**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: LAUNCH OF THE INITIATIVE OF DECENTRALIZATION OF EDUCATION AND AUTONOMY OF REGIONS (IDEAR) IN PUERTO RICO**

As announced by the U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, Governor Pedro Pierluisi and P.R. Secretary of Education Eliezer Ramos, the government of Puerto Rico is taking a new approach to educational transformation and has committed to decentralize the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE). Puerto Rico will launch the Initiative of Decentralization of Education and Autonomy of Regions (IDEAR) that will begin the process of implementing a decentralized model. This move will provide an enhanced strategy to overcome the system’s challenges to ensure that students and families are benefitting from a school system that responds directly to their needs.

Within months of taking office, Secretary Cardona formed the Puerto Rico Education Sustainability (PRES) team at the U.S. Department of Education to help Puerto Rico administer the unprecedented resources provided by the American Rescue Plan, signed by President Biden on March 11, 2021. In total, the Biden-Harris Administration has released nearly $5 billion to Puerto Rico in pandemic relief, since taking office. This includes:

* $3 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act; and
* $1.2 billion from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA).

Additionally, the Department awards more than $600 million in annual program grants to Puerto Rico each fiscal year. Secretary Cardona also continues efforts to work with Puerto Rico to improve schools and get better results for students across the Island.

The Department also signed an agreement with a third-party fiduciary (TPFA) in 2021 to ensure that annual program and pandemic funds were administered with enhanced oversight and accountability measures to ensure that these resources result in impactful programs for the students. The TPFA has worked closely with the P.R. Department of Education to ensure funds are spent in compliance with the applicable laws and other requirements.

To date, the PRES team has provided technical assistance and training to the PRDE in the areas of financial and grants management, K-12 education, special education, and adult, career, and technical education.

This announcement makes bold improvements for Puerto Rico’s K-12 education system while partnering with local, invested Puerto Rican communities.

**Background**

Puerto Rico's education system is the sixth largest school district in the U.S. The system faced hurricanes, earthquakes and the adverse effects from the disruption caused by COVID-19. Despite the difficulties, Puerto Rico can improve its education system, create more autonomy, and delegate decision-making to the local level. The Island has the opportunity to integrate parents and the community in local education decision-making which will ensure transparency and create systems and processes that guarantee greater services for teachers, parents, and especially students. In this context, it is essential to understand the multifaceted problems facing Puerto Rico and identify possible solutions to address these challenges. The efforts that teachers and communities of the Island have done to maintain the system are recognized and it is time to make a commitment to drive changes that support them.

**The objectives of the transformation of Puerto Rico's educational system are:**

* Decentralize the Puerto Rico Department of Education’s responsibilities.
* Increase local autonomy for regions and schools.
* Allow federal and local resources to flow directly to the local structures created.

**Given the challenges facing Puerto Rico's education system, there is an unprecedented opportunity to proactively reimagine and transform it.**

This transformation requires a system that addresses the needs of students while taking advantage of the opportunities that technology and innovation offer in the twenty-first century. There is Island-wide recognition of the urgency of making structural changes. With these opportunities, Puerto Rico can renew its education system and create a sustainable model that guarantees equitable access to quality education for all students. It is essential to identify the key areas that require attention, develop a strategic plan, and execute it efficiently to transform Puerto Rico's education system.

**Taking the first step on the road to building a better system from the current structure of the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE).**

The PRDE operates as a unitary system, meaning it is a combined State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agency (LEA). Decades of evidence illustrate the challenges faced by Puerto Rico's centralized education system. One of the difficulties has been to adequately disseminate federal and state resources to schools. A significant limitation is that a large structure makes it difficult to maintain adequate controls between SEA and LEA responsibilities which limits an effective operation of state, local and school functions. As a result, Puerto Rico seeks to reimagine its education system to provide autonomy to school communities and improve student outcomes by using examples of similar efforts undertaken in other states and districts. Similar educational transitions have shown that academic results, operations and overall transparency have improved since their restructuring processes, despite the different challenges that were faced.

**The plan to decentralize and transform Puerto Rico's education system will be unlike all previous efforts that attempted to restructure Puerto Rico's Department of Education.**

Although in the past there have been initiatives to decentralize aspects of the PRDE, this effort goes further, decentralizing some state functions to the local level, establishing this process with an executive order and a commitment to implement it. This plan will empower educational regions, teachers, parents and students in decision-making for their communities.

**Decentralization will help improve the quality of education for all students in Puerto Rico including students with disabilities.**

Decentralization allows local education agencies to adapt educational services to better meet the specific needs of the community and its students. This process does not eliminate the central office level but strengthens both the SEAs and LEAs.

In addition, decentralization streamlines the distribution of federal and state resources, ensuring that students and schools have access to high-quality educational materials and programs quickly and efficiently. This approach allows schools and regions to quickly adapt to natural disasters, resulting in a more agile and resilient education for Puerto Rico's students.

**This transformation will be a collaborative and transparent effort of local and federal leadership:**

This transition will be led by the Government of Puerto Rico. The Governor’s Office, the U.S. Secretary of Education, PRDE, and other government agencies have collaborated to create the Initiative of Decentralization of Education and Autonomy of Regions (IDEAR) or *Iniciativa de Descentralización Educativa y Autonomía Regional (IDEAR)*. IDEAR will be responsible for coordinating the efforts and voice of the community, parents, teachers, students, and other local members involved in educational decision-making, for an effective transition. The initiative will be assisted by experts dedicated to providing support and building internal capacity to advance this effort.

**This transformation will ensure that teachers' voices and opinions are taken into consideration during the transformation. Decentralization will also allow parents and guardians to be actively involved and informed about their children's education.**

During the transition process, there will be active channels of participation to listen to the opinions and concerns of teachers, making them active participants in the development and implementation of the new educational model in Puerto Rico.

There will be a continuous and accessible communication channels for parents and guardians to share their perspectives and share their input on the development and implementation of the new educational model in Puerto Rico and involve them as active partners in the process.

Teachers, parents and community members can submit their feedback through a survey being developed by IDEAR and to be sent by the Puerto Rico Department of Education. Suggestions, questions, and feedback can be sent via email at: IDEAR@de.pr.gov

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