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REPORT

HOW UNITED STATES POLICY IS HURTING PUERTO RICO'S STUDENTS

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Cover Image: Students at Belen Blanco De Zequeira,
Loiza, Puerto Rico by Lorie Shaull
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Executive Summary

Discussions about the challenges facing Puerto Rico's education system often ignore the profound and lasting impact of United States policies that have systematically discriminated against the territory's students. Today's education system reflects a layered trauma—one rooted in colonial marginalization and reinforced by a post-1965 federal education framework that has consistently failed to adequately serve Puerto Rico's youth.

This report highlights the impact of U.S. policy on Puerto Rico's students compared to those in the 50 states and District of Columbia. Focusing on resource inequities, the exclusion from federal programs, and the limited influence on education policymakers in Washington D.C., Puerto Rico's education system has operated on an uneven playing field due to discriminatory U.S. law and regulations. Furthermore, this report illustrates how despite Puerto Rico having parity with states under federal education law, disparate policy excludes Puerto Rico students from the same benefits as its state counterparts. This unjust treatment continues to perpetuate systemic inequities that negatively impact student outcomes for students in Puerto Rico.

Key Findings

- **Federal Policy Discrimination** - Despite being considered a state under the United States' two main education laws (ESSA & IDEA), Puerto Rico students are still excluded from benefiting from federal programs. This exclusion has resulted in the loss of tens of millions of dollars to support students.
- **Underfunding and Resource Inequities** - Federal funds notwithstanding, Puerto Rico is the only state under ESSA with one sole revenue source which has resulted in an overreliance on federal funding (45%, vs. 13% state avg.) and the lowest per-student funding ratio in the country.

Consequences

- U.S. policy discrimination has caused students with disabilities and students in rural communities to lose tens of millions in federal funding.
- Structural underfunding has created an equity deficit that has made it impossible for Puerto Rico to compete with state and D.C. counterparts.
- Challenging learning conditions have left Puerto Rican students at the bottom nationally in academic assessments.



Students at Belen Blanco De Zequeira, Loiza, Puerto Rico by Lorie Shaull

Background

Puerto Rico has been under U.S. colonial rule for 127 years since it was acquired from Spain after the Spanish-American War. Immediately following, the early 20th century saw drastic changes to Puerto Rico's education system, including efforts to assimilate Puerto Rican students towards a U.S. education paradigm, including mandating English as the language of instruction.^{1 2} This Americanization campaign was similar to systems in the U.S. that dispossessed colonized peoples of their cultural heritage—for example, Native American industrial schools.³ These efforts aimed to erase Puerto Rican identity and emphasize loyalty to the U.S. over local history and culture. Despite the imposition of these colonial structures, efforts to improve education led to significant literacy gains, with rates increasing from 16% in 1900 to 57% by 1930.⁴

In the second half of the 20th century, the U.S. Congress passed two consequential laws that have defined and continue to shape education for Puerto Rico students. The first was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed in 1965, which aimed to close achievement gaps for children in underserved communities.⁵ The second law was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1975, whose goal was to ensure that children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and guarantee special education services and individualized education programs (IEPs).⁶ Through these education laws, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. are treated as states. Puerto Rico stands alone from the other U.S. territories, which were not considered states under ESEA and EHA.

Unlike the EHA, which all states were required to follow, participation in the ESEA was voluntary. However, every state, along with Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., has opted in over time. Rejecting ESEA funding would have meant forfeiting billions of dollars, particularly for schools serving low-income students. This would have meant fewer teachers meant to reduce class sizes, fewer academic coaches

and tutors that help students with learning loss, less teacher training to better meet the needs of disadvantaged students, and a lack of educational materials such as books and classroom supplies. With 56% of Puerto Rico children living in poverty, this loss would have severely hampered teachers' ability to meet the needs of Puerto Rico's most vulnerable students.⁷

Puerto Rico had strong financial incentives to opt into ESEA considering the dire economic conditions it was facing in the 1960s.⁸ During this period of transition, the U.S. could have allowed Puerto Rico to continue developing its education system, being responsive to the local needs and realities throughout the archipelago. This would have acknowledged the distinct differences of Puerto Rico compared to states on the mainland. Instead, the U.S. ignored those distinctions, culture, and nuances, pressuring Puerto Rico to adapt instantly to the U.S. educational model.

