

January 2012

WLRN Script

Good evening. I'm Dr. Larry Feldman, Vice Chair of the School Board and the District 9 School Board Member wishing you a very happy, healthy, and blessed New Year. As we start the second half of this school year, I'm pleased to be able to share with you some wonderful news that our teachers, students, parents, and administrators have been able to achieve

First, Miami-Dade County Public Schools has outperformed neighboring counties, as well as the State, in the percentage of high schools with performance grades of '**A**' according to data released by the Florida Department of Education. Our District doubled the number of A's from 15 to 31, increased the number of B's by 33 percent, decreased the number of D's by 43 percent and eliminated all high schools that were labeled with an 'F'. Our principals, teachers and students are to be commended for this high level achievement and deserve the respect and congratulations that accompanies a job well done.

Under the State's expanded high school grading system, student outcomes including graduation rates, as well as, student participation and performance in advanced placement coursework were taken into consideration when calculating school grades. In District 9, I am very proud to report the following high schools achievements: **Coral Reef Senior High School** maintained their '**A**' rating; **Miami Palmetto Senior High School** returned to their '**A**' rating; and **Homestead Senior and South Dade Senior High Schools** each achieved a "**C**" rating. No school has it easy, whether it is maintaining its hold on high achievement or trying to overcome the societal barriers for which

they are not responsible. There are so many factors beyond the control of our teachers that makes the teaching and learning process even more difficult than it normally is – and when that happens, student performance and high level achievement is even more meaningful. It is with that force of determination, passion, and unyielding expectations that I salute the students and staff at **Miami Southridge Senior High School** as they earned their place on the top stage for their **“A”** rating - up from an “F” in 2009. Congratulations to each of these schools and the many others in our district as they all performed at levels that exceeded other’s expectations.

Additional positive news from the Department of Education listed Miami-Dade County Public Schools’ **graduation rate** at an all-time high of **77.7 %** for the 2010-2011 academic year. This is a **5.6 %** increase over last year’s rate AND the highest graduation rate M-DCPS has achieved since the Florida Department of Education began tracking graduation statistics with modern methods in the late 1990’s. This year, while the State of Florida increased its graduation rate by only one percent our District’s rate of improvement dramatically increased by nearly six percent.

The improvement in the district’s graduation rate and achievement levels were made possible by a detailed plan that addressed the new high school accountability standards. This plan included additional instructional periods in the school day for course acceleration, online credit recovery opportunities and the District’s attention to a smoother transition to high school academics from the middle school. Finally, a comprehensive summer school program offered our students opportunities to make up coursework and receive individual instructional time.

Can we take a moment to celebrate, yes ... but we will not rest until we reach a 100% graduation rate, that's correct, 100% of our students must graduate because the student we leave behind might be yours or mine and that is unacceptable. So we will continue to develop high leverage strategies to meet the needs of **ALL** students thus making them ready for postsecondary institutions, careers in the work force or enter the military. You see, **"failure is not an option"** in this school district. We have the will and we have the staff and we will find success for all students ... for that is our mission and our calling.

Let me remind you lest we forget. Just a short 3 years ago, this district was in financial despair with only \$4 million in reserves to support a \$6 billion budget... and the state was hungry to take us over. The district was at an instructional loss and the state threatened to take over our failing schools, 9 of them. Our credibility among the community was at best hanging on by a thread and our unions were disappointed by the contracts we inherited.

Here we are 36 months later: our central office reduced by 58%, our increased graduation rates and State performance ratings at their highest levels, our financial outlook, while losing almost \$2 billion in revenue, rated stable by Moody's, our food and nutrition department in the black, overtime abuse slashed and stopped, procurement renegotiating contracts at significant discounts, health needs self insured and saved \$73 million, and our administrative salaries and expenditures under control.

All this come on the heels of solid reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAPE, which

I shared a few months back. Florida Commissioner of Education Gerard Robinson recently noted Miami-Dade's progress, saying, "Miami-Dade students scored higher than the average of students in large cities (populations over 250,000) both in terms of scale scores and percentage scoring above basic in reading for grades 4 and 8, and in grade 4 mathematics." Once again, congratulations to our students, teachers and administrators for this achievement. Even as we struggle to overcome funding issues, the quality of education being delivered by our teachers continues to rise.

And one more bit of exciting news – just as I shared previously about the hundreds of students applying for the new grades 6 to 12 **Mays Conservatory** which is linked to the University of Miami's Frost School of Music, the new **Medical Academy for Science and Technology (MAST) @ Homestead**, opened its doors on Tuesday, January 3, 2012 on the site of the former James Archer Smith Hospital. The school is located at 1220 N.W. 1st Avenue in Homestead. This new state-of-the-art educational facility has approximately 800 student stations and provides educational strands for students who want to pursue pharmaceutical, physical therapy and biomedical fields.

MAST @ Homestead is the first medical academy located in the South Miami-Dade area, the second Medical Magnet High School in the State and one of only a handful in the nation. The school's mission is to cultivate the next generation of health care professionals through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) while increasing their commitment to community service. Congratulations to Region Center South and Principal Greg Zawyer and the entire MAST faculty, staff, and students who devoted countless hours and effort seeing this dream become a reality! The students said it best.... Let the competition begin, this time -- WE are the leaders!

Having just shared what there is to be excited about.... the New Year also brings with it a new Legislative session. Some education related bills that you must keep an eye on:

- HB 4057, sponsored by Rep. Metz, would eliminate the requirement of one semester of PE in middle schools.
- SB 416, sponsored by Sen. Detert, is related to creating a ban on texting while driving –a proposed amendment to this bill seeks to establish a penalty for driving while texting in school zones.
- SB 512, by Senator Bogdanoff, modifies the penalties associated with class size reduction and non-compliance.
- SB 980, expands the allowable use of the current surtax available to local school districts to include maintenance and repair costs which would go far in assisting us with our \$1.7 billion maintenance needs for our aging buildings.
- SB 416 and SB 980 are amendments that would greatly help our district in weathering the financial crisis that looms ahead.

I'd also like to take a moment to ask you to support the Governor's recent pledge to return \$1 billion to K-12 education in the upcoming budget. You might remember education suffered the largest blow in last year's budget cuts from the Legislature with a \$1.3 billion cut to funding. The return of most of that funding is a small step in the right direction, especially upon learning that Florida was just named #11 in the Education Week Yearly report card. The drop from its #5 ranking was due, in large part, to the lack of adequate K-12 funding by the state, in fact, the state received an 'F' in funding its education program.

Just a few days ago, we celebrated the birthday of an American hero in Civil Rights. The legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us that we must all stand firm against social injustice, civil inequality, and acts against humanity. That today, more than ever, we must strive to make words like tolerance, acceptance and understanding genuine daily acts. I'd like to thank several community organizations who organized events in honor of Dr. Martin L King Jr. The Homestead/Florida City Breakfast, the West Perrine Community Development Council's Parade, and Congresswoman Frederica Wilson's 5000 Role Models 19th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Unity Scholarship Breakfast. The civility of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is not just a celebration of a month out of the year, but as demonstrated by Dr. King, a lifetime and a life.

Lastly, some District 9 News....Please mark your calendar for my next **Monthly Coffee n' Conversation** which will be held on January 31st at Perrine Elementary and my next **District 9 Town Hall and Student Awards Ceremony** on February 28th at Southridge Senior High School.

Please stay tuned for pictures from events and happenings throughout the last month and for information on how to visit us on Facebook and follow me on Twitter.

Have a fun learning day.