



Federation of Puerto Rican Teachers - FMPR



Press Release

October 23, 2017

The Federation of Puerto Rican Teachers (FMPR) to education workers, given the extraordinary work we have carried out to place in good condition hundreds of schools all across the island. The Education Secretary, Julia Keleher, is mistaken when indicating that today teachers begin working in some regions. Teachers and the Federation of Puerto Rican Teachers have been working and are already working in schools and communities since September 26 and as people we are contributing to the reconstruction of Puerto Rico. However, it is shameful that the Government and the Education Secretary pretend to take advantage of the grief and crisis provoked by Hurricane Maria to force the emigration of thousands of students and move forward with their plan to close and privatize hundreds Puerto Rican public schools. Well knowing the irreparable damage that our sons and daughters with suffer and our country.

The Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico demand the opening and restart of the school semester in alternate schedule (8:00 am to 12:00pm) in hundreds of schools in all educative regions with physically acceptable conditions and which have water and electricity. Additionally, the FMPR energetically rejects the Education Secretary, Julia Keleher's plan to begin classes little by little using as an excuse the supposed inspection by the Corps of Engineers from the United States of America. **Certainly there are schools which cannot begin total or partial classes. However, it is nonetheless true that the majority of schools in many municipalities can begin to impart classes.**

The excessive centralization in decision making in the hands of the Education Secretary, its incapacity to delegate personnel from the Agency and the unnecessary delay to begin the school semester in the majority of schools seems to be part of a plan orchestrated by the Government of the United States, similar to that used in New Orleans in 2005, to close public schools and eliminate teachers, as well as promote the abandonment of the Island by thousands of Puerto Rican students or force their movement to private schools.

The Education Secretary stated that class would begin on October 23, only in some schools in the educative region of San Juan and Mayaguez. In addition, Keleher proposed to open hundreds of schools in adequate conditions to begin classes in the already mentioned regions as well as the regions of Bayamon, Caguas, Arecibo, Humacao and Ponce. In San Juan and Mayaguez it is clear that the federal inspection consisted of a very brief and superficial process, inferior to reports offered by the schools principals. On the other part, the Education Secretary has also prohibited to begin classes in the so called "community" schools. These schools were created, among others, to hide the fact that there is no real service being offered to children in the Special Education Program.

It is unacceptable that over a month after the passing of Hurricane Maria, the Government unnecessarily denies the right to public education to tens of thousands of students; and that it is not understood that schools belong to their communities and they need them open in order to recover.

Schools are like an oasis which allows the community, and above all their sons and daughters, to heal traumas and mitigate the effects of the crisis with a hot meal. That is why it is unforgivable that the Education Secretary, with absence from the Governor Ricardo Rosello, order to stop the purchase of food for the school cafeterias en five educative regions which will remain closed. Besides denying the right to education, it is cruel to deny a hot meal and warmth to the great majority of our students.

The Federal Government, the Governor Rosello and the Education Secretary Keleher, have publically stated that the plan they are following is similar to that executed in the city of New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. But they do not mention that in that occasion they displaced tens of thousands of African American families out of the city, closed all public schools, laid off teachers and eventually created the system of private schools (charter schools) which have been a failure.

That plan against the country explains why Keleher, with the regrettable support from the Teachers´ Association, is holding up the start of class in the majority of schools, closing schools which did not suffer damages, declaring excess teachers, offering public schools to private ones, proposing virtual schools and threatening parents, teachers and principals who try to repair or begin classes in their schools.

The Government does not stop at stealing our retirement system, they want to leave teachers without work and students without an education. At this moment the semester is not in danger because of Hurricane Maria, the only threat to the school semester is the Education Secretary and her plan to postpone the start of school in the majority of schools.

The Federation of Puerto Rican Teachers calls on to parents, teachers and community in general to mobilize on Thursday November 9 at 11:00 am at the Convention Centre of Puerto Rico in San Juan to demand, independently of the educative region, the opening of all those schools that have water and adequate physical conditions from 8:00am to 12:00pm. Enough sabotage by the Department of Education! Stop the unnecessary delay of the school start in hundreds of Puerto Rican schools!

Moreover, the FMPR summons the Government and the Education Secretary Keleher to make public any negotiation or operation that is geared to privatizing the services of the Education Department.

Attentively,

Teacher Mercedes Martínez Padilla
President of FMPR

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