The ESEA and EHA evolved into the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), respectively.

The set of rules issued to states and jurisdictions that guide how to administer federal funding under the ESSA is called Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR).⁹ EDGAR was conceived for the bifurcated U.S. state and local educational model followed by 49 states and Washington D.C. Conversely, the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE), the state agency tasked with delivering education services to students, operates as a "unitary" system, serving as both the state educational agency (SEA) and local educational agency (LEA) as defined under U.S. education law. This arrangement immediately created challenges for the Puerto Rico system, whose unitary education structure can at times be incongruent with EDGAR. This unitary structure is unique within the broader U.S. educational system with only Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands adopting the model. Of the 49 million public school students throughout

1 Del Moral, Solsiree. 2013. *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898–1952*. University of Wisconsin Press

2 Barreto, Amílcar Antonio. 2000. *Speaking English in Puerto Rico: the impact of affluence, education and return migration*. CENTRO: The Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies 8(1): 5-17

3 Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report. U.S. Department of the Interior: Bureau of Indian Affairs, accessed on May 30, 2025, https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/dup/inline-files/bsi_investigative_report_may_2022_508.pdf

4 Curtis, Matthew; Mateo, Uribe-Castro. 2023. *The Expansion of Public Education in Puerto Rico after 1900*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham

5 Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 et seq.

6 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.

7 Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Children Population in Poverty 2024: Kids Count Data Center*. <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data?location=PR#PR/4/0/char/0>

8 Carrión-Tavárez, Ángel. 2021. *La situación de Puerto Rico en la primera mitad del siglo XX*. Instituto de Libertad Económica

9 34 C.F.R. § 75-99

the United States, barely 300,000 within these five jurisdictions are learning in a unitary structure with the majority, nearly 240,000, being educated in Puerto Rico.

A system in decline

Currently, the Puerto Rico education system ranks as the 7th largest public school jurisdiction in the United States.¹⁰ Eight out of every ten students in the system qualify for free or reduced price lunch, the highest in the country, and an indicator of the significant challenges families face throughout the archipelago, which also includes the inhabited islands of Vieques and Culebra.¹¹

In recent years, the school system has struggled with declining enrollment, the largest percentage decrease of any state or territory.

For decades, students and teachers in Puerto Rico have been forced to operate in environments that make teaching and learning significantly more difficult than their counterparts on the mainland.¹² Teachers are widely known to supply materials for their students, paint their classrooms, teach with outdated books or none at all, or provide instruction under leaking ceilings due to deferred maintenance. These challenging learning environments have partially led to classroom outcomes that rank at the bottom compared to its state peers. (See Table 2)

Table 1. Puerto Rico Public School Enrollment 2014- 2024

Year	Fall 14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Public School enrollment	410,950	379,818	365,181	346,096	307,282	292,518	276,413	259,535	250,668	240,762	236,421
Percentage change		-7.6%	-3.9%	-5.2%	-11.2%	-4.8%	-5.5%	-6.1%	-3.4%	-4.0%	-1.8%
Total Change over 10 years											-42.5%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by region, state, and jurisdiction: Selected years, fall 1990 through fall 2024.

Table 2. State & Territory Bottom Rankings of 4th Grade Math and High School Graduation Rate

State Rank	4th Grade Math (score)	HS Graduation Rate (percentage)
National Average	237	87%
50/52	Alaska (226)	Arizona (77%)
51/52	New Mexico (224)	District of Columbia (76%)
52/52	Puerto Rico (184)	Puerto Rico (74%)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Condition of Education: High School Graduation - Puerto Rico. National Center for Education Statistics, Nation's Report Card - Puerto Rico.

