

CONNECTION

A Newsletter for Miami-Dade County Public Schools Parents



DISTRICT LAUNCHES iATTEND M-DCPS INITIATIVE TO STOP ABSENTEEISM IN SCHOOLS

On any given day, nearly 20,000 Miami-Dade County Public Schools students are absent from school. Going to school every day is one the simplest and most important contributing factors to a child's academic success. This is why Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho and School Board Members – along with municipal leaders and community and cultural organizations - held a news conference recently to launch the iAttend M-DCPS Initiative, a more aggressive and strategic approach to stemming absenteeism.

"Every day that a child is in school is an opportunity to learn," said Superintendent of Schools Alberto M. Carvalho. "There is a direct correlation between regular school attendance and student achievement. It's important that parents, business and faith-based leaders, elected officials and every segment of our community join with us to stress the importance of regular school attendance. Being there every day means our students experience the joys of learning."

The initiative includes closer monitoring and reporting of student absences, calls to parents, and more direct measures including home visits, counseling and referrals to outside agencies.

The District plans to have iAttend M-DCPS challenges in which schools will be recognized on a monthly basis for improved attendance and high attendance, including recognition for students. In addition, the Miami Marlins, Miami Dolphins, Miami HEAT, and Miami City Ballet, longtime partners of the school district, have agreed to support this initiative through targeted communications to the community.

Among the partners in attendance at the news conference were: School Board Vice Chair Dr. Larry Feldman, Board Member Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Board Member Lubby Navarro, City of Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado, City of Hialeah Council President Isis Garcia-Martinez, Miami-Dade County Council of PTA/PTSA President Joe Gebara, Urban League of Greater Miami President/CEO T. Willard Fair, Miami City Ballet Artistic Director Lourdes Lopez, Miami City Ballet Executive Director Michael Scolamiero, and Miami Marlins Senior Director of Community Outreach Angela Smith.

If you would like to help, please call 305-995-3050. You can also stay informed about this initiative on social media using #iAttendMDCPS.

UPCOMING SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

October 14	11:00 a.m.	Regular Meeting
November 17	10:00 a.m.	Organization Meeting
November 18	11:00 a.m.	Regular Meeting

TWO MIAMI-DADE PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEAD THE STATE ON NEWSWEEK'S 2015 TOP 500 SCHOOLS LIST

Twelve Miami-Dade public schools were showcased in Newsweek magazine's prestigious "Beating the Odds 2015: Top High Schools for Low-Income Students" list. Out of 21,000 high schools in the nation, only 23 Florida schools made the list. Of those, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) represents a whopping 52 percent of the highlighted schools in the state with Medical Academy for Science and Technology @ Homestead ranked as #1 and Design & Architecture Senior High (DASH) ranked as #2.

"Miami-Dade County Public Schools is extremely proud to be recognized on this coveted list," said Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho. "This achievement is a testament to the innovative and progressive approach the school district takes regarding diverse educational offerings that ensure a world-class education for all of our students."

Newsweek has been ranking the top U.S. high schools for more than a decade. It identified 500 public high schools across the nation in terms of graduation rates, dropout rates, AP/IB scores, college enrollment, SAT and ACT participation and scores, number of students enrolled in college courses during high school and state scores, as well as the number of students eligible for free/reduced-price lunches.

Others included on the list are:

iPreparatory Academy, Miami Springs Senior High School, Coral Reef Senior High School, Miami Coral Park Senior High School, G. Holmes Braddock Senior High School

For a complete list of Newsweek's Best schools, visit the website at: <http://www.newsweek.com/high-schools/americas-top-high-schools-2015>.

M-DCPS HOSTS SHAPE AMERICA'S NATIONAL '50 MILLION STRONG BY 2029' PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAMPAIGN

Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho, Board members, District officials, and preschoolers and staff from North Beach Elementary School hosted representatives from SHAPE America, the President's Council on Fitness and NIKE to launch "50 Million Strong by 2029" campaign, a national movement to ensure that by the time today's preschoolers graduate from high school in 2029, all of America's students will benefit from the skills, knowledge and opportunities to enjoy healthy, meaningful physical activity.

