


MEMORANDUM

June 30, 2011

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

FROM: Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools 

SUBJECT: 2010-2011 REFLECTIONS

I recently had the great honor of attending many of our high schools' 2011 commencement ceremonies. These joyous events always give me the opportunity to reflect on the achievements of our students, teachers, and District as a whole. It has truly been a privilege to serve as Superintendent of Schools in one of the most dynamic communities in the nation. I am honored and grateful to the Board for expressing your continued confidence in my leadership by granting me the opportunity to remain in this capacity through June 30, 2015.

Indeed, the 2010-2011 school year has truly been challenging, but rewarding. As always, much of the credit for our successes must be given to our colleagues at the school site: teachers, support staff, and administrators. The results of their efforts include a graduation rate that reached an all-time high and a solid performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Even as funding for education was further reduced and the demands to comply with a variety of mandates increased, we were able to find ways to improve.

Guiding our work has been the Board's 2009-2014 Strategic Plan Framework which serves to focus our District on what is truly important: our students. We have but one singular strategic goal, *Student Achievement*, supported by four pillars: Student, Parent, and Community Engagement; Education; School and District Leadership; and Financial Efficiency and Stability. By following this framework, we have realized remarkable success. What follows are some examples of our accomplishments over the past year.

Student, Parent, and Community Engagement Pillar

Our focus on student, parent, and community engagement has been a cornerstone of our efforts to improve student achievement. One such example is the creation of the Education Transformation Office Community Task Force. This group, comprised of parents, alumni association presidents, PTA representatives, union officials, university partners, and members of the business community, came together in support of our most fragile schools. Meeting monthly, they reviewed school and student data, shared resources, and provided input on districtwide policy regarding schools within the urban core.

The community continues to embrace The Foundation for New Education Initiatives, Inc. (Foundation), which supports District programs such as the Saturday Success Academy, The Parent Academy, and the Cultural Passport. This year, staff secured over \$1,000,000 in donations and \$586,000 in in-kind resources in support of various initiatives which add to the educational experiences available for our students.

Our second annual Violence Prevention Youth Summit was held this year at each of our high schools. This program actively engages students as peer leaders to drive the conversation about how to stem the rising tide of student violence and community apathy. Over 5,000 students, parents, and community participants lent their voices to the call for understanding, responsibility, tolerance, and civility within our diverse community.

With the understanding that keeping children on the right path often takes the efforts of many concerned partners, the Miami-Dade Schools Police Department collaborated with agencies from across the county to improve school safety and reduce the number of students who entered the juvenile justice system. Through programs such as the Civil Citation initiative and a variety of prevention strategies, juvenile arrests have been reduced by 35 percent, while serious targeted incidents declined by 11.5 percent.

Recognizing that parents are our partners in education, particularly in the education of special needs children, we conducted resource fairs and parent workshops on transition services including events such as *Festival Educativo* and *Anbyans Kreyol*, serving nearly 400 parents of special education students. In addition, we launched the Parent Resource Center at Blue Lakes/FDLRS, providing support services and resources to hundreds of parents of students with autism.

To ensure that access to technology would not become an artificial barrier between the home and school, we implemented Project LINK, providing free computers and internet access to identified families in 35 low-performing schools. Through the Parent Academy, families were offered classes on computer use and internet safety. As a result of this and other District efforts to provide access and communication options to parents in our community, by the end of 2011 the number of parent portal accounts established through dadeschools.net had reached over 200,000.

The Parent Academy continued to provide workshops throughout the community which were attended by over 43,000 parents. I am happy to report that the positive effects that our District's efforts to engage parents were independently verified in an evaluation conducted by a research team of doctoral candidates at Florida Atlantic University. Their report concluded that "...what parents learned and later utilized from attending Parent Academy workshops made a measurable difference in their child's academic achievement," verifying what we know and practice: that the partnerships forged between the school and the home are critical to long-term student success.

To meet the needs of our schools during these financially challenging times, we continued to leverage the assets of the broader community. We maintained our Education Compacts with cities such as Miami Beach, Miami, and Hialeah, partnering on many projects that brought resources into our schools. Together with Florida International University (FIU) we established a new partnership known as ACCESS – Achieving Community Collaboration in Education and Student Success, designed to improve student learning through professional development, collaborative research, and leadership development.

We also continued our collaborations with the local business community through our Dade Partners Program, local chambers of commerce, and various industry and professional organizations yielding significant support to individual schools and the District as a whole. If we were to place a monetary value on the over 2 million hours and in-kind services of over

35,000 volunteers invested in our schools, it would be well above \$48 million. This level of involvement speaks volumes regarding the value that the citizens of Miami-Dade place on their public schools.