¹⁰ National Center for Education Statistics, Enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by region, state, and jurisdiction: Selected years, fall 1990 through fall 2023, U.S. Department of Education, accessed May 30, 2025, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d24/tables/dt24_203.20.asp

¹¹ Departamento de Educación de Puerto Rico, Perfil Escolar: Matrícula certificada. <https://perfilescolar.dde.pr/certifiedenrollment>
The Nutrition Assistance Program Helps Over Half of Puerto Rico's Children. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, accessed on May 30, 2025, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/the-nutrition-assistance-program-helps-over-half-of-puerto-ricos-children>,

¹² Cardoza, Kavitha, "In the 6th-largest U.S. District, Natural Disasters Have Disrupted Schooling for Years" NPR, August 16, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/08/16/1193722562/puerto-rico-schools-education>

Puerto Rico's education system stands alone compared to other U.S. educational jurisdictions regarding the enormous challenges it faces attempting to recover from multiple recent natural disasters such as Hurricanes Irma & Maria in 2017, the earthquakes of 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic. While Puerto Rico had the lowest learning outcomes in the United States prior to the cascading events following 2017, these compounded challenges have exacerbated the equity deficit that Puerto Rico is nowhere close to closing.

In 2019, in response to PRDE's negative audit report findings, leadership instability, and a string of corruption-related convictions, the U.S. Department of Education imposed a Third-Party Fiduciary Agent (TPFA) to oversee and manage Puerto Rico's use of federal education funds.¹³ The TPFA is a compliance tool that the U.S. Department of Education may use to ensure that federal requirements are properly followed. This is layered above the Fiscal Oversight Management Board (FOMB), which was imposed by the U.S. Congress in 2016 to manage Puerto Rico's government insolvency. The federal imposition of these two entities has limited local education decision-making power. In many cases, this additional oversight has created bureaucratic layers that have prevented the swift delivery of educational services for students. The imposition of the FOMB and its effect on Puerto Rico's education system further illustrates that while Puerto Rico is considered a state under the ESSA, its broader territorial status has left it vulnerable to external mechanisms imposed by U.S. policymakers that ultimately control decisions related to education.



¹³ Díaz Ramos, Tatiana, "Puerto Rico's Education Department Still Under Receivership: When Will It End?" *Centro de Periodismo Investigativo*, April 1, 2025, <https://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2025/04/puerto-rico-education-trustee-oversight/>



Inequitable funding: Educating students from an uneven playing field

Following ESEA's initial passage, Puerto Rico started from an uneven playing field compared to the other states when attempting to comply with federal law and deliver educational services to students, due to the way it funds its education system. Apart from federal funds, all 50 states collect a revenue source outside their state's general fund (e.g., local property taxes, severance taxes, lottery proceeds, etc.) to fund education. Puerto Rico solely funds its education system through its territorial general fund and federal funds.¹⁴

Even if Puerto Rico wanted to provide a municipal or county revenue stream for education as most jurisdictions in the United States do, it would put an immense strain on the 78 municipal governments, most of which suffer from "pervasive poverty" as defined by the federal government. This is defined as more than 20% of the municipality living below the federal poverty level for at least 30 years and would undoubtedly exacerbate educational inequities.¹⁵

As a result, Puerto Rico has the lowest investment of state funds for education in the country. This insufficient investment by the Puerto Rico government, compounded by the absence of additional revenue sources, translates directly to why Puerto Rico's education system is woefully underfunded and has the lowest per-pupil expenditure compared to all 50 states and Washington D.C. (See Table 3: State and Territory Per-Pupil Student Expenditures in Appendix A)

Because Puerto Rico invests less in education, this causes its system to rely more heavily on federal funds, more than any other state in the country. Federal funds constitute more than 45% of Puerto Rico's education budget, more than double the next closest state of South Dakota at 20%, and stands in stark contrast to the national average at 13%.¹⁶

These structural revenue challenges that have compounded since the mid-20th century illustrate an equity deficit that the Puerto Rico education system must rectify for its students to compete on the same playing field with state and D.C. counterparts.

Puerto Rico's chronic underfunding has led to teacher shortages, crumbling infrastructure, and a lack of essential educational resources for students. These conditions have pushed tens of thousands of families away from Puerto Rico to the U.S. mainland looking for improved educational environments for their children.¹⁷ Connected to that out-migration is the federal funding associated with each student which, as demonstrated by the 174,484-student decline over the last 10 years, has an oversized impact due to the system's over-reliance on federal resources.

Technical Discrimination

Often overlooked when analyzing the challenges of Puerto Rico's education system are the few but relevant elements under federal law and practice that unjustly discriminate against Puerto Rican students. From rural community funding to Medicaid reimbursement for services for students with disabilities, Puerto Rico's territorial status prohibits the island from taking advantage of critical federal programs its state counterparts enjoy. This is what is described in this paper as technical discrimination - elements explicit in law, regulation, or federal agency guidance that negatively impact the Puerto Rico education system.

