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November 17, 2017

Secretary Julia Keleher
Department of Education
Government of Puerto Rico
P.O. Box 190759
San Juan, PR 00919-0759

Dear Secretary Keleher,

We are writing in response to your request for assistance in the wake of the devastating effects of Hurricane Maria. Through your letter as well as our ongoing conversations, you have requested assistance on several areas, a number of which we are working to address. In this letter, I am responding to one specific issue related to students who have come to Florida from Puerto Rico as juniors and seniors in high school. Any eligible, displaced student enrolled in a Florida school can seek to earn a Florida diploma; however, Florida schools will also provide a path for displaced Puerto Rican high school juniors and seniors to substantially complete the Puerto Rican high school curriculum and earn their Puerto Rico high school diploma. This will allow students the ability to graduate on time with a Puerto Rico diploma rather than risk potential delays inherent in attempting to complete the different curriculum necessary to obtain a Florida diploma. The assistance you seek is to create a different track for those juniors and seniors who would best be served by completing Puerto Rico's curriculum and receiving that diploma. The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE), in cooperation with your agency, is very willing to help as more fully described below.

To date, and in accordance with Executive Order 17-259, §252.46, Florida Statutes, the directions of the State Coordinating Officer, and by Emergency Order, statutes and rules have been waived in order to allow school districts to enroll students displaced by Hurricane Maria without the necessary and customary documentation. (*See* Emergency Order Relating to Students and Teachers Displaced by Hurricane Maria, dated October 6, 2017).

To further the goal of allowing displaced juniors and seniors to earn a high school diploma that meets Puerto Rico's requirements, the FLDOE will provide the Puerto Rico Department of Education a listing of students enrolled in public schools in Florida who are identified as a Puerto Rican student displaced by Hurricane Maria. Additionally, the department is willing to request that Florida school districts provide students with the option to earn a Puerto Rico high school diploma if:

- 1) the student is enrolled in a public school in Florida;
- 2) was enrolled in public school in Puerto Rico;
- 3) has been displaced by Hurricane Maria; and
- 4) had attained the 11th or 12th grade in Puerto Rico by the time Hurricane Maria made landfall in October 2017.

For this program to work and result in displaced students earning a Puerto Rico high school diploma, we will initially need your agency's cooperation in the following areas:

1. Providing a point of contact for the Florida Department of Education and Florida school districts to provide information and respond to inquiries;
2. Confirming the requirements for earning a high school diploma from Puerto Rico;
3. Delivering student transcripts, where practicable and available;
4. Verifying courses that are comparable to, and would satisfy, the courses required for high school graduation under Puerto Rico's standards;
5. Specifying acceptable means of completing occupational experiences and any other requirements needed for the Puerto Rico Department of Education to award a high school diploma;
6. Participating in a secure electronic platform for the transfer of student information between Florida School Districts or the Florida Department of Education and the Puerto Rico Department of Education; and
7. Notifying the Florida Department of Education and the applicable Florida school district when the Puerto Rico Department of Education determines that the student has satisfied the requirements for a high school diploma under its policies.

To support this effort, the Florida Department of Education will coordinate with our district school superintendents to ensure eligible juniors and seniors are informed of this opportunity; and, after consultation with your department, FLDOE will provide school districts a listing of courses comparable to those required for graduation based upon Puerto Rico's graduation requirements. We have set up a secure platform for secure records transmission and will work with your staff to make modifications as needed to facilitate the secure exchange of student records. FLDOE will also assist school districts in transmitting information to Puerto Rico when a student has satisfactorily completed the requirements for a high school diploma from Puerto Rico.

Florida is no stranger to hurricane relief efforts, and stands ready to provide assistance wherever possible. FLDOE considers this an important component of an overall relief effort, and we are confident that through hard work and cooperation the educational needs of those students displaced to Florida can be met.

I look forward to your response to these proposed steps.

Sincerely,



Pam Stewart