

## MEMORANDUM

May 12, 2010

TO: The Honorable Chair and Members of The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

FROM: Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools 

**SUBJECT: PROGRESS WITHIN THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

As we are quickly approaching the conclusion of the 2009-2010 school year, I have been reflecting on just how far we have come in this journey together. I am honored to have served you as Superintendent. I believe that the relationship that we have cultivated is one of mutual respect and trust, and I view you, the Board, not only as my employers, but as partners in a noble endeavor. Together, I believe we have turned a corner for Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) by refocusing our efforts on the mission of educating the children of Miami-Dade and restoring trust and transparency to our District. While economic times ahead will remain challenging, our collective dedication to children and community will continue to guide our journey.

As Superintendent, I am incredibly proud of the work of our teachers, school support staff, and administrators, who labor every day to make sure that each child is reached; that each child enjoys academic success; and that each child has every opportunity to shine. Our reward for this hard work has been two-fold; first, we have protected our employees' jobs, but most importantly, by mitigating the impact of budget cuts to our schools, we have maintained excellence in the education programs that have produced outstanding results.

Unfortunately, as economic conditions continue to deteriorate, headlines from across the nation tell the tale of massive teacher layoffs and the elimination of educational programs. As we continue to be faced with declining revenues, I fear that we will also be required to make some difficult but necessary choices. I know that we will do everything possible to protect jobs, albeit in ways that may require people to step out of their comfort zone and move into new areas. My first priority, however, remains protecting the classroom and maintaining excellence in educational programming. It is my hope, that by working together as we have done over the past nineteen months, we will be able to mitigate any adverse effects of these trying economic times on both our schools and our workforce.

The results of our work in the classroom cannot be disputed. Our students outperformed their peers in major U.S. urban cities on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) math exam. Our Hispanic students scored significantly higher than their national counterparts. I am optimistic that the release of the NAEP reading results will be equally impressive. Over half (205) of the District's schools are now "A" rated, and 90% of our schools earned an "A", "B" or "C". Correspondingly, we have seen a significant reduction in the number of schools graded at a "C" or below. For the first time, over 50% of our 10<sup>th</sup> graders passed the Reading portion of the FCAT on the first attempt and our minority participation and passing rates on Advanced Placement exams are among the highest in the nation. In fact, the total number of students participating in at least one AP Exam has increased by 13.5% in just this last year. These outstanding results prove that Miami-Dade's teachers and students have the will, skill, and desire to excel, regardless of circumstance, which is comparable to any other population on the planet.

On January 13, 2010, the Board adopted the 2009-2014 Strategic Plan Framework as a roadmap to chart our journey over the next five years, focusing only on what is truly important, our students and how we support them. As such, the Board formally declared that the one singular strategic goal of M-DCPS is that of *Improving Student Achievement*. This goal deliberately focuses on each student demonstrating age/grade level appropriate knowledge mastery; having an appropriate post-secondary plan; graduating from high school; and finally, having the skills to successfully enter the higher education arena and/or the workforce. It is within the four pillars of this strategic framework: Student, Parent, and Community Engagement; Education; School and District Leadership; and Financial Efficiency and Stability, that we undertook all of our activities over this year. By following this framework we have realized remarkable success.

### **Student, Parent and Community Engagement Pillar**

This year we have seen our community come together in support of our students and our schools. Much of our success has been due in part to our parents, staff, and community partners. One of the most exciting accomplishments has been the establishment of The Foundation for New Education Initiatives, Inc. (Foundation), which supports key District initiatives such as Success Academy, The Parent Academy, and Cultural Passport Program. As of March 31, 2009, the Foundation had raised over \$1 million, met all governance requirements for a direct-support organization, and continues to bring supplemental resources to the District.

In addition, through our Foundation our students and staff raised almost \$240,000 for Haitian relief since the January 12, 2010, earthquake struck the island nation. The M-DCPS family also collected and sent thousands of medical supplies, food, water and camping equipment to Haiti and partnered with various agencies to open up communication lines for impacted family members. Subsequent to the earthquake in Haiti, approximately 1,125 students from Haiti have registered in M-DCPS.

Unfortunately, over the course of this past year our community has also seen our young people affected by unspeakable acts of violence. In response, we again called on the community and students themselves to take an active role in changing the culture of youth violence. Through our "All Eyes, All Hands, All Hearts," initiative we put into action a series of programs and activities aimed at stemming the tide of violence among our young people including UDecide, a series of Anti-Violence Public Service Announcements and daily messages broadcast to all the schools. Spots were created with State Attorney Katherine Fernandez-Rundle, Schools Police Chief Charles Hurley, Radio Personality DJ Laz, Retired Miami Heat Star Alonzo Mourning, and others.

Students too were actively engaged through a series of Violence Prevention Youth Summits. Students acted as Peer Leaders in each of our high schools driving the conversation about how to stem the rising tide of student violence and community apathy. Over 4,500 students and community stakeholders participated in these events culminating in a Districtwide community forum on January 14, 2010. The responses to our efforts have been very positive. We are seeing students begin to spread the message of anti-violence and responsibility themselves, beginning, we hope, a permanent change of culture. Going forward, we will continue these programs, while encouraging our students and the community at-large to maintain a watchful eye and an open heart throughout the summer months, as well as during the school year.

