

FEMA Obligates First Sub-Project to Rebuild Island's Schools

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The funds are from the \$2 billion obligation in 2020 to the PRDE to rebuild schools in over 1,100 campuses

Guaynabo, Puerto Rico – Rebuilding public schools on the Island that were damaged by Hurricane María is underway with an obligation of over \$2.9 million to the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) for the Dr. José N. Gandara School in Aibonito. This is the first allocation of funds that authorizes construction for a PRDE project for a specific school under FEMA's Accelerated Awards Strategy, known as FAASt.

Work at the high school, which has roughly 500 students and offers vocational studies, includes roof repairs, replacing lighting in the classrooms and throughout the facility as well as building a concrete ramp for people with access and functional needs.

“The unprecedented obligation to the Department of Education last year was an important first step in ensuring public education facilities are rebuilt resiliently. Working closely with the government of Puerto Rico, we will see how this translates into shovels in the ground and more resilient educational facilities for our future generations,” said FEMA's Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator in Puerto Rico, José G. Baquero.

One of the fields of study offered at the high school is pre-engineering, which contributed to the educational development Hector Gabriel González Rivera, a member of the PR-CuNaR2 team that developed the first Puerto Rican satellite that was recently launched into space under the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) ELaNa37 project.

“The funds obligated are of the utmost importance to repair damage at the school, which is the only school in Aibonito that offers vocational programs. Repairing the affected classrooms is necessary for the students”, said González Rivera.



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Likewise, the mayor of Aibonito, William Alicea Pérez, expressed how valuable it will be for students to have a repaired school facility, which is the ideal environment for them to learn.

“It is an honor that one of our schools is chosen for this allocation of funds and the eventual construction of permanent improvements. Our vision is that the improvements to this school will make it an appealing school for both *Aiboniteños* and students from neighboring towns,” he said.

On the other hand, the school follows the model of the Puerto Rico Department of Education’s *Escuela Abierta* program, which promotes, during extended hours, academic achievement and school enrolment through sports, music, theater and tutoring in various subjects. Regarding the allocation for this school, the Secretary of the Department of Education, Eliezer Ramos Parés, emphasized the government agency’s commitment to improve the infrastructure of all schools on the island. “We have begun works hand in hand with FEMA and various partner agencies with the goal of speeding up the reconstruction works in each campus. The Reconstruction Office of the DE has the inventory of the needs of each school and leads efforts to obtain the funds and begin the necessary work,” he said.

Under the FAASt strategy for the PRDE, statistical samplings were used to develop costs in order to streamline the obligations of funds that will help restore over 5,300 buildings and auxiliary facilities like recreational areas and pavilions. To date, FEMA has obligated over \$2.5 billion to the PRDE, which includes emergency and permanent work projects related to Hurricane María.

Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, Executive Director of the Central Office of Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience (COR3), said, "Our school community deserves a safe, accessible and resilient infrastructure. This is the first FEMA-mandated project of thousands that we will see developed in the near future. The commitment of our team at COR3 is to continue working together with the Department of Education and FEMA, until the reconstruction of the schools affected by the past hurricanes and earthquakes materializes, for the benefit of our society.

To access more information on the recovery of Puerto Rico from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 and recuperacion.pr. Follow us on social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.

