
Miami-Dade County Public Schools

District Profile

Rank among U.S. School Districts (by size):	4
Number of Schools:	378
Number of Students:	347,774
Number of Teachers:	22,393

Superintendent: Rudolph “Rudy” Crew served as superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools from July 2004 until September 2008. During his 26 years as an educator, Crew has held a range of positions across the country, including superintendent, college professor, administrator and teacher. Prior to his role as superintendent of Miami-Dade, Crew served as executive director of the Institute for K-12 Leadership at the University of Washington, director of district reforms for initiatives at the Stupski Foundation, chancellor of the New York City Board of Education, and as superintendent at both Tacoma Public Schools and Sacramento City Unified School District.

Superintendent Alberto Carvalho was appointed superintendent of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools in September 2008. With 18 years of experience in the district, beginning as a science teacher, Carvalho most recently served as associate superintendent with responsibility over intergovernmental affairs, grants, Title I and community services.

Governance: Nine-member school board, elected by geographic region to serve four-year terms

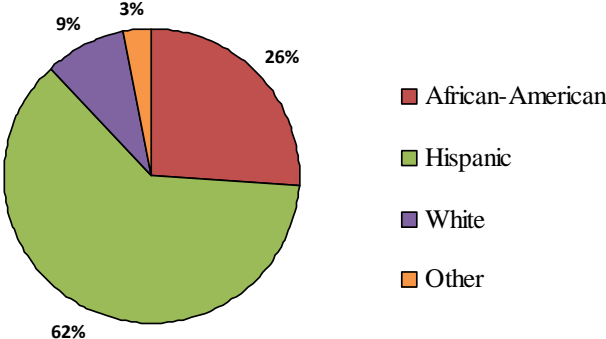
Teachers Unions: United Teachers of Dade

Student Characteristics

Percent of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch:	59 percent
Percent of Students Designated as English Language Learners:	15 percent

(2007-08 data)

Student Demographics



(2007-08 data)

Student Achievement

Miami-Dade County Public Schools' (MDCPS) student achievement gains are evidenced by publicly available data collected and analyzed by MPR Associates, Inc., a leading education research consulting firm. Among the reasons that MDCPS stood out among large urban school districts:

Better overall performance

- In 2007, Miami-Dade outperformed other districts in Florida serving students with similar income levels in reading at all grade levels and in elementary and middle school math, according to The Broad Prize methodology.

Better subgroup performance

- In 2007, Miami-Dade's low-income, African-American and Hispanic students outperformed their peers in similar districts in reading and math at all grade levels, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- In 2007, Miami-Dade's Hispanic students achieved higher average proficiency rates than their state counterparts in reading and math at all grade levels.

Better overall improvement

- Between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade showed greater improvement than other Florida districts serving similar income levels in reading at all grade levels and in middle and high school math, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade was more successful than the state in increasing the percentage of all students who achieved proficiency in reading and math at all grade levels.

Better subgroup improvement

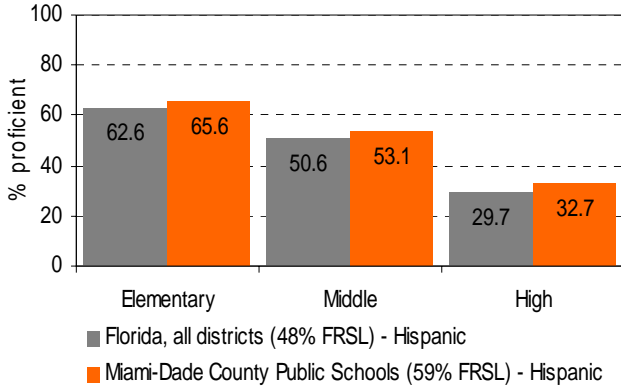
- Between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade's African-American students showed greater improvement than their peers in similar Florida districts in reading and math at all grade levels, according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- During the same period, Miami-Dade's Hispanic students showed greater improvement than their peers in similar Florida districts in reading at all grade levels and in middle and high school math.
- Similarly, Miami-Dade's low-income students showed greater improvement than their peers in similar Florida districts in math at all grade levels and in elementary and middle school reading over the same time period.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade was also more successful than the state in increasing the percentage of Hispanic and African-American student who achieved proficiency in reading at all grade levels and middle and high school math.
- In addition, between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade was more successful than the state at increasing the percentage of low-income students who achieved proficiency in reading and math at all grade levels.
- Between 2004 and 2007, participation rates for African-American and Hispanic students taking the SAT, ACT and Advanced Placement exams rose in Miami-Dade.

