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Response for students and STEM educators to the emergency of COVID-19 [1]

Submitted by Greetchen Díaz-Muñoz [2] on 24 March 2020 - 2:35pm

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Given the recent natural disasters and the public health emergency that we are facing, Ciencia Puerto Rico continues to be committed to the educators and students of Puerto Rico, who have seen their teaching and learning process interrupted, first by a sequence of earthquakes and now by the COVID-19 pandemic. This new crisis (the third in last three years) highlights how important it is to develop strategies and tools that ensure the continuity and resilience of the education system.

Following the earthquakes earlier this year, we launched a response to support STEM educators [3]. With a new interruption of classes throughout Puerto Rico, given the recommendations for social isolation, CienciaPR has implemented contingency plans for its educational projects and developed new initiatives to supoort educators and students. Here are some of them:

Scientists for Service Online

We are calling professionals and advance students in the STEM areas to participate in Scientists for Service online [4], a program of talks and live demonstrations for a school audience. The talks

will take place through the “Zoom” [5] video-webinar platform, which allows students to connect through their computers or mobile devices and ask questions of the invited speakers.

We will hold at least twelve online chats from early April to late May. Students in southern and central Puerto Rico affected by the recent earthquakes will receive special notifications and preference in the registry to be able to interact with scientists live. However, all students and the general public will be able to listen to the talk through Facebook Live, and through our portal where we will post the videos for their continuous use.

The topics of the talks will focus on the topics included in the PR Department of Education's remedial modules, topics related to infectious diseases and their prevention, as well as topics included in the "Ciencia al Servicio" kits lessons.

CienciaPR has a membership of thousands of experts in practically all STEM areas. Many of our members are experienced scientific communicators and/or educators, interested in contributing to Puerto Rico, even from a distance.

Online lessons from the Kit "Ciencia al Servicio"

The "Ciencia al Servicio" Kits for STEM educators [6], developed by CienciaPR, contain active learning science lessons, which cover the standards of the Department of Education in grades 4-12, and can be done outside the traditional classroom without the use of electric power, and/or advanced technology.

We have modified some of these lessons to be used at home by students, independently (middle and high school levels), or guided by an adult (all levels). You can access these lessons for free through the CienciaPR portal [7]. To access them, you must complete a simple registration form that will help us identify the number and type of users, by town.

Workshops and distribution of Kits "Ciencia al Servicio"

We are monitoring the development of the recent events and the future opening of schools in Puerto Rico. We will continue the distribution of Kits "Ciencia al Servicio" for STEM educators [6] in the southern area, as soon as we can get the educators together.

Between June and July, we plan to host educational workshops to train science and math teachers and facilitators in the use of the kits and and online lessons, STEM materials, and how these resources can assist in preparing them for future emergency situations affecting schools. Some of the participants will be selected to become “Teachers in service” so that (1) they develop a lesson for their grade and subject with our resources, and (2) they record a video explaining the lesson. These lessons will be placed on the CienciaPR web portal, for the benefit of other participants and to benefit more teachers and students from all over Puerto Rico.

Communication efforts and public orientation

CienciaPR has published a blog where it summarizes our communication efforts on topics related to COVID-19. Students and educators can access valuable information about the pandemic. There you will find articles about COVID-19, [8] published as part of a CienciaPR collaboration with El Nuevo Día, as well as other very valuable resources.

If you wish to communicate with CienciaPR's Science Education program, you can write to: education@cienciapr.org [9]

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