

Protagonists of Science: 13-year-old passionate about the environment invited to MIT ^[1]

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MIT RAISE, organizers of the summit, selected Ana Lucía Pérez Escalera as the youngest voice among the international speakers. (Supplied)

At just 13 years old, **Ana Lucía Pérez Escalera** has not yet reached university, but she has already stepped onto the same stage as figures such as Stephen Hawking, Matt Damon, and Buzz Aldrin: the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** (MIT).

The young Puerto Rican was invited to the MIT AI & Education Summit 2025, held from July 16 to 18, where she gave a talk about her initiatives, which intertwine art and environmental conservation in Puerto Rico.

“I always imagined that my passion for science and technology would one day take me to MIT, but I didn't think it would happen so soon,” confessed the student, who is homeschooled.

Her presence at the summit was no coincidence. Pérez Escalera is the founder of **De a Pokito por Puerto Rico** [3], an organization dedicated to educating people about the importance of caring for the environment on the island. Her work caught the attention of the **MIT RAISE** [4] team, organizers of the event, who selected her as the youngest speaker among the international participants.

At the summit, topics such as the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, global literacy, and the environment were discussed over the course of three days. Guests had the opportunity to highlight the manifestations of AI in different sectors such as technology, science, and politics.

For Pérez Escalera, coming to MIT was another opportunity to open a space where science, art, and technology come together to find environmental solutions. During his presentation, he introduced **BrainyHacks PR**, an educational workshop that challenges young people to develop mobile applications using tools from MIT's app inventor.

A “hackathon,” Pérez Escalera explained, is a collaborative event where programmers come together to create new solutions by applying technology to existing problems. In his organization, these events have an ecological focus. In 2024, two editions of BrainyHacks PR were held in Salinas and San Juan.

In Salinas, for example, young people between the ages of 12 and 16 designed an application that helps farmers decide when to plant, based on meteorological data. **With four editions already held on the island, Pérez Escalera is clear about her goal: to continue opening up learning spaces for more young people in Puerto Rico.**

“The future will be in our hands,” she said.

That vision was reaffirmed shortly thereafter when she was invited to participate in the “Youth in AI” panel during the same summit. There, young people from different countries shared their opinions on the use of AI in schools.

For Pérez Escalera, AI is a tool with great potential to generate solutions that benefit the environment. One of the issues that concerns her most is the improper handling of waste, especially the need to reduce waste at its source.

As part of De a Pokito por Puerto Rico's mission, Pérez Escalera has integrated her love of art to promote actions such as **recycling** and **beach cleanups**. **Her artwork fuses elements of biology with inspiring messages to protect Puerto Rico's coastlines.**

Looking to the future, the young woman dreams of combining architecture and technology to create sustainable solutions. In addition to BrainyHacks, her plans for this year include writing and illustrating a collection of books to inspire and educate other children about caring for the environment.

Her commitment has also extended to the legislative arena. He drafted an amendment to **Law 51 of 2022**, on the sale and use of single-use plastics, which was approved by the House of Representatives and sent to the Senate for review. The proposal sought to allow customers to bring their own reusable utensils and containers to restaurants and shops.

Despite his achievements in various sectors on and off the island, Pérez Escalera maintains his clear focus: protecting Puerto Rico.

“Raising our flag in front of the best university in the world and then offering my testimony was a symbol of hope and a sign that effort always has its reward,” she said.

Her projects currently seek to inspire young people to become ambassadors for their communities. As an organization, she will be offering educational talks in all 78 municipalities, conducting workshops that combine science and art, recycling, river and beach cleanups, and other activities that promote environmental stewardship and **STEAM** (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) careers.

To learn more about her projects or collaborate with her initiative, you can follow her on Instagram as [@deapokitoporpuertorico](https://www.instagram.com/deapokitoporpuertorico) [5], or visit her website, deapokitoporpuertorico.com [3].

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