Closing achievement gaps

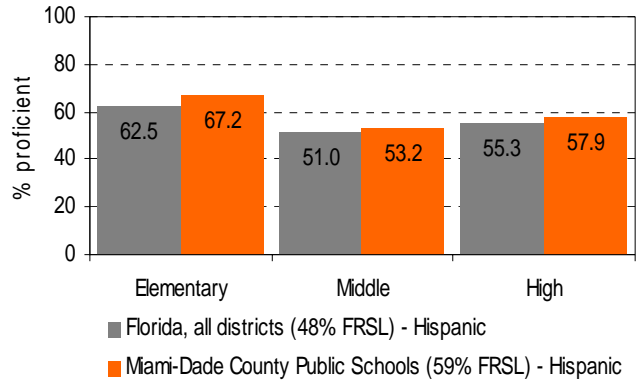
- Miami-Dade narrowed achievement gaps between its Hispanic and white students in reading and math at all grade levels between 2004 and 2007. In addition, Miami-Dade narrowed achievement gaps between low-income and non-low-income students and between its African-American and white students in math at all grade levels and in elementary and middle school reading.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade narrowed achievement gaps between low-income and non-low-income students faster than the state at all grade levels in reading and in elementary and middle school math.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade also narrowed achievement gaps between the district's Hispanic students and the state average for white students in reading and math at all grade levels.
- In addition, between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade narrowed achievement gaps between the district's African-American students and the state average for white students in math at all grade levels and in elementary and middle school reading.
- Between 2004 and 2007, Miami-Dade also narrowed achievement gaps between the district's low-income students and the state average for non-low-income students in math at all grade levels and in elementary and middle school reading. For example, during this period, Miami-Dade reduced the achievement gap between low-income students and the state average for non-low-income students by 9 percentage points in middle school reading.

Student Achievement Highlights

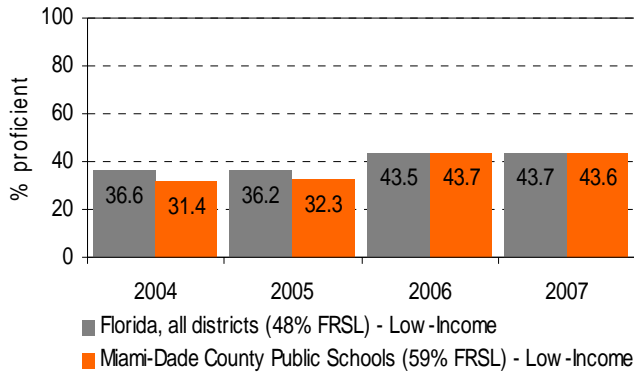
**Hispanic Reading Proficiency Rates
District vs. State Average
2007**



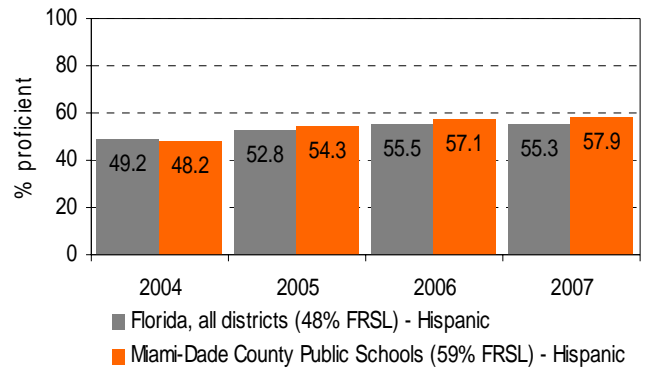
**Hispanic Mathematics Proficiency Rates
District vs. State Average
2007**



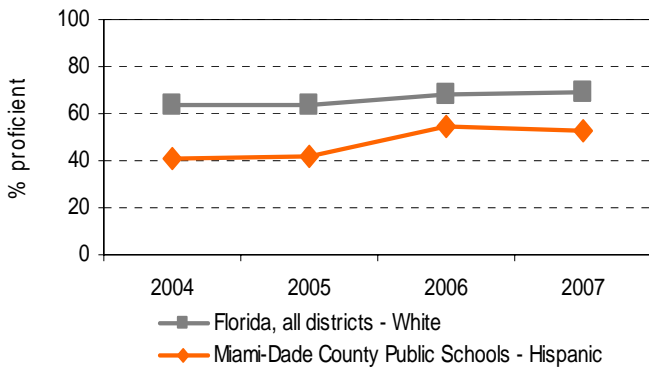
**Middle School Reading Proficiency Rates for
Low-Income Students in the District vs.
Low-Income Students Statewide**



