

About 90 Percent of Puerto Rico's Schools Are Open, But Enrollment Is Down

By [Andrew Ujifusa](#) on December 5, 2017 8:03 AM

The vast majority of Puerto Rico's schools are back online, but that's not even close to the end of [the issues facing the island's educational system](#).

Last Friday, we spoke with the island's Secretary of Education Julia Keleher about the state of K-12 there. Here's the update she gave us:

- 1,075 schools have reopened. That's compared to the nearly 1,200 schools that were open on the island before Hurricane Maria hit the island in late September. (Before the storm, the island had closed a large number of schools due to financial problems.)
- Keleher said 38 schools have been permanently closed due to structural damage.
- The number of students enrolled stands at about 331,000, down from approximately 350,000 before Maria hit. However, Keleher called the 331,000 figure a "fluid" number.
- She didn't have info on the number or share of teachers who have come back to schools. Keleher granted a hardship waiver so that teachers have until January to return to work.

Keleher also singled out the [Council of the Great City Schools](#), a district leadership organization, for helping Puerto Rico's K-12 leaders manage the challenges of getting schools back on their feet.

But she remains concerned about the condition of the schools that have reopened, such as the mold in many schools that have suffered water damage. Puerto Rico is a single, unified school district under the control of Keleher's department, although she was in the process of trying to beef up local control of schools when the hurricane hit. When we asked her why she had agreed to allow such schools to open, she stressed that while her department had mitigated the worst potential issues, there is also tremendous pressure in local communities to get the schools up and running.

Communities on the U.S. mainland would not accept the circumstances under which many Puerto Rican schools are opening, Keleher added.

"I am not satisfied with these conditions," Keleher said. "We're mitigating the major risks. But the expectation should not be that schools have mold."

Puerto Rico's schools were allowed to re-open without power, although they did need to be able to provide water to students.