

The 2012 Broad Prize

About the Winner

Miami-Dade County Public Schools Florida

DISTRICT PROFILE

Superintendent

Alberto Carvalho was appointed superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) in September 2008. 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 the Sacramento City Unified School District.

Governance

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

Teachers Union

United Teachers of Dade



\$4.3 billion
Annual Budget



\$8,512
Per Pupil Expenditures



4
Rank Among U.S. School Districts



349,664
Number of Students



21,646
Number of Teachers



435
Number of Schools



21%
Students Designated as English Language Learners



74%
Students Eligible for Free and Reduced-Price School Lunch



65.9% Hispanic
23.9% Black
8.3% White
1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander
0.6% Other

(based on 2011/12 school year data)

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A greater percentage of Hispanic and black students reached advanced academic levels in Miami-Dade than in other urban districts in Florida. In 2011, the percentage of Miami-Dade's Hispanic students performing at the highest achievement levels (Levels 4 and 5) ranked in the top 30 percent statewide compared with Hispanic students in other Florida districts. Miami-Dade's Hispanic students outperformed their peers in reading and math at all school levels (elementary, middle, high school) and in elementary and middle school science. Between 2008 and 2011, Miami-Dade was also more successful than at least 70 percent of Florida districts at increasing the percentage of black students who performed at the highest achievement levels in elementary and high school reading, math and science. For example, the percentage of Miami-Dade's black students performing at the highest achievement levels in elementary school math increased by 6 percentage points, while the average increase for other Florida districts was 4 percentage points.

Black and Hispanic graduation rates increased faster in Miami-Dade than in other urban districts nationally. Miami-Dade's black and Hispanic graduation rates, as shown by the average of three nationally recognized graduation rate estimation methods, both increased 14 percentage points from 2006 to 2009.

Miami-Dade increased the percentage and scores of students participating in college-readiness exams more than other urban districts nationally. Between 2008 and 2011, participation rates and scores on the SAT exam simultaneously increased for all students in Miami-Dade, as well as for black and Hispanic students separately. For example, SAT participation by Hispanic students increased 6 percentage points, and SAT scores increased 15 score points during this period.

Miami-Dade outperformed other similar Florida districts at all school levels. In 2011, Miami-Dade students outperformed students in other Florida districts that serve students with similar family incomes in reading, math and science at all school levels (elementary, middle, high school), according to The Broad Prize methodology.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICES RELATED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The district is able to continuously improve teaching, learning and operations because it has a strong data-driven performance culture in which teachers and administrators rely on in-depth data analyses to drive improvements.

While many districts keep careful track of student assessment data, Miami-Dade has done a particularly good job of using this information to empower students, teachers and administrators to improve performance each year. Administrators and teachers use student data to make their instructional decisions and are savvy at accessing, interpreting and using data to plan and adjust instructional strategies when necessary and re-teach until students meet or exceed learning standards.

Administrators routinely pore over data such as interim assessments in reading, math and science or absences and tardies by school, class or student. Many of them engage in the district's Data/COM process, a unique problem-solving strategy to help challenged schools improve their student performance. During Data/COM sessions, leaders of struggling schools meet with the superintendent and his cabinet to hash through real-time assessment data from their schools and determine what that data reveals about the challenges and obstacles they must overcome. The group brainstorms options about how to address the issues and determines which will have the best probability of success.

In Data/COMs, leaders may consider school-level challenges that range from stemming the dropout rate to ensuring that kindergartners come to school ready to learn. The leaders then debate potential solutions, including what has worked in other schools in the district and nation, and provide the school with an immediate infusion of tailored resources to implement those solutions quickly.

Across the district, administrators, principals, teachers and students also regularly engage in collaborative "data chats"—conversations about the strengths and challenges of individual students, teachers and schools—as well as conversations about teaching and learning objectives, all informed by real-time data, and all seeking new ways to improve. Administrators have data chats with principals, principals have data chats with teachers, and teachers have data chats with students. They review data reflecting student, teacher and school-level progress and use them to set goals and identify strategies to continuously improve. The point is to help each individual understand what he or she needs to do to reach the next level of performance.

