for all sports equipment.

The goal is to develop two (2) times the number of Sports schools with a special focus in community interests such as Basketball, Volleyball and Baseball.

Currently PRDE, through the Institute of Professional Development and University Relations, established a partnership with the FIFA. The purpose of this educational alliance is to implement a soccer curriculum for physical education teachers, called FIFA For Schools, which is training these teachers in the development of soccer competencies. These trainings are offered both in person and virtually.

#### Pillar 8 – Montessori Schools

For more than a century, Montessori has been thriving around the globe, and contemporary research validates the effectiveness of the Montessori Method. It develops students who are capable, accountable, knowledgeable people who have the strong sense of self they will need to thrive in the real world.

Montessori classrooms are thoughtfully designed to offer children opportunities to develop their own capabilities, for each classroom is filled with developmentally appropriate activities that encourage children to interact with specific learning materials, as well as to work cooperatively with others.

Currently, PRDE has 45 Montessori schools within the public school system. Through the implementation of the Infrastructure Plan, PRDE's goal is to increase a hundred (100) schools with Montessori offerings, specifically focused on the Primary levels.

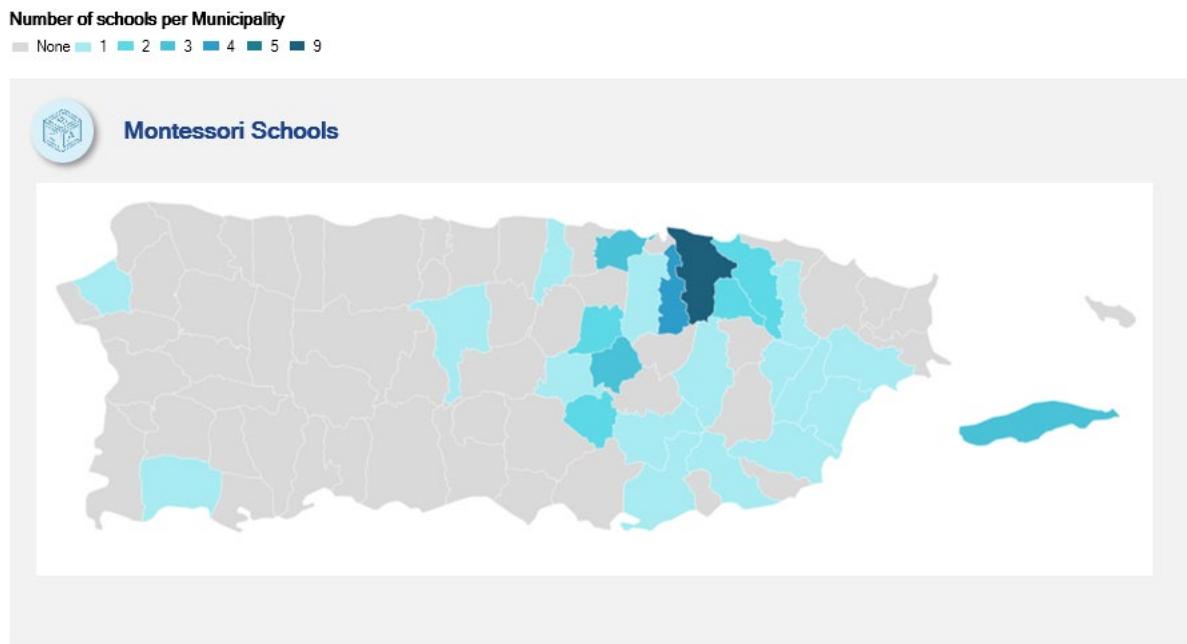


Figure 13 Current Distribution of Montessori Schools in Puerto Rico

PRDE has established an educational partnership, through the Institute of Professional Development and University Relations (IPDUR), with a group of external investigators from the University of San Francisco that is currently working with both the leads of the IPDUR and the Auxiliary Secretariat of Montessori in developing a mythology that will evaluate the impact of the Montessori philosophy in the learning environment.

### C. Effective Implementation of the Infrastructure Public Policy Plan

Due to the scope and complexity of the various projects that PRDE must accomplish in a limited amount of time, PRDE has identified the importance to meet with certain essential elements that will help PRDE to achieve an effective implementation of its Infrastructure Plan.

#### Program Management Officer (PMO)

The PMO required by FEMA and COR3 was selected after completing the procurement process. PRDE selected a consulting firm with more than 40 years of experience in the development of projects in school's facilities in almost 200 school districts in the United States, and with broad knowledge in the federal funds management.

The PMO will be responsible for the school's assessments, the community outreach, the demographic analysis, the evaluation of the infrastructure damages, and the identification of the needs of the school community, to further develop the Master Construction and Recovery Plan.