Medicaid Expansion

Currently, all states are eligible to expand Medicaid coverage to fund services for students with disabilities or special needs.¹⁸ Forty-one states, including Washington D.C., have adopted Medicaid expansion.¹⁹ While Puerto Rico is

¹⁴ Compliant Fiscal Year 2026 Commonwealth Budget, Fiscal Oversight and Management Board, May 12, 2025, accessed May 30, 2025, [FOMB - Letter - Legislative Assembly - FY26 Commonwealth Budget Submission to Legislature - May 12, 2025.pdf](#)

¹⁵ Carlos Vargas et al., Pervasive Poverty in Puerto Rico: A Closer Look, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College CUNY, September 2023, <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/app/uploads/2023/09/Pervasive-Poverty-PR-1.pdf>

¹⁶ Ponencia del Departamento de Educación para el proceso de transición de gobierno 2024, Government of Puerto Rico, October, 2024, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://transicion2024.pr.gov/Agencias/081/Pages/default.aspx>

National Center for Education Statistics, Condition of Education: Public School Revenue Sources, May 2024, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cma/public-school-revenue>

¹⁷ Coto, Danica, "Puerto Rico to close 179 public schools amid crisis" AP News, May 5, 2017, <https://apnews.com/article/ef5de9ccef4419aaadc8ba7b791e373>

Cardoza, Kaviitha, "In the 6th-largest U.S. District, Natural Disasters Have Disrupted Schooling for Years" NPR, August 16, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/08/16/1193722562/puerto-rico-schools-education>

¹⁸ Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Medicaid and School-Based Services, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.medicare.gov/resources-for-states/medicaid-state-technical-assistance/medicaid-and-school-based-services>

¹⁹ KFF, Status of State Medicaid Expansion Decisions, accessed May 30, 2025, [https://www.kff.org/status-of-state-medicaid-expansion-decisions/#:~:text=To%20date%2C%2041%20states%20\(including,have%20not%20adopted%20the%20expansion](https://www.kff.org/status-of-state-medicaid-expansion-decisions/#:~:text=To%20date%2C%2041%20states%20(including,have%20not%20adopted%20the%20expansion)

technically eligible, Medicaid for the island operates under a federally-capped funding structure, limiting the total federal funds available. In addition, Puerto Rico suffers from a lower federal reimbursement rate than the states, forcing the territory to cover a larger share of Medicaid costs. Beyond the baseline inequity that Puerto Ricans face regarding Medicaid parity, expanding Medicaid coverage for students with disabilities would force the territory to divert resources away from an already fragile health system. As a result, the Puerto Rico Department of Education is starved of critical resources available to its state counterparts. The help of Medicaid dollars could significantly ease the PRDE's budget, as \$433 million in local funds were spent during the 2023–24 school year on services for students with disabilities.²⁰ This constraint will continue to handicap Puerto Rico as 37% of its students are identified as students with a learning disability.²¹ Medicaid expansion highlights yet another example of how Puerto Rico's territorial status excludes it from benefits that directly impact students—despite its parity under federal education law.

Rural and Low-Income School Program

Title V, Part B of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is known as the Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) Program. This program provides funding to support rural schools with the goal of improving student achievement.²² Puerto Rico is currently precluded from RLIS funding due to its unitary system structure. A key element of eligibility for jurisdictions is that the rural area serving students is geographically isolated from an urban center within the local educational agency (LEA). Because Puerto Rico operates a unitary educational system, rural areas are included with their urban centers, hence disqualifying them from participation. It is estimated that over 43,000 students, or roughly 20% of the system's student enrollment, live in a rural designated area, starving them of millions of dollars.²³ While Puerto Rico's unitary system is not a function of its territorial

status or U.S. policy, this serves as an additional example of how Puerto Rico's education system was forced to adapt to the U.S. education model, despite its nuanced particularities, and thus preventing it from taking advantage of federal programs and funding.