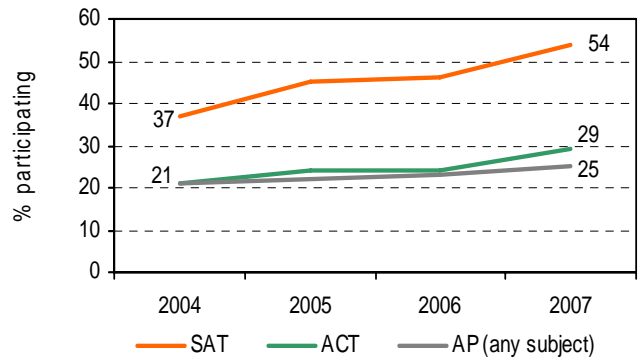
**High School Mathematics Proficiency Rates for
Hispanic Students in the District vs.
Hispanic Students Statewide**



**Middle School Reading Proficiency Rates for
Hispanic Students in the District vs.
White Students Statewide**



**Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Hispanic Student Participation Rates in
College Readiness Exams**



Key District Policies and Practices

SchoolWorks, an education consulting firm based in Massachusetts, collected and analyzed evidence of MDCPS policies and practices affecting teaching and learning. SchoolWorks' qualitative analysis, produced below, is based on a site visit, focus group interviews with district stakeholders and analysis of extensive documentation. The criteria used for evaluation, available at www.broadprize.org, are grounded in research-based school and district practices found to be effective in three key areas: **teaching and learning**, **district leadership** and **operations and support systems**. MDCPS demonstrated the following effective policies and practices:

Teaching and Learning

Research shows that effective teaching is the primary factor contributing to high levels of student achievement. In MDCPS, a comprehensive, competency-based curriculum provides teachers the tools to deliver content in accordance with the state's standards, while also allowing flexibility to make adjustments based on student learning needs. The district's instruction-based initiatives such as high school reform and differentiated instruction and its focus on developing interventions for struggling students have improved the quality of instruction at MDCPS. In addition, teachers, school leaders and district administrators are able to use an aligned, district-developed benchmark assessment system in order to monitor student learning and make decisions about teaching, learning and school support.

Curriculum

The district provides comprehensive, competency-based curriculum guides across grade levels and subject areas that are aligned to Florida's state standards. The curriculum also reaches beyond state standards to prepare students for competition in a global economy, which is the one of the district's five strategic goals. Key characteristics of the MDCPS curriculum include:

- Across subject areas (e.g., English language arts, mathematics, science), district-level curriculum documents provide teachers with the "what to do," including explicit student learning objectives and competencies. In addition, the district provides teachers with pacing guides that define what standards must be addressed during each nine-week segment in the school year. This offers school-based staff the autonomy to decide how to coordinate and present content and when to deliver it within a nine-week block.
- In addition to district pacing guides, schools develop calendars that further break down and clarify content delivery and assessment. Calendars contain weekly or bi-weekly benchmarks that allow teachers to assess student mastery and determine skills and content that need to be re-taught. Teachers have flexibility within the nine-week period and between benchmarks assessments, which are administered three times a year, to alter the pace of content delivery in order to meet individual student learning needs. Teachers can also reorganize lesson plans if they notice that students require more time to master content.

Instruction

MDCPS has placed significant emphasis on building teacher capacity to meet the needs of all students, as evidenced by major instructional initiatives, such as the roll-out of guided reading at the elementary level and Creating Independence Through Student-owned Strategies (CRISS), an instructional strategy that focuses teachers on advancing learning and comprehension by building on students' prior knowledge of a subject. The district has also increased the sophistication of intervention programs by requiring staff to continuously review programs and improve upon them by employing a student-focused continuous improvement process.

The district has implemented guided reading across elementary schools. As a result, MDCPS teachers regularly assemble and re-assemble small, homogeneous groups of students (i.e., students achieving at similar levels) according to their progress on reading assessment results. Teachers are then able to target instruction to the particular needs of each student by rotating through each small group.

