The total estimate for the two phases of the unprecedented project will be around $150 million

Guaynabo, Puerto Rico – Around 55 public schools in Puerto Rico will be seismic retrofitted following updated building codes. This is possible thanks to an initial obligation of nearly $35 million to the Public Buildings Administration through the Hazard Mitigation Grants Program (HMGP) of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The funds for this first phase of the project will be used to evaluate and determine if the properties are historic, if they are located in a flood zone, among other considerations. Work will also be done to develop designs, specifications and the corresponding estimate for each facility to carry out the refurbishment work. During the second stage, funds will be allocated to cover the costs of auctions, permits and construction.

“With these improvements, hundreds of students, teachers and other staff who work in the schools will benefit, and the positive impact will be felt in each community where these learning spaces are located. In addition, the fact that many of these schools serve as emergency shelters greatly multiplies the importance of the project and its relevance to the communities,” said FEMA’s Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José G. Baquero.

The modifications to the 55 schools seek to improve these structures that were not damaged by the 2019 and 2020 earthquakes. Specifically, the HMGP project proposes to evaluate, design and reinforce these buildings to reduce the risks to future seismic events and mitigate loss of life and damage to critical infrastructure.

Most of the 55 schools were designed and built following old construction codes and have structural defects, such as short columns and unreinforced masonry walls. Likewise, the seismic hazard mitigation proposal combines structural reinforcement and shear walls to prevent damage in future earthquakes.
In addition to HMGP program funds for these schools, FEMA’s Public Assistance program obligated approximately $186 million to the Puerto Rico Department of Education for 137 permanent work projects at other schools in the southern and western regions of Puerto Rico. Of that amount, $178.3 million were assigned for hazard mitigation measures to address seismic vulnerabilities.

“For the Public Buildings Authority (AEP, for its Spanish acronym), the obligation for work related to the selection of schools for structural refurbishment design represents a step forward. We have followed our work schedule to improve the rest of the school buildings and provide the necessary maintenance. We have already worked out plans for the summer period that aim to have our schools ready for the start of classes next August. We’re confident that we can expedite the allocation of more federal funds for more AEP schools,” said the executive director for AEP, engineer Ivelysse Lebrón Durán.

Likewise, the Secretary of the Department of Education, Eliezer Ramos Parés, said “this obligation of FEMA funds contributes to the work that, from our Infrastructure Office, and together with the Public Buildings Authority and OMED, we have been developing to improve the school buildings. We will serve as facilitators for everything that allows us to expedite the processes.”

Furthermore, the Executive Director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency (COR3), engineer Manuel A. Laboy Rivera, said that the seismic retrofitting of schools is a priority for Governor Pedro Pierluisi’s administration.

“Because of this, we at COR3 dived into the technical process along with Public Building Authority staff and the specialized assistance of FEMA contractors from Region 2 with experience in seismic projects to expedite the feasibility of this work. COR3’s HMGP team advised AEP to make this project cost efficient, considering the variables of years of construction and structural evaluations of the sites. As a result of our hard work together, school communities will soon have safe and resilient structures to potentially catastrophic events,” said the engineer.

For more information on Puerto Rico’s recovery from Hurricane María, please visit [fema.gov/es/disaster/4339](https://fema.gov/es/disaster/4339) and [recuperacion.pr](http://recuperacion.pr). Follow our social media pages at [Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico](http://Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico), [Facebook.com/COR3pr](http://Facebook.com/COR3pr) and [Twitter @COR3pr](http://Twitter @COR3pr).