Education Pillar

Building on the success of our comprehensive Education Plan, we moved forward with a District plan for Response to Intervention (RtI), providing increased intervention options for Level II and III students. Consequently, the percentage of 3rd graders reaching proficiency in reading, as demonstrated by their performance on the FCAT at schools which implemented RtI, showed a 5 percentage point increase over 2010 scores. I am proud to announce that our District's leadership in RtI implementation has prompted its selection by the University of South Florida and the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) as a best practice district to be showcased at the FLDOE RtI Summer Institute.

To support students who are at-risk of dropping out of school because they are over-age, we launched the Secondary Student Success Center (S3C) Initiative, a grade 6 through 12 technology-based program. This program enables students to recover, as well as accelerate, middle school courses to get them on-track with their graduating cohort. In its first year of implementation, 101 students enrolled in three S3C centers located throughout the District. Two students have met all requirements to be promoted to grade 10, 66 have met all requirements to be promoted to grade 9, and the remaining 33 students have successfully completed all credit recovery courses. Perhaps most exciting is that 60 percent of the students in the S3Cs were able to achieve a level 4 on the 2011 FCAT Writing assessment.

We created the Education Transformation Office to oversee 19 of the District's most fragile schools, assembling an array of experts in school turnaround to support and guide instructional efforts at these locations. In just one year these schools have shown significant academic improvement.

We have continued our DATA/Com process whereby, on a quarterly basis, we bring together the principals and senior staff to review data related to the academic progress of students. These sessions allow the administration to ensure that interventions and resources are appropriately aligned to each school to improve student outcomes. The success of this process has garnered national attention, resulting in its replication in several other districts.

We expanded non-traditional opportunities for learning to better connect with our students, digital natives, in a way that is meaningful for them. In addition to enhancing programs like Links to Learning that brought learning out of the classroom and into the home in a digital environment, we embraced virtual classes during the regular school day, affording the opportunity for 6,800 students to take at least one class on-line.

We entered into a partnership with Discovery Education providing streaming digital media resources aligned to the secondary science curriculum. Through this partnership, over 7,500 teachers received professional development and are actively using this resource in their classrooms. These and other media assets, as well as focused training on how to effectively incorporate technological tools into daily instruction, are helping teachers and

students transition from text-based materials to digital content, a transition that will be a statutory requirement beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. The results of these efforts were demonstrated in the dramatic increases in student performance reflected in the 2011 FCAT Science assessment scores.

Continuing our focus on client centric innovation, we expanded choice options for parents with schools such as the International Studies Preparatory Academy (ISPA), MAST@Homestead, and iPrep Academy, the District's first blended learning environment. M-DCPS now has one of the most extensive choice programs nationwide, with over 144,000 students making an active choice in the school or program they attended during 2010-2011.

Rigorous curricular offerings were also expanded. This year 36,515 students participated in the gifted program, while the number of students enrolled in middle school advanced courses increased to almost 40,000; and nearly 82,000 students enrolled in honors courses. Particularly significant was the increase in students enrolled in at least one Advanced Placement course, which increased by 17.1 percentage points to 21,401, including a 22.5 percentage point increase for the African American subgroup. In fact, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) was highlighted in the 7th Annual AP Report to the Nation as having the greatest number of Hispanic students worldwide scoring a 3 or higher in seven (7) different Advanced Placement (AP) Exams.

Dual Enrollment (DE) opportunities were expanded, with the percentage of students enrolled in DE courses increasing by a staggering 83 percent over last year. In addition to DE offerings provided on our high school campuses, nearly 100 students were able to participate in DE classes in an actual university setting through our collaboration with FIU, known as the *Academy for Advanced Academics (AAA at FIU)*.

School and District Leadership Pillar

This year we faced many issues which required focused leadership at both the district and school levels. One such circumstance was our response to the implementation of constitutionally mandated class-size maximums. Although compliance with class size has been measured at the school level since 2006-2007, it was not until this fiscal year that it was calculated at the classroom level.

In developing our approach to meeting this requirement, without the benefit of adequate state funding, we resolved to comply with the constitutional mandate within the resources available. Critical to our strategy was a commitment to maintain a robust educational program, providing autonomy to our principals at the school site, and the deployment of innovative approaches to instructional delivery, without compromising the integrity or rigor of the educational program. As a result, the District was able to successfully manage 88,591 class sections for grades PreK-12 for 96.4 percent compliance. This equated to \$6.6M over the FTE CAP, representing a legislatively imposed penalty of \$1.66M to the District.

M-DCPS took the lead in working with our teachers to implement meaningful educational reform. Well before Florida won a Race to the Top (RTTT) grant, we were already addressing tough issues with the United Teachers of Dade (UTD), such as tying teacher evaluations to student performance and performance pay. As a result of the significant

work undertaken in partnership with the UTD, we recently announced that M-DCPS is the only District in Florida where teachers will be eligible for significant performance bonuses this year.