Another research-based strategy the district has adopted is CRISS, which is designed to teach students skills that allow them to organize their own thinking as they learn. The district has trained Improvement Zone teachers in CRISS. The Improvement Zone is a three-year project begun in 2006 that created a longer school day, an intensified professional development plan and a specific instructional approach for 39 schools that had chronically underperformed (20 elementary, 11 middle and eight high schools). The writing skills that students learn through CRISS carry across content areas and are designed to promote literacy in all subject areas. CRISS was part of the core training for Improvement Zone Schools, which have made significant gains in recent years.

In addition to focusing on instructional strategies, MDCPS has focused on how to appropriately identify interventions for students and what programs to use. Interventions are designed and managed through the student teacher team (ST2) process—a continuous improvement process that begins with school-based teams that monitor student data. ST2 teams then design specific intervention tiers—they determine the level and/or amount of intervention students need to succeed—for individual students and for small student groups.

Through the ST2 structure, the district has provided a number of intervention options. For example, elementary school teachers use Early Success, Soar to Success and Voyager Passport to provide additional reading support to struggling students. These three programs are supplementary programs purchased from a publisher that can be used to provide remedial support to struggling students. Middle and high school teachers most commonly use Read 180 and Read XL. Teachers also intervene with struggling students by re-teaching sessions during the school day and in optional after school and during Saturday tutoring sessions.

Assessment

The MDCPS internal assessment system includes district-mandated benchmark assessments given three times a year in reading, language arts and mathematics in third through 10th grade, as well as district-mandated writing exams for all students in first through 10th grade. In collaboration with the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the district went further to develop a bank of test questions that teachers may use to assess student mastery of content and skills in relation to the standards at all grade levels. Benchmark tests have been a cornerstone of the MDCPS assessment system. The benchmark assessment system provides key information to school leaders, teachers, regional staff and district administrators.

The MDCPS assessment management system, a combination of two web-based software tools, Edusoft and Cognos, provides teachers, school leaders and district administrators with access to comprehensive student achievement data. One of the most powerful functions of Cognos is its ability to provide users with customized information in what are called “data cubes.” Data cubes allow users to design unique queries to explore the relationship between key data points. For example, a principal may conduct a search for specific data on third-grade students who are English language learners to determine whether teachers are effectively teaching a particular math concept. The district-developed “test bank” provides a source for interim assessments three times a year and serves as a resource for teachers to create bi-weekly assessments at the school and classroom levels. Teachers use bi-weekly assessments to regularly monitor student learning. The superintendent and other district administrators report that the primary function of the benchmark and bi-weekly assessments is to provide teachers with a tool to talk about instruction and to better understand student learning needs—not to determine absolute performance.

At the regional and district levels, staff also access assessment student data through Cognos, as well as through the Strategic Management System—a district-based computer system for tracking key strategic goals. Through these systems, regional and district personnel may monitor student progress and guide the supports they deploy to schools according to need. Regular district data meetings are used to review student data and make decisions about how to use resources to best support Miami-Dade schools.

MDCPS data systems provide data to staff at all levels of the organization. The degree of access and the type of reports accessible depend on the needs of personnel at each organizational level. For example, teachers receive detailed data on each child in their classroom to inform their instruction. Principals can track school progress and investigate new data trends through Cognos. Regional and district personnel are able to view trends across schools and the entire district.

District Leadership

District governance and leadership, from goal-setting to implementation to evaluation must support the essential work of teaching and learning in schools. To keep all components of a district focused on student learning, research shows that district leadership must set clear strategic goals and hold the organization accountable for implementation.

MDCPS has established a mission that conveys a clear district purpose, first and foremost, promoting student achievement. A digitalized strategic plan, organized according to priority, allows district staff to monitor and measure departmental, school, regional or district-wide achievement toward goals on an ongoing basis. A district performance dashboard comprised of a series of scorecards at different levels of the district (e.g., central office departments, regions, schools) rolls up to the superintendent level and, ultimately, aligns to the strategic plan. Individual scorecards provide district and school leaders with specific goals, ongoing feedback and an opportunity to receive incentives for high performance.

Mission, Vision and Values

The district mission, “to provide the highest quality education so that all of our students are empowered to lead productive and fulfilling lives as lifelong learners and responsible citizens,” was developed with the involvement of a vast range of stakeholders, including district staff, school leaders, teachers, union representatives, students, parents and community members.

The superintendent and other district leaders sought extensive input from stakeholders through surveys, forums, workshops and committees. Throughout the input-gathering process, stakeholders developed a uniform understanding of the district’s “purpose.” District efforts to gather input, which continued for more than half a year, also then informed the development of the district’s strategic plan.