Federal Program Funding Disparity

Through law under ESSA and through practice at the U.S. Department of Education, Puerto Rico is treated as a state for the purposes of federal programs. Conversely, a 2016 report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) found that there do exist Federal programs under which Puerto Rico receives differential treatment and inequitable access to education funding.²⁴

Language Barrier

Throughout the 127-year relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, no consistent effort has been made by the federal government to meet the archipelago's citizens where they are at linguistically. The federal government operates in English, U.S. laws and regulations are written in English, and guidance from federal agencies to states and territories is promulgated in English. Communication from the U.S. Department of Education (Department) to the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) is delivered in English, with very few exceptions.

Conversely, Spanish is the dominant language in Puerto Rico, with most business, government, and schooling conducted in Spanish. Operations at the PRDE are conducted in Spanish. Communication received by the U.S. Department of Education in English must be translated, and communication back to the Department is first written in Spanish and then translated to English. These exercises often lead to breakdowns in communication, confusion, and misinterpretation of regulations. This has resulted in the improper implementation of federal programs, delay in deploying resources to schools and students, and the prolonging of the resolution of issues.

²⁰ Ponencia del Departamento de Educación para el proceso de transición de gobierno 2024, Government of Puerto Rico, October, 2024, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://transicion2024.pr.gov/Agencias/081/Pages/default.aspx>

²¹ National Center for Education Statistics, Report on the Condition of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, accessed on May 30, 2025, <https://nces.ed.gov/use-work/resource-library/report/compendium/condition-education-2024>
Improving Teaching and Learning for Students with Disabilities and other Diverse Learners including Decentralization Implications for the PRDE, Council of Great City Schools, Summer 2024, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.cgcs.org/Page/1781>

²² U.S. Department of Education, The Rural Education Achievement Program: Title V-B of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, accessed May 30, 2025, <https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/formula-grants/rural-education-achievement-program>

²³ U.S. Census Bureau, Urban and Rural, Table P2, 2020 Decennial Census, DEC Demographic and Housing Characteristics, accessed March 25, 2025, <https://data.census.gov/table/DECENNIALDHC2020.P2?q=rural+&g=040XX00US72,72S0500000>

²⁴ Congressional Task Force on Economic Growth in Puerto Rico Report, 114th Congress, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 20, 2016, <https://www.finance.senate.gov/chairmans-news/bipartisan-congressional-task-force-on-economic-growth-in-puerto-rico-releases-final-report#:~:text=released%20its%20final,report,-with%20policy%20recommendations>

These elements of technical discrimination underscore that Congress ultimately determines how Puerto Rico is treated. In these instances, it has chosen to discriminate against the students of Puerto Rico through differential treatment compared to other states and Washington, D.C. there is nothing stopping Congress from providing Puerto Rico parity to states as it attempted to do through ESSA and IDEA, or even going beyond that state baseline in order to address acute inequities.

Representational Discrimination

Due to its territorial status, Puerto Rico has one non-voting member in the U.S. House of Representatives called the Resident Commissioner and no member in the U.S. Senate. With over three million Puerto Ricans throughout the archipelago, equal representation in the U.S. Congress would equate to four U.S. Congressmen and two U.S. Senators. The table below illustrates how Puerto Rico's students fare to their state counterparts with respect to representation in the U.S. Congress.

This lack of representation in the U.S. Congress has limited Puerto Rico's ability to advocate effectively for educational resources, negatively impacting the quality of education available to its students. The most recent example

of how the lack of U.S. congressional representation has negatively impacted Puerto Rico's K-12 learning is the school infrastructure recovery effort following the natural disasters that hit the island between 2017 and 2020.

Hurricanes Irma & Maria devastated Puerto Rico, leaving hundreds of schools in disrepair and amplifying existing infrastructure struggles. That was followed by earthquakes in January 2020, which collapsed an entire school in the town of Guanica.²⁵ These natural disasters attacked all of Puerto Rico's schools, 500 of which had been built before 1950 and have long needed repair.²⁶

Conservative estimates concluded that Puerto Rico schools were in need of repairs totaling \$11 billion dollars.²⁷ In the end, Puerto Rico received \$2.35 billion dollars from the U.S. federal government to repair hundreds of schools that were damaged or destroyed by the earthquakes and the two-storm aftermath.²⁸ In contrast, when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, over \$2 billion dollars was allocated to repair or replace the 110 schools that were severely damaged or destroyed.²⁹ Puerto Rico's lack of congressional representation serves as a vivid reminder about how its territorial status has resulted in dire consequences for the 7th largest school district in the U.S.