Through the collective bargaining process we achieved agreements with the American Federation State County Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Dade County Schools Maintenance Employee Committee (DCSMEC), and UTD, which protected essential workforce, created efficiencies, maintained a free health insurance option for employees, and positioned us well for the coming year.

Financial Stability Pillar

Within the Financial Stability Pillar we have continued to implement programs, policies, and practices that have helped us maintain a sound financial position, allowing us to continue to protect our educational programs and high quality staff in the face of continued economic austerity and in stark contrast to many other districts across the state.

Once again we were creative in our approach to minimizing the District's financial exposure and limiting expenditures. Our efforts to deliver a solid, balanced, and transparent budget has been recognized as a best-in-class process. Miami-Dade County Public Schools received the GFOA (Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada) Distinguished Budget Presentation Award.

Our efforts to curtail costs and effectively manage our funds were not limited only to the general fund budget. This year the office of Treasury Management restructured a portion of the District's Certificates of Participation to provide structural balance to the District's capital budget in coordination with strategic reductions in facilities and maintenance services that salvaged core essential maintenance services. Principal and interest obligations in fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013 were primarily refinanced to mature in FYs 2029 through 2032, resulting in a true interest cost of 4.849% for a savings to the District, over time, of approximately \$137.5M.

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 continued our implementation of a self-insurance program, still providing a no-cost premium option for our employees and affordable premiums for their dependents. In order to help keep costs down and improve the overall wellbeing of the workforce, a number of comprehensive wellness programs have been launched. This year over 56,000 students, faculty, staff, and parents have participated in the "Let's Move" national initiative alone. To control costs associated with workman's compensation, the Office of Risk Management continued its aggressive medical management and return-to-work initiatives, resulting in four continuous years of expenditure reductions.

Similarly, we continued the successful implementation of our ERP solution, remaining on time and within budget. Information Technology Services (ITS) implemented SAP Human Resources (HR) 2.0, the replacement for the Personnel or HR related systems. This new SAP HR system provides web-enabled recruiting and new employee self-service capabilities. Employees have access to more detailed benefits choices and can manage their own personal information online, while site administrators can now view and fill open

positions and initiate changes in position requests and other activities currently performed in the personnel actions screen in the PERS Legacy system. Similarly, ITS completed the development of SAP Payroll (PY) 1.0 this year. To ensure accuracy, beginning in February, payroll parallels began comparing legacy payroll to SAP payroll. Currently, SAP PY is scheduled to go live in November 2011.

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 a low of \$4 million just three years ago to approximately \$127 million, an increase of 3,175 percent, at a time of historic declines in property values, tax collections, and a significant loss in education funding from the state and other sources. I am proud to report that we have emerged from FY 2010-2011 with a healthy reserve, a balanced budget, and a stable credit rating, having done so without relying on increases to our local taxpayers or through widespread employee layoffs.

A Singular Goal – Student Achievement

The success achieved this year has been in support of improving *Student Achievement*. When we measure student achievement, it is a comprehensive view, seeking to ensure that all students are being given every opportunity to meet their full potential and leave us with a post-secondary plan that includes collegiate and/or world of work experiences.

Therefore, beginning in 2009-2010, the first year of our new Strategic Framework, baseline data was collected on the post-secondary plan intentions of our graduating seniors. These results indicated that over 47 percent of the 2010 graduating class planned to continue their education in a 4-year college or university, almost 16 percent planned on attending a community college, and over 5 percent had plans for technical school or the military. Currently, data are being collected for the 2011 graduating seniors, and that information will be reported to the Board when it becomes available.

Through the Gates/National Student Clearinghouse Student Tracker Pilot project we are enhancing our ability to track graduates participating in postsecondary education through reports that link K-12 and post-secondary data. Information gathered through this program will be used to improve college readiness for younger students, as well as to assist us in better gauging the success of our college readiness efforts as an additional measure of how we are meeting our goal of student achievement.

As you know, this year the Florida Department of Education implemented the FCAT 2.0 assessment along with a revised set of curriculum standards, while simultaneously raising the scores that students are required to achieve in order to be considered proficient. Nonetheless, our instructional leaders, teachers, and students stepped up to this challenge.

FCAT Reading, Mathematics, and Science student achievement results for the 2011 school year released by the Florida Department of Education show that, overall, our students continue to perform well. In reading, the percentage of M-DCPS students scoring in Levels 3 and above held relatively constant from 2010 to 2011. These scores reflect the transition from the original Sunshine State Standards to the new FCAT 2.0, designed to measure the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. The percentage of M-DCPS students passing the Grade 10 Reading test increased by one point, even with the transition to the new test.

