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OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss what this pandemic means for the educational system in Puerto Rico
 2. Discuss the recent DE announcement and its short and medium term implications for student teachers and parents.
 3. Discuss recommendations, solutions and public policy recommendations
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FOCUS

- Current situation of Education in Puerto Rico.
 - Long-term and short-term challenges of school closure
 - Challenges for vulnerable students with special needs
 - Other perspectives concerns recommendations of the Association of Teachers of Puerto Rico
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BACKGROUND

Currently there are 294,000 students who are enrolled in the Puerto Rico Public Education System. Within the student population, there are 103,000 students registered in the Special Education Program. The 2019-2020 school year has been one run over particularly the second school semester which in the first instance could not start on the scheduled date due to the seismic events that occurred in January which represented a nightmare for Puerto Ricans, particularly those in the South area. This delayed the process to continue the semester and the schools were gradually incorporated, however, as of March 13, there were schools that had not particularly started in the towns of Guánica, San German and Yauco. In the absence of an action plan to guarantee the continuity of educational services, which is a constitutional right even when the first curfew begins, students were without taking classes.

CONTEXT

On March 13 the first touch is announced and from that moment it is determined not to return to the classroom. In an attempt to guarantee the continuity of educational services, we begin to provide services from the home, something unprecedented in Puerto Rico due to the pandemic situation.

Initially, instruction was given to download some modules and use digital pages and platforms suggested by the DE as resources to start working with them from home. And the first daring began for teachers, parents and students because the modules could not be downloaded and the suggested platform was blocked. So we can describe this distance learning process as a marathon has really been an experiment.



CHALLENGES

Among the difficulties, it was not possible to specify how many students had the technological resource, how many had internet in their homes and how many had the support of their parents in order to direct them from home with an educational approach. We were able to gather the feelings of many parents and guardian grandparents of how difficult this process was making them because they were not prepared to educate in relation to aspects of curricular content. Given this panorama, it was correct on the part of the Department of Education to announce the completion date of the semester because there was much despair, anguish and uncertainty. Now, a degree of frustration is generated by the announcement by the Secretary that everyone approved of the degree. The way the announcement is made in our opinion is what creates the displeasure because for future occasions the teacher's moral authority was lost to challenge his students and families to finish their work and do their best. This is very dangerous in the eyes of professionals. The biggest impact is that it caused a sense of demotivation and a poor sense of struggle. All because of the way it was announced. The current public policy allows to exempt those who for justified reason could not comply and it was definitely necessary to consider that the teaching was not 100% as the teachers would have liked. And students who could not be provided with individualized education, who were deprived of therapeutic services, who had no technological resources, lack of internet and another important element that did not have direct support from their parents or guardians, could not be penalized. legal and finally they are minors who are not to blame for anything that is happening.

SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

Students with special needs that required some assisted equipment were not within their reach because they were in schools since the closure was abrupt due to the curfew.

This population has been well hit since the earthquakes, many of the students were without therapies which are of great support for academic progress. Each student's Individualized Educational Programs could not be met. In addition, blind students, to name an example, were not provided with curricular access, being penalized for their disability. The situation was complicated. And we hope that all these challenges can be worked on since it could be that in August the classroom teaching will not begin.

PROPOSALS

Some of the recommendations are:

1. Provide internet equipment included to teachers and students.
 2. Create modality for therapies so that they can be replaced in summer.
 3. Create remedial courses and offer them to small groups.
 4. When the situation is normalized Tutorials for all subjects
 5. Design educational modules for all units and subjects
 6. Create educational capsules of essential topics and offer announcements periodically.
 7. Educational Camps
 8. Start first three weeks with reviews of the previous grade.
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