The district's mission then aligns to the district's strategic plan through five areas of focus: academic achievement, global competition, parent and community engagement, reform business practices, and recruitment and development of high-performing, diverse staff.

Strategic Planning

The district's strategic plan is a living, dynamic document with roots in multiple sources of data, the analysis of which helped district leaders determine key priorities. The district widely publicized both the strategic plan and the process for revision. Subsequent strategic plan reviews have incorporated ongoing input from district stakeholders. Furthermore, the district has become increasingly more sophisticated in using data to monitor progress against its strategic plan in recent years.

To lay the groundwork for the strategic planning process, district staff conducted an "environmental scan" to collect data and information on demographics, student achievement, enrollment growth, class size, fiscal constraints and safety. Through focus groups, district representatives gathered input from a range of stakeholders to inform strategic planning. These stakeholders included parents, teachers, instructional support personnel, principals, assistant principals, students, district and regional administrators, unions and employee associations, business leaders, community leaders and councils.

Beyond conducting the environmental scan and focus groups, MDCPS developed a computer-based system to ensure that the superintendent and his cabinet frequently review data and refine strategic goals as necessary. District cabinet members participate in benchmark meetings to review progress towards key strategic initiatives through this "Strategic Management System," a database that contains all of the district's strategic goals and the budgets allocated to those goals. In addition, the system contains action plans that describe how budgets will be spent to reach the related goals. Over the last year, the district incrementally upgraded the Strategic Management System to include performance data on all staff and budgeting. Staff are able to produce reports from the Strategic Management System that are aligned to the district's five strategic goals and that have data aggregated by quarter.

In addition to the Strategic Management System, MDCPS has put communication channels in place to ensure that key district initiatives and activities are aligned with the strategic plan. For example, an Instructional Council, comprised of cabinet members and regional superintendents, meets monthly to examine new information that is relevant to current instructional initiatives and emerging student needs. This group serves as the superintendent's think tank, according to former Superintendent Rudy Crew.

The district has also set-up monthly ComStat meetings, sometimes called the district's "nerve center," during which the superintendent, cabinet and cabinet staff monitor immediate operational needs in the field and deploy resources to deal with critical issues in a timely and immediate manner.

Performance and Accountability

To hold staff and the entire organization accountable for progress toward strategic plan goals, MDCPS sets district-wide organizational goals, which are tied to goals for each district office, region and school. In this way, the contributions of a single principal to his or her goals are also a contribution to a larger district-wide goal. Performance goals for district personnel and school administrators are recorded and communicated through an electronic reporting system called a "dashboard."

While staff evaluations occur annually, supervisors at all levels give feedback to their employees quarterly by benchmarking their progress towards strategic goals through a scorecard process—a set of measurable goals, not unlike a report card. Scorecard evaluation has been common in the business world

for some time and has made inroads to districts in the last 10 years. Staff performance data then rolls up from the teacher level to the school level to the regional level to the district level and to the cabinet level. District leaders report the final district-level results back down again, so that everyone in the system is aware of the entire system's current performance.

The superintendent's performance scorecard, which measures key performance data aggregated from all departments and schools, resides at the top of the district dashboard. Department personnel and regional personnel have similar scorecards that are focused on those aspects of the larger strategic plan that they implement. Through the Strategic Management System (described above), the office of strategic planning collects data on an ongoing basis and review it quarterly.

The district has also established a scorecard process at the school level. Performance goals for each principal align with the strategic plan and are established at the beginning of the school year between the principal and their regional supervisor. School administrator score cards differ at the elementary, middle and high school levels because students are graded differently in high school, and only in high school is graduation rate a measurable factor. The school leader's performance plan contains three weighted components: 1) the score card, which aligns with the strategic plan goals (60 percent); 2) school targets, such as attendance, suspension and parent involvement (30 percent); and, 3) individual professional growth targets (10 percent).

Based on district staff and principal performance, as indicated on their scorecard, the district provides incentives for student achievement and school performance. The district provides financial incentives—up to 7 percent of an employee's salary for a "perfect scorecard"—to district and regional administrators, as well as to principals and assistant principals.

To help district, regional and school staff achieve their scorecard targets and to ensure that they continue to improve, the district has established regular meetings, usually quarterly, at each level of the district (central office, region and school) to review progress. At the district and regional levels, the ComStat team and the Instructional Council review quarterly benchmarking results to continuously identify areas for district-wide improvement. At the school level, personnel have been trained in the "Plan-Do-Study-Act" cycle, a common, continuous planning model, to drive the school-level improvement plan. At the classroom level, the district requires staff to use a "continuous improvement model" to manage student interventions.