PRDE's Infrastructure and Recovery Office will supervise and oversee the PMO's work and approve the work plan or any other official documentation. The PMO will provide PRDE the resources to start the operation of the Office, and the knowledge transfer to PRDE staff and resources.

The Infrastructure Public Policy Plan, the Department's Strategic Plan, and Act No. 2018-85, as amended, *supra* will be the foundation for the Master Construction and Recovery Plan. The PMO must gather detailed information from the stakeholders, including input from students, parents or guardians, teachers and staff, the community surrounding the schools and other government agencies, to help them pursue individual scope of works for each school building and determine which one has to be restored, re-designed, replaced or repurposed, and the location for those determined to be new construction.

The Master Construction and Recovery Plan is also considered a live document and subject to modifications, that can be updated based on the stakeholder's needs and priorities identified over the duration of the available funds.

## Talent Pipeline – Recruitment, Certification and Recertification of Teachers

As evidenced in the data collected from the surveys and focus groups, there is consensus concerning the lack of personnel at schools. As of today, PRDE has identified dozens of schools lacking a School Director, Assistant Directors, Teacher leaders, and other school staff necessary to perform the academic and administrative tasks.

To address areas of shortage or potential shortages, the PRDE officially signed a partnership with the University of Puerto Rico to offer opportunities to current teachers in grades PreK-12 to earn graduate school credit hours - at no cost to them and achieve a certification or recertification in the area or subject it teaches. PRDE plans to use ARP ESSER funds to extend this strategy to offer courses in other universities and colleges. PRDE's certification and recertification process is also a way on how PRDE has used funding to avoid layoffs.

PRDE also plans to use ARP ESSER funds to provide a one-time paid-leave license to qualified personnel that will help PRDE address its most urgent areas of shortages or potential shortages. Those who complete the certification or recertification process, through the one-time paid-leave license, will be required to sign a 5-year commitment to teach that particular subject matter in PRDE. This strategy also contributes to a more professional workforce, which is so needed in the educational field.

Thru various consultation processes that were performed, PRDE repeatedly identified the urgency to also address salary increase. PRDE will address bonus and salary increase for permanent, probatory and transitory employees. PRDE also plans on using ARP ESSER funds to further compensate staff who continues to show a high sense of responsibility during the pandemic and supports the continuity of the services and the educational process.

In addition, on September 27, 2021, PRDE launched the Professional Development Organizational System; a platform envisioned to be used as a system for data driven decision making, collection of targeted professional development information, identifying personnel readiness and, target state provided supports and technical assistance.



The platform will provide a variety of professional learning sessions and support to all school staff and PRDE personnel on how to access and accelerate student learning. The Professional Development platform will also allow self-service, interactive training sessions with on-demand resources available to all educators and administrative staff. The Professional Development platform will allow PRDE to identify the most urgent areas of shortages.

These strategies will help PRDE on minimizing the effect we are experiencing; more teachers and school personnel leaving the public system.

Is through a collaborative network and coherent plan, that PRDE will effectively increase student access to key support staff within school buildings, including school counselors, special education personnel, nurses, social workers, and psychologists.

Schools will be part of the planning of a multi-year cycle that will allow PRDE to achieve a continuous improvement mindset, create constant opportunities to assess ongoing needs, trying new strategies, and making necessary adjustments.

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## Monitoring and Internal Controls

PRDE understands the importance of implementing appropriate fiscal monitoring and internal controls to the disaster relief funds, as to address potential sources of waste, fraud, and abuse of these funds.

For Restarts funds, PRDE has already completed the procurement competitive process, selecting an adequate external vendor to perform monitoring and program review. These funds have already been monitored and will continue to go through the same process until funds are used and available.

For ESSER funds, PRDE is under the process to develop a request for proposal that will contract a firm with experience in auditing, monitoring and/or program review of federal grants.

All monitoring efforts will provide an external point of view on of the processes being evaluated. Both, PRDE and the external evaluator, agree to perform a risk analysis to prioritize the evaluation of implementation of these federal programs at schools and PRDE offices.

Desk monitoring and visits to locations will also take place. After visits and desk monitoring are completed, PRDE will request copies of the noncompliance reports and identification of any findings, to proceed with the implementation of corresponding Corrective Action Plans.

## D. Disclaimers, Term and Revision

The content of this document is based on the information that is known at the date of its publication. The document and reports may be revised when the need for changes is determined. Therefore, it may be modified or amended when required.

Figures stated in this document and the attached reports are derived based on assumptions and information provided by the stakeholders. These assumptions and information will change over time. Hence, it is imperative that PRDE reviews this Plan on a quarterly basis to ensure it is up-to-date and addresses the current needs of the school communities.

Information provided in this document and the attached reports should  
NOT be construed as providing legal advice.

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