



A Union of Professionals



The Honorable José B. Carrión III
Chairman
Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico

Dear Mr. Carrión,

On behalf of the 29,000 members of the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico Teachers Association) and the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, we write to strongly urge you not to make devastating funding cuts to the education system that serves the 379,000 students in Puerto Rico.

The majority of Puerto Rican students and their families live in poverty, and more than 140,000 of them are receiving special education services. School is the place where these students have access to education—to books, to teachers, to community and to at least two full and healthy meals.

The federal oversight board that was created under the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act has proposed furloughing teachers for 20 days. The board has also proposed an additional 20 days of furlough for the public employees who feed students, transport them to school, and make sure schools are safe and clean, essentially shutting down schools for 40 days. That is 40 days that students could spend learning in a safe and welcoming environment but instead will spend out of school, possibly in dangerous conditions or without food. These cuts—on top of closing 300 schools—would be devastating for the families and children of Puerto Rico. The problem will be especially acute in our poorest and most rural areas, where parents have had to drive their children for hours to attend school because transportation services have been cut and nearby schools have closed.

As Aida Diaz pointed out in her address to the PROMESA board on March 13 in New York City, Puerto Rico's teachers earn just \$1,750 a month, yet the cost of living in Puerto Rico is higher than in the United States by nearly 10 percent. Salaries for teachers on the island have been stagnant, and the debt crisis has driven thousands of teachers and their families to the mainland. In 2015 alone, more than 3,000 teachers left Puerto Rico. Since districts in the United States are recruiting Spanish-speaking teachers, there are few English, math and science teachers left in Puerto Rico. And conditions are dire for the thousands of children with disabilities who are missing out on receiving special education services. Further cuts to salaries or teaching and learning conditions will only exacerbate this teacher shortage. Since Puerto Rico instituted deep austerity measures, the physical state of existing schools has deteriorated, with reports of pests at some schools, and teachers making do without libraries and books, and using their own resources to buy the basics. Some schools have brownouts and blackouts during the day. Despite this information from the Puerto Rico Teachers Association, the PROMESA board submitted a plan that would devastate public education.

Children get one chance at an education. The harm of the proposed budget cuts to the lives of children cannot be fixed at a later date. Children and the education system must be spared from any further damage. A well-funded education system is the foundation for a strong economy and a bright future of Puerto Rico. The children affected by these cuts will determine what kind of economy and future Puerto Rico will have.

Instead of disinvesting in education and proposing cuts that would place our island in further distress, as the PROMESA board is proposing, the board should be fully investing in our island's future, in its children.

We invite you to visit schools in Puerto Rico with us, to see what is working, what is needed, and how education dollars are already being stretched beyond the breaking point.

Sincerely,



Randi Weingarten, President



Aida L. Díaz de Rodríguez, President

cc: The Honorable Carlos García

The Honorable Andrew Biggs

The Honorable Ana Matosantos

The Honorable Jose Ramón González

The Honorable David Skeel

The Honorable Arthur González