Teachers and administrators also receive training on how to use the district's comprehensive data warehouse—which allows them to run color-coded reports on everything from grades to attendance to test scores to community service hours, at the school, classroom or individual student level. Teachers can choose among prepared reports or run their own customized versions to pinpoint individual and group needs and figure out steps that should be taken to accomplish specific goals like helping students acquire missing credits or increasing reading comprehension scores. Teachers and administrators say the data warehouse is easy to use and suits their needs well. A web portal also allows parents, students, employees and community members to access relevant data online.

District leaders have worked to create a district-wide culture that is focused on achieving results, continuously improving and providing students with equal opportunities to learn.

District leaders have modeled their management styles and strategies after successful leaders of other organizations, both public and private (including Apple, IBM and Toyota), that keep their eye focused on results, accountability and efficiency.

For example, when new district initiatives have been rolled out, employees found that district leaders communicated a clear and compelling vision, set high expectations and required accountability for performance. Employees report that this has helped create a culture within the district that values student and programmatic results, as well as continuous improvement and innovation.

The superintendent has also worked hard to communicate frequently and maintain excellent relations with the Miami-Dade school board, which often reaches unanimous decisions that are consistent with the superintendent's strategic recommendations.

The district ensures that as many resources as possible reach the classroom by being financially sound, implementing prudent financial planning processes and displaying strong fiscal accountability.

In 2008, the district's finances were in rough shape. Its unrestricted financial reserves were just \$5.9 million out of an annual budget of \$2.8 billion, and its credit rating from Moody's had fallen significantly, resulting in higher interest

rates. Carvalho immediately implemented an array of strategies that have successfully turned around the district's financial standing, even in the face of sharp state budget cuts.

The district balanced its books by implementing cost-saving measures and seeking new sources of funding from the federal government, private foundations and businesses. From 2007-08 through 2010-11, the district secured an average of \$270 million in grants and donations each year. Meanwhile, the district imposed a hiring freeze and saved money by rerouting buses, rebidding service contracts and reducing energy consumption. In addition, it has moved to an online payroll system and begun using electronic rather than paper reports. Central office staff has been reduced, and most travel has been eliminated.

Miami-Dade has worked hard to minimize the impact of budget cuts on the classroom. All spending decisions are assessed through the prism of the district's central goal: boosting student achievement. Funds have been protected for district priorities such as magnet schools, charter schools and pay-for-performance programs, as well as arts and cultural programs.

As a result of these decisions, M-DCPS' unrestricted reserves reached \$171 million in 2010-2011, and its contingency reserve stood at \$85 million, or 3.5 percent of revenue. In 2011, both Moody's and Standard and Poor's gave the district high debt ratings and found their reserves stable and adequate. The district has dramatically increased its reserves even as budget allocations have shrunk.

The district has a clear and well-articulated strategic planning process that engages the broader community, as well as employees, and incorporates current research on effective strategies.

Miami-Dade engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process that called on all stakeholders to think broadly about the district's identity, priorities and goals. At the start, district leaders defined student achievement as the plan's central objective. They then organized themselves in support of this objective around four basic district-wide pillars: education; student, parent, and community engagement; school and district leadership; and financial efficiency and stability.

Stakeholders were asked three questions: What is the district doing well? What could it be doing better? What are its three greatest upcoming challenges?

Input was generated at a board-superintendent retreat, through focus groups of teachers, administrators, parents and other stakeholders and through surveys to community members.

The resulting strategic plan is based on research and evidence—citing studies that show what works for other districts and using needs assessment data from teachers, parents and the community—that substantiate the plan's strategies to strengthen the district's four pillars. It is visionary, well-articulated and routinely monitored by the school board, superintendent and cabinet to ensure that it is being properly implemented and is optimal at guiding the district to reach its student achievement goals.

The strategic plan includes annual district performance objectives, specific plans for achieving them and benchmarks for monitoring progress. The initiatives in the plan, and the resources allocated to implement those initiatives, are all evaluated for their effectiveness in reaching the central objective: student achievement. Questions like whether resources are “cost-effective” and lead to a “return on investment”—meaning greater student achievement—are also considered at every turn.

As part of his own performance evaluation, the superintendent must report on progress toward meeting strategic goals listed in the plan. As new student assessment data comes in, the results are evaluated in light of the strategic plan. If the assessment results indicate that a particular strategy in the plan is not working, or if new ideas emerge regarding how to better meet targets, the district shifts its practices accordingly. ■



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