Table 4. List of states by population above and below Puerto Rico, Student Population, and Federal Representation

State	Total Population (Millions)	Public School Student Population	Federal Delegation
Nevada	3.26	479,574	6
Iowa	3.24	508,112	6
Puerto Rico	3.09	236,421	1
Arkansas	3.08	484,978	6
Kansas	2.97	483,505	6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 National and State Population Estimates; National Center for Education Statistics, Enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by region, state, and jurisdiction.

²⁵ Jimenez, Laura, "Puerto Rico's Earthquakes Have Put Thousands of Schoolchildren at Risk." Center for American Progress, Feb 10, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/puerto-ricos-earthquakes-put-thousands-schoolchildren-risk/>

²⁶ Patricia Mazzei, Edmy Ayala, and Frances Robles, "After Homes Collapse in Earthquake, Puerto Ricans Ask: Are We Safe?" The New York Times, January 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/08/us/puerto-rico-earthquake.html>

²⁷ Ujifusa, Andrew, "What's the Price Tag for Fixing Up Puerto Rico's Schools? Try \$11 Billion." Education Week, January 13, 2019, <https://www.edweek.org/education/whats-the-price-tag-for-fixing-up-puerto-ricos-schools-try-11-billion/2019/01>

²⁸ Puerto Rico Recovery: FEMA Made Progress in Approving Projects, But Should Identify and Assess Risks to the Recovery, U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-21-264 (Washington, DC: GAO, March 2021), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-264.pdf>

Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA Approves Over \$142 Million for Schools Affected by Earthquakes, November 17, 2021, <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20211117/fema-approves-over-142-million-schools-affected-earthquakes>

²⁹ Hawkins, Beth, "18 Years, \$2 Billion: Inside New Orleans's Biggest School Recovery Effort in History," The 74, September 24, 2024, <https://www.the74million.org/article/18-years-2-billion-inside-new-orleans-biggest-school-recovery-effort-in-history/>

Conclusion

The dual reality of Puerto Rico's recognition as a state under ESSA and IDEA, alongside the persistent discrimination it faces stemming from its territorial status and other federal policies, underscores the educational injustice affecting Puerto Rican students in comparison to those in the states and Washington, D.C. Educational funding inequity in Puerto Rico has led to overall underinvestment in its school system. Technical discrimination has led to missed opportunities to fund supports for students with disabilities and students in rural communities. Representational discrimination has led to a dearth of adequate funding to repair and rebuild Puerto Rico's badly damaged schools. The totality of these issues illustrates that just allocating more federal funds, individually fixing federal programs for parity, or solely increasing representation in congress alone will not improve Puerto Rico's education system.

Improving the system requires a shift away from the one-size fits all, U.S. educational system paradigm. A break from the U.S. system would present Puerto Rico with an opportunity to reimagine its educational system. Educational best practices from the U.S., its Latin American peers, and countries around the world could be incorporated into a reconstructed system that best meets the needs of students. A bold change would allow Puerto Rico to build a student-centered system that prioritizes culturally relevant pedagogy, provides equitable funding, and empowers local educators to make decisions in the best interests of students.

Ultimately, Congress has the authority to treat Puerto Rico on par with—or even better than—its state counterparts and Washington, D.C. Absent changes to Puerto Rico's territorial status or immediate Congressional action to address these systemic and acute inequities, students on the island will continue to face discrimination under federal policy and endure the worst K-12 learning conditions in the nation.



