

Hurricane Orlando – An analysis on the effects of High School education after mass Puerto Rican migration to Orlando post Hurricane Maria

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Introduction

On September 20th 2017, Category 4 storm Maria devastated the island of Puerto Rico with maximum sustained winds at 155 mph (National Weather Service 2018).

- This “perfect storm” effectively crushed Puerto Rico’s power grid, brought forth fatal water-borne disease outbreak, and toppled the island’s infrastructure (World Vision, 2018). As of 2018, the Florida Department of Education reports Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) has had 3,364 enrollments of students from Puerto Rico – a 1.83% increase in total enrollment. This number is expected to increase. In specific, Colonial High School has received the most post storm refugee’s to date in OCPS – about 300 students. Therefore, in my research I will qualitatively asses the adaptations made to high schools in by school officials in OCPS.

Methodology

- To collect my qualitative analysis I decided to interview school administrators that are experiencing a large influx of high school students because of Hurricane Maria in OCPS. I began by sending out a general interest form then followed up with a phone call.

“If you were to survey all these high school kids you would find that each student faces intricate dilemmas. The reality is, we must treat these students the same as any other student who walks through those doors - with grace, compassion, and love that someday we will be lucky enough to have them call our city home. These students compose the tapestry of Orlando. I use the word tapestry because it is like a melting pot of so many intricate cultures – some students are staying for good but on the other hand I have had students come back.”

- Jose Martinez, Colonial High School Principal.



Results

- Critical to have enough guidance counselors and human resources in place to handle the transition trauma students go through.
- It is critical to have excess counselors whose main purpose is to reach out to community leaders whom can help where the school budget cannot reach.
- The students must be given an interest survey so administrators can help meet the needs of students back to normalcy by connecting them with what they enjoy doing.
- Partnering with colleges for bi-lingual support proves to be highly successful.

Conclusions

- Colonial High School has 10 guidance counselors that are assessing and helping Puerto Rican high school students.
- Colonial has 2 guidance counselors whom act as liaisons to the community for excess resources (sometimes for the parents) such as bilingual learning, housing accommodation, and so on. This extension into the community bypasses the need to wait for legislation to be amended, passed, or failed.
- By pairing up students who may have faced similar emotional/physical trauma during the storm one is able to connect students struggling and observed they often become very close.
- Supporting students through interest surveys minimizes students getting lost in the transition and promotes their long term success.
- For English Language Learners bilingual college students are helping high school students by translating core curriculum subjects for students needing extra tutoring.

Future Work

This project could be expanded upon through student focus groups over a period of time to determine program efficiency. I plan to expand and gather more interviews with other high school administrators.

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