

FEMA Funds Help Address Short Columns in Schools in the South

Release Date: October 6, 2021

The funding is from the Agency's section 406 Hazard Mitigation funds

GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – Some 157 schools affected by the 2020 earthquakes are eligible to mitigate seismic hazards caused by the structural condition known as short column with funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The Agency allocated \$136.5 million under Section 406 Hazard Mitigation to perform work that combines structural reinforcement and shear walls to reduce the impact in case of a seismic event.

These mitigation efforts are aimed at increasing the capacity of the facilities to resist lateral movements that typically result from earthquakes and put life and property at risk. The measures will also help reduce the time it takes for schools to return to normal operations after an earthquake.

“Education is a pillar of society. It is of great satisfaction that in FEMA we can contribute to teaching in safe and resilient schools. Without a doubt, it is an essential part of the commitment that we have with the recovery of Puerto Rico, not only from María, but also from the earthquakes that caused so much damage,” said the Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator in Puerto Rico, José G. Baquero.

On the other hand, the Puerto Rico Department of Education was awarded over \$108 million by FEMA for 99 permanent construction projects in the municipalities affected by last year's series of earthquakes.

Among the schools in the island's public system with million-dollar obligations is the Blanca Malaret Elementary School in Sabana Grande with \$1.9 million. "Our enrollment is 558 students and repairs are about to be completed," confirmed the school's Director, Miguel A. Ramírez Morales. The space also serves as a shelter because of its solar panels and generator.



Similarly, in Utuado, the Bernardo González Colón and Dr. Efraín González Tejera schools serve as shelters in case of emergencies. Both received allocations of nearly \$1.8 million and \$1.4 million, respectively. The former, which has an enrollment of 346 students, can shelter about 100 people in case of emergency, while the latter, with an enrollment of 137 students, can accommodate about 60 people.

Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, Executive Director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience (COR3), said "the reconstruction of schools affected by last year's earthquakes is one of our priorities. Weekly meetings are held to complete the formulation of the projects and only 59 school projects have yet to receive obligations from FEMA's Public Assistance Program. At the same time, we have issued approximately \$680,000 in disbursements for the architecture and engineering (A&E) phase of 21 reconstruction projects at campuses located in the southern zone. Governor Pedro Pierluisi's commitment is clear, and we continue to work as a team to ensure that these projects are carried out for the safety of our school communities."

To learn more about Puerto Rico's recovery from the earthquakes visit fema.gov/disaster/4473.