Physical activity in schools provides many benefits to students, including improvement in academic achievement, test scores, attention, concentration and on-task behavior. This initiative will provide youth with the knowledge and skills to be active for a lifetime, and assures them the opportunities to engage in 60 minutes of physical activity associated with the school day.

SUPERINTENDENT CARVALHO VOICES CONCERNS OVER FSA RESULTS BEFORE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

On Monday, September 21, the State Board of Education held a meeting in Miami Gardens. Below are excerpts from Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho's remarks on behalf of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents.

Nearly seven months ago over a million students across the state of Florida sat before a computer monitor to take the much anticipated, highly debated, Florida Standards Assessment. They had been prepared by their teachers and were confident in their ability to demonstrate how much they had learned last school year.

We all know what transpired during those weeks of testing – students getting kicked off, blank screens, a cyber-attack, and daily district wide cancellation of tests midstream.

Since then, much has been written about this less than perfect rollout – a validity study with over 130 pages of charts, data, and recommendations, countless newspaper articles and opinion papers, and 45,000 letters to state entities; all in an attempt to reason with anyone who will listen about the unreasonableness of those who are unyielding in their reluctance to admit that perhaps, superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, and students may have been right.

That the pace at which computer-based testing has been rolled out statewide has been too aggressive, that the \$220M test that was so quickly put together, with items from Utah after PARCC was discarded, was not ready for primetime, and that an inaugural test of ANY kind would be unable to determine appropriate school grades since learning gains would not be able to be calculated in year one.

Yet, the department continues to state that it is “on track” and is resolute in its intent to assign scores to children and consequently, grades to schools for last year. This position, in light of the numerous recommendations from the Alpine study, is unconscionable. The Florida Association of District School Superintendents urges you, as does the Commissioner, to read the entire report; not just the cliff notes. In it, you will find pages and pages of recommendations. School leaders, teachers, students, and the public deserve to know what the timeline is to address the recommendations in the report. Until such time as we do, moving forward is adding questions and doubts to an already fragile accountability system.

The state insists that everything is as it should be. That we have nothing to worry about. I remind you that that was also its position prior to the problematic administration of the FSA. Scores that are published to students and their families nine months after an assessment can hardly be considered “on track.” We should all ask ourselves what is the purpose and benefit of assigning school grades this late. Is it to inform and improve instruction? Is it to better assign students to more appropriate supports? No, nine months after its administration, and minimally five months after the school year began, it's a bit late for that.

Some say that there is nothing that can be done to halt the runaway freight train that is a late school grade rollout. To that I say, best to get it right than to simply get it done. There is too much at stake.

The FLDOE School Accountability Program has been dealt several blows in the past couple of years. Sadly, it has lost a lot of the credibility it once had with the public. What used to be a simpler and well-balanced calculation of proficiency and growth has been bastardized over the years, and in our zeal to repair it, it is now scheduled to be half of its fundamental, original self. Issuing grades with only 50 percent of the traditional criteria – performance alone – excluding learning gains – is irresponsible and sends the wrong message to students, teachers and the community at-large.

We are in the business of learning. I think we all can agree that students come to our school house doors on a wide spectrum of ability – this spectrum is contingent on a number of factors that are beyond the control of educators – poverty, English language proficiency, learning disability, etc. We are charged with growing students' intellects despite their place on the starting line. To judge anyone without taking into consideration how far students moved in one year's time is irresponsible and potentially misleads communities on the true teaching effectiveness.

If Florida wants to remain a leader in school reform and accountability, it should heed the warning of superintendents throughout the state and it should refrain from issuing school grades for last year and focus its efforts on setting appropriate cut scores for this baseline year in order to determine and include adequate learning gains in 2015-16. To not do so, will certainly compromise our accountability program. Statistical manipulations that attempt to generate a desired narrative devoid of appropriate logic or data are inappropriate and undermine reasonable and respectful accountability.

DATES TO REMEMBER

October 1-	Magnet Application Period Opens
October 30-	Teacher Planning Day
November 11-	Observation of Veterans Day

The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

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Alberto M. Carvalho
Superintendent of Schools

Logan Schroeder-Stephens
Student Advisor to the School Board

Produced by the Office of Communications
Daisy Gonzalez-Diego
Chief Communications Officer