## **Education Pillar**

Within the Education Pillar we developed and implemented a first-ever comprehensive Education Plan, building upon our successes and forging ahead with new innovations. We opened the Autism Intensive Communication Academy at Blue Lakes Elementary providing a family friendly public school environment tailored to meet the unique needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. We successfully brought learning into the SBAB Complex with the opening of the PLC in the Annex, providing an early learning laboratory. In recognition of the importance of art, music, and cultural experiences to a well rounded education, we launched the Cultural Passport Program. Through the Cultural Passport program students will be provided with access to different cultural field

experiences each school year including visits to museums and art galleries, as well as live musical, theatrical, and dance performances.

We added 14 days to the school calendar for students, who needed it the most, by adding Success Academies at the District's most critical schools. We worked closely with the State to provide differentiated and tiered support to schools to ensure that the schools with the greatest needs received the most support. We identified District-wide technology programs that targeted reading, math and science, and provided access to it for all schools, from the most fragile to the highest performing. We have provided more curriculum specialists at the regions to work closely with schools. In so doing, the decentralization of curriculum support specialists allowed them to be deployed in a more efficient manner and the services provided to students to be more targeted and focused.

The District is providing professional development for teachers and working with math coaches and liaisons to help teachers help students to succeed. This targeted professional development is based on student data which is collected and analyzed throughout the year. By utilizing data in a timely manner to monitor student progress at the District and school sites levels, we are better able to improve student outcomes.

We are also exploring non-traditional methods to expand opportunities for learning and time on-task. This year we launched "Links to Learning," an on-line and interactive collection of reading, writing, and mathematics curricula that is individualized to each student. Through "Links to Learning," available through the District's student portal, children can log on at home or in public libraries, anywhere there is internet access, and engage in learning activities which are tailored to their needs and abilities, extending learning far beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. Through these and other efforts I believe that we will continue to see marked increases in student performance, even in the face of continued economic austerity.

### **School and District Leadership Pillar**

Critical to the long term success of M-DCPS is our ability to recruit talented educators, provide for their leadership development, and ensure effective and ethical governance. Beginning this year we launched several initiatives aimed at building a highly qualified workforce and a culture of responsibility within M-DCPS.

First, we established a year-long residency program for a cohort of central office and school-site executives with identified leadership potential. This program provided each participant with an opportunity to participate in diverse working experiences substantially different from their everyday job duties. The Educators in Residence

program serves as platform for both cross-functional training and succession management.

Also launched this year was "Everybody Teaches" (ET). This program leveraged non-school site administrative talent to assist in the delivery of instruction to M-DCPS students. Non-school site administrators were asked to join the ET faculty, provided training and then deployed to work with students in various capacities over the 2009-2010 school year. This program provided a much-needed opportunity for central office staff to connect with the school sites and students. At no additional cost to the District we were able to impact approximately 90 schools with over 920 adults. I participated myself, lecturing at the Edison Edu-Plex and Miami Central Senior High.

The District also unveiled the "Ethical Voices, Responsible Choices" initiative comprised of a series of proactive measures intended to assure that all M-DCPS employees are aware of the requirements associated with Florida's Code of Ethics, Sunshine Law and Public Records Act, to tighten ethical standards in the school district, and maintain transparency and fairness in business practices ensuring strict accountability for the public's funds. The measures include ethics training for all employees beginning with construction and maintenance project management staff. Since the November launch, 233 employees have successfully completed the course.

### **Financial Stability Pillar**

Within the Financial Stability Pillar we have implemented programs, policies and practices that have helped us regain sound fiscal footing and to prepare for the uncertain economic times which still lie ahead.

As you all are aware, two years ago Miami-Dade County Public Schools was in dire straits. A drastic change was called for and a drastic change was made. The financial circumstances were such that our District was left with a reserve of \$4 million at a time when our State was facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. By taking a very strategic approach to realigning our workforce for improved efficiencies, reducing administration, eliminating unnecessary expenditures, and cutting our budget, we were able to provide well-deserved salary adjustments for nearly every employee; protect important educational programs such as art, physical education, languages, and music, and keep our promise to repay all those who participated in the Employee Partnership Plan.

We were creative in our thinking and honorable in our decision making, implementing a program of values-based budgeting and holding fast to four basic principles: improving

student achievement, protecting the classroom, protecting the workforce, and providing for the District's viability in the future. The Board has provided sound fiscal policy direction thus ensuring our fiscal stability and long term sustainability and allowing us to take bold steps to control costs and reduce expenditures. This year we shortened our work year by 10 days for administrators and support personnel, for a savings of \$13 million. We have maintained a strict hiring freeze for all non-instructional positions and continue to eliminate or reduce all contracts for goods or services.

