Problems and Fixes to PR's Education System

THE OBSERVATORY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN PUERTO RICO

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What is the Observatory?

Think-tank that focus on public education in Puerto Rico aimed to:

- Promotes the scientific and objective study of the education system to provoke possible solutions.
- Guide informed public debates.
- Serve as a source of information to design public policy based on data that transforms and improves the education system.

At almost a year since its formation, the Observatory presents the preliminary results of 5 research works that complement each other to identify important aspects of the Island's educational system.
EDUCATIONAL REFORM: THE PARADIGM OF SCHOOLS ALLIANCES (CHARTER) IN THE FACE OF POVERTY AND VIOLENCE IN THE COUNTRY.
César Rey Hernández

This work tries to make an analysis of the two laws (Law # 149, Law # 85) that have guided the educational reform of the last twenty years of our school system. Changes in public policy are examined within the social and economic context of education in Puerto Rico, emphasizing the charter school model, the cornerstone of Law # 85 and the axis of public debate in the country. From a critical and comparative perspective, their history and the ideology that originates them are discussed. From there, the potential and limitations of this model to bring changes to the country's educational system are analyzed.

From the empirical work and the comparative method carried out, we were able to verify that the two pilot projects of Alianza schools (charters) have been relevant and successful because they immediately benefit the community they represent.
Main Findings:

- The charter school model represents the paradigm of public education for youth from impoverished and violent sectors of the country.

- Charter schools in Puerto Rico do not represent a budgetary expense for the Department of Education, rather it represents an advantage.

- However, the particularity of success depends on the particularly community and historical leadership in both cases, as well as great external financing from philanthropic organizations and foundations that bet on this reality.

- That the projects of alliance schools in other latitudes, particularly in the United States, have in some cases involved the exclusion and marginalization of the most impoverished sectors of that society. In our case, contrary to the examples studied in the United States, these alliance schools have meant the empowerment of their communities.

- It is important to point out that in our evaluation we evidenced the intention of some of the proponents to privatize schools through alliances and not necessarily have an intention to empower these communities.

- The educational vouchers did not turn out to be of interest to the educational process at this stage of the educational reform experimentation.
The study focuses on the educational attainment of youth ages 10 to 28 in Puerto Rico and has five main objectives:

✓ To identify the dimensions of the dropout problem in Puerto Rico in recent years (after 2010). ("Dropouts" are defined as youth not in school that have not completed High School.)

✓ To document changes in levels of school completion by age and gender in Puerto Rico over the past decade.

✓ To look at when in the youth life cycle and at what age the problem of school dropout is beginning to manifest itself.

✓ To examine the main demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of youth not in school that have not completed High School in Puerto Rico and compared them with young people who completed high school and did not go to college; Youth enrolled in high school or college; youth with some college studies (but not completed); and young people who have a college degree or more.

✓ To analyze the impacts and possible consequences of not completing high school on employment status and how they relate to poverty levels among young people in Puerto Rico.
Main Findings

- Puerto Rico's population between the ages of 10 and 28 was 27% of the total in 2010 and that decreased to 24.5% by 2018.

- The school dropout rate decreased from 9% in 2010 to 4.6% in 2018.

- The dropout rate for men between the ages of 10-28 decreased from 10.4% in 2010 to 5.6% in 2018. For women, the rate was consistently lower and declined from 7.6% in 2010 to 3.7% in 2018.

- The proportion of young people between the ages of 21 and 28 who did not complete high school and who were not enrolled in school declined from 14.6% in 2010 to 6.8% in 2018.

- There is a significant increase in the proportion of young people between the ages of 21 and 28 with at least a Bachelors degree from 17.2% in 2010 to 24.8% in 2018.

- For youth below poverty, the dropout rate was 12.9% in 2010 and decreased to 6.7% by 2018 while for those not in poverty the dropout rate was 4.4% in 2010 and decreased to 2.1% by 2018.
  - For youth ages 21-28 below poverty, the dropout rate was 22.2% in 2010 and decreased to 10.6% by 2018 while for those 21-28 not in poverty the dropout rate was 6.6% in 2010 and decreased to 3.2% by 2018.

- The proportion of youth between the ages of 21 and 28 that were employed fluctuated between 45.9% in 2010 and 47.4% in 2018 and there was no significant reduction in the proportion of young people out of the labor force at 37.9% in 2010 and 37.1% in 2018.
Changes in School Dropout, Poverty and Youth Employment in Puerto Rico

TASAS DE DESERCIÓN ESCOLAR POR EDAD ENTRE EL 2010-2018

EMPLEO, PARTICIPACIÓN LABORAL, POBREZA Y EDUCACIÓN DE JOVENES ENTRE EDADES 21-28 EN PUERTO RICO

Source: PRCS, 1st file
In the related literature there is some mixed evidence on the consequences that school closing has on student achievement, but many articles pointed to detrimental effects. We selected Puerto Rico as the case study, a U.S. jurisdiction that closed almost 30% of their public schools in three years, which would probably make it the most intense school closing in the U.S. and perhaps in the world. Taken advantage of student level data, we use causal inference methods and found that this large school consolidation had statistically significant effects on the student performance in standardized tests. We discuss factors that may play a key role and recommend potential alternatives.