

Puerto Rican teachers denounce closing of 283 public schools



San Juan, April 10 (RHC)-- Teachers, education activists and parents have denounced Puerto Rico's recent announcement of shuttering nearly 283 public schools, which make up one-third of the public schools in the U.S. colony.

The move, which is part of the recently introduced education bill by Puerto Rico's governor, Ricardo Rosello Nevares, will leave just 828 schools open to serve 319,00 students on the island.

The Puerto Rico Teachers Association (Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico), the largest teachers' union on the island, denounced the announcement made by Puerto Rico's Education Department. "The harm that the education secretary is causing children and their parents is immeasurable," Aida Diaz, president of the union, said. "We are on the side of all the school communities, and together we'll go to battle to avoid these discriminatory and unjust school closures."

Haydee Del Valle, a parent of a 12-year-old who attends one of the schools slated for closure, told NBC News: "This makes me sad because this is a great school." And she added: "I don't even know where the schools they're being sent to are located."

"We know it's a difficult and painful process," said Education Secretary Julia Keleher, a charter

school proponent, according to Common Dreams website. "Our children deserve the best education that we are capable of giving them taking into account Puerto Rico's fiscal reality."

But Union leader Diaz had some tough words for Keleher saying: "No one in their right mind acts the way she's acting," referring to Keleher. "This unjustified school closure responds to her exclusive work forwarding an agenda in favor of private companies that she will enrich by turning over our children's public education funds to them."

The U.S. colony's largest teachers union, representing nearly 30,000 teachers, filed a lawsuit Tuesday contesting Gov. Rossello's bill which aims to implement a charter schools pilot program in 10 percent of public schools and offer private school vouchers to 3 percent of students starting in 2019-2020.

In the lawsuit, the teachers union stated it was unconstitutional to use public funds or property for private schools. "To say charters are public schools when they are going to be administered, directed and controlled by private hands is clearly an illegal and unconstitutional contradiction," Diaz said in a statement. Starting next year, in 2019, Puerto Rico is expected to close some 300 schools, according to The Washington Post.

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