Even on those issues such as healthcare costs commonly thought to be beyond the control of an employer, we saw an opportunity to do better with less. We terminated our healthcare provider when it became clear that their quest for profit was their singular motivator and implemented a self-insurance program, still providing a no-cost premium option for our employees. Through this action alone we turned a potential \$73 million increase in expenditures into a \$4 million savings in less than a year.

Similarly, our District-implemented ERP solution, created after we terminated our outside contractor and brought the project in-house, is being delivered on-time and on-budget. To date, our staff has delivered the Finance Modules and e-Recruiting and we are on schedule to roll out the Human Resource modules on July 30, 2010.

You, the School Board, took pay cuts yourselves, voting to give up 10 days of pay for this year. I am proud too of my Cabinet, who collectively volunteered to give up their increases in support of our students and our District family. Finally, as a result of our efforts to hold the line on expenditures not necessary to support the classroom and improve efficiencies, we have increased our reserves, from the \$4 million low point by over 1,800%, to almost \$80 million, again at a time of historic declines in property values and tax collections. We did all of this at a time when we faced a significant loss in education funding from the State and other sources.

## **Challenges Ahead**

Together as a team we have made this year a success in spite of so many obstacles. Looking forward, I am confident that this trend of success will continue. We have been challenged, and as a school district, we have met those challenges head on with remarkable success. However, there are cliffs looming ahead. These cliffs are the sun setting of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, the imminent deadline for full implementation of the Class-size amendment if not modified by the voters in November, and continued potential reductions to education funding from the State of Florida even in the face of increasing costs.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that without the ARRA, the fiscal condition both here, throughout the State, and the Nation, would have been catastrophic. In Miami-Dade we made a conscious decision to use the stimulus dollars to save jobs and protect programs. We have also been careful not to use these dollars to incur long-term recurring liabilities, but we must face the fact that our economy has not yet rebounded, and property values have not yet stabilized.

Turning to the Class-size amendment, I fully support the intent of the Constitutional class-size amendment; however, without flexibility to allow for slight fluctuations within individual classes and throughout the year, the costs associated with strict implementation stands to change the face of education, eliminating the available funds for virtually anything but core courses. In Miami-Dade alone, we estimate that a strict implementation of class size would cost \$94 million in additional personnel costs alone and could force the elimination of a significant number of non-core and elective courses. Therefore, the outcome of the November election stands as a defining moment for M-DCPS and many other Florida districts. The irony is that had the State not pulled back funding from us in each of the past three years, we would have had the necessary dollars to fully comply.

The dark reality is that despite all of our efforts to be fiscally responsible we may still be derailed by factors beyond our control. Now, with the conclusion of the 2010 Legislative Session, we are faced with punitive and caustic demands for strict compliance with class-size requirements at the classroom level in advance of the question of amendments being put to the voters. Pursuant to language included in the Conforming Bill school districts which fail to fully comply with the class size requirements as of the October FTE count will be penalized by having Class Size Reduction funding withheld, as well as 50 percent of the Base Student Allocation (BSA) per-student for each student in excess of the current constitutional requirement; and then 5 percent of those funds will then be redistributed to compliant districts, thus further disequalizing the FEFP. To put this into perspective, the amount estimated at risk to be taken from Miami-Dade and given to other districts is \$15,526,818 or enough money to pay for the salaries of 221 teachers. This reduction is in addition to other embedded decreases to education funding, including state mandated increases to retirement contributions and other legislative policy decisions which effectively result in a \$7 per student decrease in the BSA further impacting our operating budget.

As proud as I am of the work that we have done to put our District on sound financial footing, I am equally concerned that we will again be faced with very difficult decisions as we develop the 2010-2011 budget. We will be exploring additional opportunities to improve efficiencies and reduce costs across the District, maintaining as always our

guiding principles to first protect the classroom, and then where possible protect the workforce. However, it is likely the size of our workforce will contract consistent with the reduction in funds.

### **Continued Innovation**

Looking ahead we know that we must continue to reinvent education while continuing to do better with less. We will be exploring the use of technology in the classroom as one mechanism to revolutionize learning for our students and teachers. Our aim is to essentially put the classroom at the fingertips of our students so that they can access curriculum and instruction when and how they learn best while simultaneously providing our teachers with almost instant data that can be used to help drive more effective instruction.

In the coming months I will deliver to the Board an end-of-year report outlining our progress on many of the projects we have undertaken in the past year, highlighting our successes and discussing our challenges. I will also provide a detailed analysis of student and school performance once we have the NAEP reading scores and the Florida Department of Education releases the 2010 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) results.

Thank you again for your trust in me, your support of my administration, and your service to the community as School Board Members. I admire your willingness and desire to take on such a leadership challenge at a time when publicly funded education is facing perhaps the harshest fiscal reality in modern history. I remain committed to serving this Board and this school district as Superintendent, and I thank you for your continued support. I can truly say that I am honored to share with you the responsibility for guiding the education of our community's children. As always, I remain committed to academic excellence and stand ready to continue working together to develop innovative educational opportunities that will further improve the lives of those we serve.

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cc: School Board Attorney  
Superintendent's Cabinet