In mathematics, where students in grades 3 – 8 were administered the new FCAT 2.0, the percentage of M-DCPS students scoring in Levels 3 and above also remained relatively stable, with increases in grades 4, 5, and 8. For the first time, the grade 10 mathematics test was given exclusively as a computer-based assessment, resulting in fewer M-DCPS students achieving passing scores than in 2010. However, the percentage passing did not drop below the percentage of students who passed in 2009.

Perhaps the greatest improvement was seen in science, where M-DCPS students' FCAT scores increased substantially. The percentage of students scoring high (Levels 3 and above) increased 5 percentage points in grade 5 and 7 percentage points in both grades 8 and 11 from 2010 to 2011. In fact, M-DCPS students' increases on FCAT Science outpaced state averages as well as those in Broward and Palm Beach Counties.

In addition, results from the 2011 FCAT Writing demonstrate that M-DCPS elementary and middle school students' average FCAT Writing scores met or exceeded the new high performance criteria which increased this year from 3.5 to 4.0. The percentage of M-DCPS students scoring at the higher score of 4.0 or above increased from 2010 to 2011 by 5 percentage points in grade 8 and 7 percentage points in grade 4.

Overall, more than 230,000 students in M-DCPS participated in the Spring 2011 FCAT/FCAT 2.0 administration. As the result of the work of our professional educators, I am proud that even in the face of increased accountability thresholds, more rigorous curriculum content, and a new test design, Miami-Dade students have been able to maintain an overall level of performance that is on par with or exceeding that of their peers statewide.

This year the state began its move to subject specific exams for high school level courses with the first administration of the end-of-course exam for Algebra 1. In Miami-Dade, 28,066 middle and high school students participated in the Algebra I exam. The majority of our middle school students who took Algebra I on an accelerated basis scored in the highest third when compared to all students tested statewide, while 48 percent of the students in grade 9 who participated in the assessment scored in the middle or high third.

Earlier this year we celebrated the performance of M-DCPS students on the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2009 administration of Reading, Mathematics, and Science exams. In its inaugural year, M-DCPS fared very well in direct comparison among large urban districts which face similar challenges and in comparison to all other large cities nationwide. M-DCPS Hispanic students, in particular, scored remarkably well in all three subject areas. In addition, exceptional reading performance was also demonstrated in historically struggling subgroups, with higher performance for the District's economically disadvantaged students in both 4th and 8th grade, as well as 8th grade Black students.

Finally, M-DCPS' graduation rate, undeniably our most important indicator of success, has improved by nearly four percentage points to 72.1 percent for the 2009-2010 academic year. This is the highest graduation rate M-DCPS has achieved since the Florida Department of Education began tracking graduation statistics with modern methods. The District's rate of improvement for the 2009-2010 cohort year exceeded the statewide rate, confirming that our District is making great strides in raising the achievement of all student groups.

Our work has been recognized by many this year, even being selected by the White House for a Presidential visit to announce the launching of National Education Month. However, perhaps the most prestigious recognition thus far came just three months ago when we received word that M-DCPS had been selected as one of four national finalists for the Broad Prize for Urban Education. The Broad Prize, often referred to as the "Nobel Prize" of education, is awarded annually to the school district judged to demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among poor and minority students. Our selection is more than recognition of our success at reinventing M-DCPS; it is a validation of our core values and commitment to the belief that all students are entitled to a comprehensive, high quality education.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools has indeed had a wonderful year. We faced challenges leveled by the state legislature and overcame obstacles to the fair assessment of our students' performance. As a community of educators, we prevailed over cuts to our funding and requirements to do even more with our limited resources. In the face of each of these tests of commitment to delivering a high quality education, you, the Board, have provided sound policy guidance and a clear message to the community that our children come first. Together we have achieved efficiencies through innovation, we have found ways to do better with less, and we continue to chart a course of transformation that will ensure our continued success into the future.

As you know, I believe that educators are engaged in perhaps the noblest of all professions, responsible for imparting the gift of knowledge to the next generation. Throughout history, our ability to coexist in an enlightened civilization has been dependent upon our capacity to create, to exhibit an appreciation for other cultures, and to think critically. As such, education is central to the individual learner, and public education is central to society as a whole, it is, in fact, the cornerstone of democracy. Real education is about independence. If the work we do in schools is authentic, it fosters an engagement with the world, one that lasts a lifetime by creating lifelong learners and global citizens. I am grateful for the opportunity to be your partner in this endeavor.

Thank you again for your trust in me, support of my administration, and service to the community as School Board Members. I am honored to serve you as Superintendent of Schools and I thank you for your continued support. As always, I remain committed to this Board and this District, and I look forward to working with you as we continue 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