



Miami-Dade County Public Schools

District Profile*:

- Rank among U.S. school districts (by size)**: 4
- Number of schools: 435
- Number of students: 347,133
- Number of teachers: 20,322
- Per pupil expenditures***: \$8,190

Superintendent: Alberto Carvalho was appointed superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools in September 2008. In his 20 years of experience in M-DCPS, Carvalho has held a variety of positions within the district, including teacher, assistant principal, public information officer, and associate superintendent with responsibility over intergovernmental affairs, grants, Title I and community services.

Rudolph “Rudy” Crew served as superintendent of M-DCPS from July 2004 until September 2008. Previously, Crew served as chancellor of the New York City Board of Education, and as superintendent at both Tacoma Public Schools and Sacramento City Unified School District.

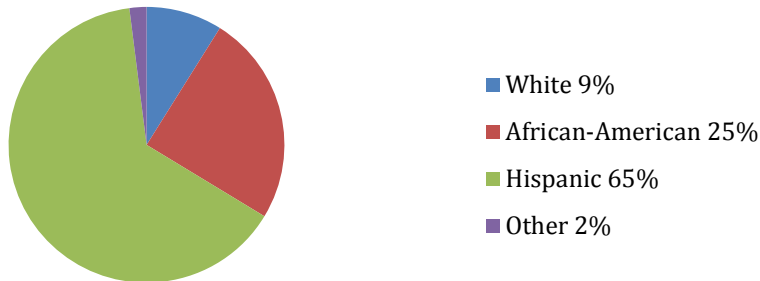
Governance: Nine-member school board, elected by geographic region to serve staggered four-year terms

Union: United Teachers of Dade

Student Characteristics:

- Percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price school lunch: 70%
- Percent of students designated as English language learners: 19%

Student Demographics:



*2010/11 data, unless noted otherwise

**2009/10 data

***2007/08 data

Student Achievement

- In 2010, Miami-Dade outperformed other Florida districts that serve students with similar family incomes in reading and math at all school levels (elementary, middle and high school), according to The Broad Prize methodology.
- In 2010, the percent of Miami-Dade's Hispanic students performing at the highest achievement levels (levels 4 and 5) on the state reading and math assessments ranked in the top third compared with Hispanic students in other Florida districts at all school levels. In addition, the percent of Miami-Dade's African-American students performing at the highest achievement levels ranked in the top third compared with African-American students in other Florida districts in math at all school levels and in reading at the elementary and high school levels.
- Between 2007 and 2010, Miami-Dade was more successful than at least 70 percent of other Florida districts at increasing the percent of low-income students who performed at the highest achievement levels (levels 4 and 5) in reading and math at the elementary and high school levels. For example, the percentage of low-income students performing at the highest achievement levels increased by 10 percentage points in high school math, while the average increase for other Florida districts was 6 percentage points.
- Between 2007 and 2010, Miami-Dade increased participation rates on ACT and Advanced Placement exams for all students, as well as for African-American and Hispanic students taken separately. For example, ACT participation rates for African-American students increased by 21 percentage points during this period.

Exemplary Practices Related to Student Achievement

The superintendent has provided skillful leadership that has fueled innovation, restored fiscal health, and enhanced stakeholder support.

When Alberto Carvalho became Miami-Dade’s superintendent in 2008, the district was improving academically but was in dire straits financially. School board meetings were marathon sessions marked by so much rancor that parents stopped bringing their children. The district’s strategic plan was also criticized as being too unfocused.

Carvalho may have been an insider in Miami-Dade Public Schools—he began working for the system two decades ago as a science teacher—but he was interested in looking outside for inspiration. To get guidance on embedding strong business practices into district operations, Carvalho took administrators and executive staff to visit successful businesses like Apple and Dell, and he sought the advice of local business leaders. To generate the external support needed to pursue reform, he leaned on leaders who had clout in the community, created partnerships with local philanthropies and arts organizations, and continued the district’s practice of seeking stakeholder input through a variety of advisory panels and town halls.

Carvalho has said that he viewed the district’s tough economic situation as an opportunity to innovate. His administration decreased operating revenue from \$3 billion in 2007-08 to \$2.8 billion in 2009-10. That included major cuts in the central office, where many employees were seen as not directly helping to boost student achievement—so they were sent out to schools where they might do so. “We did not allow the recession to go to waste,” Carvalho said.

The relationship between the school board and the superintendent has improved, with differences being hashed out respectfully, well before a public vote. And the strategic plan created for the years 2009 through 2014 was modeled on best practices in strategic planning, using examples of strategic plans from effective organizations, and streamlined into a set of specific, measurable goals very clearly centered on student achievement.