Operations and Support Systems

Research shows that the design and implementation of district operations and systems directly affects how well the district can effectively support teaching and learning. MDCPS has put in place specific financial controls to ensure that the district spends funds in alignment with the strategic plan, prioritizing funding according to strategic plan priorities. With respect to the organization of the district, regional offices serve as the link between the district and its schools, with struggling schools across regions that comprise the "School Improvement Zone" receiving an additional layer of support.

Financial Allocation of Resources

Financial decisions in MDCPS are linked to the strategic plan and demonstrate support for student learning. Specific controls have been put in place to ensure that financial allocations align with the strategic plan and district, regional and school priorities.

District budgeting is controlled, in part, through the Strategic Management System, which designates financial allocations for each action step in the strategic plan. The system allows personnel at the regional and district levels to ensure that budgets align with strategic priorities. The district evaluates budget

allocations, measuring what effect particular financial investments have had on raising student performance.

Regional office staff support school-level budgeting by consulting with each principal and with the central office staff that approve school budgets. Regional budget directors compare computer-generated recommended budgets based on student populations with what principals actually request with the new budgeting software. Regional staff can, therefore, better analyze whether principals' budget decisions make sense.

The district has also improved controls over school funding by introducing computer-based systems that allow principals to develop budgets within set spending parameters. For example, principals can create multiple budgeting scenarios much more easily than previous paper-based systems.

Organizational Structures and Management

The district is divided into six regional centers based on geography. Within each region, series of feeder patterns comprised of elementary and middle schools feed into high schools. In addition, the Improvement Zone (the Zone), comprised of academically struggling schools in the district, offers an additional layer of support to schools across regions that require the most assistance. A range of personnel are in place that work with both the central and regional offices and the schools in order to support school operations, teaching and learning, as described below.

Established in 2004, the Zone includes 39 historically struggling schools (20 elementary, 11 middle and 8 high schools). Zone schools remain part of their home region. Zone schools have less autonomy than other schools in the district to determine curriculum, intervention programs and assessment schedules. Zone schools also receive additional supports like an extended school day and school year, transition academies for students in fifth, sixth, eighth and ninth grades, university and community advisory boards, student teacher support teams, and a professional development team.

Across the district, regional office staff support key school functions, such as curriculum, assessment, operations, staffing and budget. In many cases, regional offices must collaborate with central district offices to secure necessary resources. This structure ensures that regional offices play a key role in keeping contact with schools and providing the first line of support and oversight. Regions also communicate with the rest of the district through frequent ComStat and Instructional Council meetings.

Support for Teaching and Learning

The district provides staff with a range of professional development opportunities, including a focus on inter-staff collaboration at the district, regional and school levels. Professional development is offered in a variety of formats specifically designed to move strategic initiatives forward.

During the past three years, the district has made a significant effort to build professional development systems that promote dialogue and learning communities in MDCPS. The superintendent encourages staff to focus on professional development, collaborative learning and professional learning communities.

Central to collaborative learning as a form of professional development, ComStat and "data chats"—district-level meetings to discuss student achievement data and other district-wide data reports—have built staff professional capacity to use student data to drive decision making.

At the school level, staff training on "continuous improvement," meaning selecting specific goals for student improvement based on data and then developing action plans and then measuring progress, began with Zone schools and then expanded to other schools. As leadership teams developed the capacity to

analyze their own data, professional development shifted from a centralized decision-making model toward a school-based model. In anticipation of this shift, the district developed a system for handling school-based professional development requests. School leader and teacher requests for professional development now must include clear rationale for how learning activities specifically meet student needs.

In addition to collaborations and school-based training activities, the district offers a range of clearly defined professional development delivered through three primary formats:

- “Critical mass training,” intensive training for all teachers in a specific grade level on core learning objectives in a certain subject area.
- “Turnkey professional development,” training a representative from each school who, in turn, conducts training for staff at the school site.
- “Job-embedded professional development,” learning through daily on-the-job practice, cultivating the mindset that staff professional development is an integral element of classroom teaching and not an ancillary activity. Job-embedded activities, including mentoring, coaching and peer and book study groups, are frequently collaborative and offer an opportunity for teachers to participate in structured conversation, reflection and inquiry.

For more information about Miami-Dade's best practices, please visit www.broadprize.org and/or contact John Schuster, chief communications officer, at jschuster@dadeschools.net or 305-995-1000.