Students at Belen Blanco De Zequeira, Loiza, Puerto Rico by Lorie Shaull

Appendix A

Table 3. State and Territory Per-Pupil Student Expenditures

Rank	State/Territory	Per-Pupil Expenditure (2020-2021)	
1	District of Columbia	\$33,222	\$37,800
2	New York	\$28,261	\$32,000
3	Vermont	\$25,124	\$28,600
4	New Jersey	\$24,403	\$27,800
5	Connecticut	\$23,988	\$27,800
6	Massachusetts	\$22,798	\$26,000
7	Alaska	\$21,222	\$24,200
8	Illinois	\$20,843	\$23,600
9	New Hampshire	\$20,705	\$23,600
10	Maine	\$20,183	\$23,000
11	Wyoming	\$19,938	\$22,700
12	Pennsylvania	\$19,824	\$22,600
13	Rhode Island	\$19,691	\$22,400
14	Washington	\$19,310	\$22,000
15	Maryland	\$18,754	\$21,400
16	Delaware	\$18,047	\$20,600
17	Oregon	\$17,913	\$20,400
18	North Dakota	\$17,769	\$20,200
19	Hawaii	\$17,594	\$20,000
20	Minnesota	\$17,588	\$20,000
21	California	\$16,667	\$19,300
22	Nebraska	\$16,667	\$19,000
23	United States	\$16,345	\$18,600
24	Ohio	\$16,218	\$18,500
25	Wisconsin	\$15,712	\$17,900
26	Michigan	\$15,494	\$17,800
27	Montana	\$15,546	\$17,700
28	Colorado	\$15,432	\$17,600

Rank	State/Territory	Per-Pupil Expenditure (2020-2021)	
29	Iowa	\$15,206	\$17,300
30	Virginia	\$15,091	\$17,200
31	West Virginia	\$14,585	\$16,600
32	South Carolina	\$14,511	\$16,500
33	Kansas	\$14,328	\$16,300
34	Louisiana	\$14,102	\$16,100
35	Texas	\$13,900	\$15,800
36	Missouri	\$13,746	\$15,700
37	Kentucky	\$13,703	\$15,600
38	Georgia	\$13,643	\$15,500
39	New Mexico	\$13,570	\$15,500
40	South Dakota	\$13,239	\$15,100
41	Arkansas	\$12,912	\$14,700
42	Indiana	\$12,811	\$14,600
43	Florida	\$12,279	\$14,000
44	Nevada	\$12,074	\$13,800
45	Alabama	\$11,864	\$13,500
46	Mississippi	\$11,802	\$13,400
47	Tennessee	\$11,791	\$13,400
48	North Carolina	\$11,625	\$13,200
49	Arizona	\$11,552	\$13,200
50	Oklahoma	\$11,431	\$13,000
51	Utah	\$10,802	\$12,300
52	Idaho	\$10,261	\$11,700
53	Puerto Rico	\$8,321	\$9,500

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Total and current expenditures per pupil in fall enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by function and state or jurisdiction: School year 2020-21, U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_236.75.asp

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Nation's Report Card - Public School Expenditures. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cmb>

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Puerto Rico's 2020 Race/Ethnicity Decennial Analysis (July 2022)

In this report, we provide an overview of the population changes and dramatic shift in racial self-identification in Puerto Rico revealed from the 2020 decennial census. The 2020 Decennial Census unveiled a stark demographic reality for Puerto Rico that has been unfolding in the past decade. According to the 2020 Decennial Census, there were about 3.29 million people living in Puerto Rico, a notable decline of 439,915 individuals from 2010 (-11.8%). In comparison, the United States population grew by 7.4% between 2010 and 2020. In terms of race, the 2020 decennial census has shown a dramatic shift from how Puerto Ricans identify themselves now from 10 years ago. Most of the total population in Puerto Rico identified as 'White and Some Other Race' (38.5%) followed by 'Some Other Race alone' (25.5%) in 2020 compared to a majority of the total population identifying as 'White alone' in both 2000 (80.5%) and 2010 (75.8%).

Redistricting NYC Demographic Change and The Hispanic Community (September 2022)

In this report, we provide a portrait of demographic changes in New York City between 2010 and 2020, examining overall population dynamics as well as looking more closely at the ethnoracial composition of the city and its constituent boroughs and council districts. We rely on decennial census data for 2010 and 2020 provided by the U.S. Census Bureau in their Redistricting Files. We also examine changes in the distribution of language use, particularly among New Yorkers who do not speak English well or at all since this may be an impediment to their effective participation in the political process, including registering to vote and voting. Furthermore, we provide information on the geographical distribution of income as this is another important variable for participation in the political process. We also analyze the demographic changes of the different national origin groups that make up the Hispanic population in New York City; a population of particular interest for us. These additional analyses are produced from survey data also derived from the U.S. Census Bureau (i.e., the American Community Survey). We conclude by assessing the council districts preliminarily drawn by the New York City Districting Commission in light of the ensuing descriptive analyses.



FOR THE DIGITAL VERSION OF THIS REPORT:



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