External outreach has paid off for the district. The amount Miami-Dade receives from grants has increased from \$329 million in 2006 to \$753 million in 2009. A foundation created by the school board in 2008 enables funding of various innovative initiatives, including Success Academy, an intensive course of weekend tutoring to prepare students at struggling schools for the state assessment; Parent Academy, a slate of free classes and workshops for the community; and Cultural Passport, which provides students with access to arts activities.

The district empowers everyone—from administrators to educators to students—with a wealth of performance data and tools to improve.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools builds its success on a foundation of information. A comprehensive store of data from standards-aligned assessments are housed in an online warehouse that is easily accessible to educators, who can build a variety of reports by school, class, teacher or student, or in other groupings, such as students with a specific disability. The district provides training so that educators know how to use the data strategically to plan lessons, group students, select interventions and monitor the effectiveness of instructional strategies.

As well, data form the basis of formalized, required interactions between individuals. For example, five times a year, administrators at underperforming schools meet with the superintendent and his cabinet through a continuous improvement process called Data/COM (Data Assessment and Technical Assistance/Coordination of Management). What ensues is a rapid-fire dialogue based on performance data about the ways schools have attempted to boost student achievement and whether they have succeeded or fallen short. Together, principals and the executive team then plot resource allocation and programming to continue to address areas of need until results improve.

Regional superintendents bring principals together for their own Data/COM conversations. And at the school level, administrators, instructional coaches, teachers and students participate in data dialogues as well—attempts to understand individualized strengths and weaknesses and plan meaningful and effective strategies so that all involved can continuously improve.

In Miami-Dade, student achievement data are also used to determine what kinds of professional development should be offered to teachers—for example, if scores show that one school’s fourth graders are having trouble with reading comprehension, their teachers might get visits from a coach who models lessons on the topic and monitors their progress. Fifty percent of a principal’s evaluation is based on student performance, and leaders who are not successful by that measure are demoted. Student data are also used to design a personalized supplemental course of online study for every child in the district, which can be accessed at any time, from any computer.

Schools with a history of poor performance have undergone aggressive turnaround measures.

In 2008, the state of Florida threatened to take over nine Miami-Dade high schools. In response, the district created an Education Transformation Office to turn around those schools itself and, in time, 10 more. Carvalho started by holding town hall meetings armed with data intended to shock communities into understanding the dire need for intensive reform strategies—such as the surprising share of high schoolers performing at a middle school level.

Student performance data were used to determine which principals should be asked to lead the transformation schools. This process sometimes struck a sensitive note, Carvalho said, in cases where African-American school leaders were replaced with members of other races at historically black schools. The district moved out ineffective teachers, identified teachers whose students had performed better than predicted, provided incentives for them to go to the takeover schools, and brought in Teach For America to increase the teaching talent pool.

Elementary schools deemed “fragile” because of low student performance were focused on as well—many with significant personnel changes combined with efforts to help remaining teachers dramatically improve. Central office leaders, including area superintendents, visited the takeover and fragile schools frequently, and they all received extra instructional coaching and professional development. Monitoring is especially heavy at the beginning of the school year to ensure schools get off to a right start, and administrators don’t hesitate to make personnel changes into the school year, if needed.

Memoranda of understanding were reached with the teachers union so that the schools could take new approaches to schedules and common planning time and follow more prescriptive instructional models. To keep students engaged, electives were not pushed out by academic classes. Carvalho has since personally conducted regular Data/COM meetings with principals at the takeover schools.

Access to accelerated learning opportunities has been expanded for traditionally underrepresented students.

In recent years, Miami-Dade has accomplished a significant culture shift, increasing opportunities for accelerated learning for underrepresented groups of students, such as the district's many low-income immigrants and language minorities. By geographically expanding school choice options to be more evenly available across the county, Miami-Dade made programs such as competitive magnet programs more easily accessible for all students. A program called Education for Gifted and All Learners, started in 2005, revamped and expanded gifted classes. High schools have increased the number of honors and Advanced Placement classes they offer to a minimum of 10, and they are expected to add courses each year. Many went from six periods a day to eight to make room for more credits, course options and interventions.

Eligibility guidelines for students to access accelerated classes have been eased. Principals are expected to ensure that underrepresented students actually enroll in them and to assign teachers they know will be particularly encouraging to students new to advanced classes. Newer AP teachers typically are paired with a mentor teacher experienced in AP for regular coaching and support.

At Southwest Miami High School, whose increase in AP course offerings and participation has been accompanied by a 40 percent increase in pass rates, and which has moved from a "C" grade from the state to an "A," teachers are expected to always look toward moving students to the next level of coursework. "Everyone needs to screen at all times," says Principal James Haj.

Administrators call parents over the summer to tell them their children should be enrolling in AP classes. If they don't get a response, the students are simply enrolled. AP teachers are sent to other schools to watch effective teaching in action and to College Board trainings over the summer.