



NEWS

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CONTACT: Harvey Bennett
Communications Director
850-222-5052, ext. 20

CAN MIAMI-DADE SCHOOLS TEACH FLORIDA A LESSON? *District is Outperforming the State*

TALLAHASSEE — Miami-Dade County schools are making significant gains – double those made by the state as a whole – in improving reading and math scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The reasons why could be key to increasing student achievement in all Florida public schools, especially among black and Hispanic students, according to a Florida TaxWatch report.

The report, by the government watchdog group's Center for Educational Performance and Accountability, is based on 2005 FCAT scores that show the percent of students reaching proficiency in each grade in both reading and math increased 64-points across all grades in Miami-Dade, compared to a statewide average gain of 32 points.

The report notes that it's unclear what is responsible for Miami-Dade schools' gains but that it is particularly significant in view of the district's historically dismal performance – no urban district in the state had performed worse.

"The ultimate success of the state is going to rely on the Miami-Dade School Districts' improvement," said Betty Coxe, Executive Director of the Center. "There's plenty of preliminary information to suggest that the approach taken in Miami-Dade is working. We'll need to look specifically to see why and how to replicate the success," she said.

In 2004, prior to the 2005 FCAT tests, Miami-Dade School Superintendent Rudolph F. "Rudy" Crew grouped 39 failing schools into a School Improvement Zone and devoted increased resources in 17 ways to push academic improvement. Those actions included intensive support for teachers and students, a one-hour extension of the school day with ten extra days a year, and a focus on literacy in grades Kindergarten through 5th.

The district also stressed increasing teacher effectiveness through professional development and salary incentives.

The Miami-Dade School District overall, doubled the percentage gains of the state with 28 points in reading versus 12 points statewide and 36 points in math versus 20 statewide average.

Florida TaxWatch recommends that policymakers determine what is happening in the Miami-Dade schools that can be used statewide to accelerate student achievement to levels that will help all children reach proficiency in the shortest amount of time possible.

“The unmet challenge in urban education has always been to create change across an entire school system. The standard we set for our work is whether we are improving learning for every child in every school on every day with every dollar we have to spend,” said Dr. Crew. “It’s invaluable to have a respected, independent organization, such as Florida TaxWatch, make its own evaluation of how we measure up to that standard.”

The report also notes the relationship between student achievement and future workforce needs.

“We must pay close attention to the quality of tomorrow’s workforce,” said Coxe. “Miami-Dade and Florida as a state have the opportunity to develop a strong workforce that can compete effectively in a global, knowledge-based economy. That depends in part though on our ability to raise the achievement of all students to heretofore-unprecedented levels.”

Florida’s future workforce will be one of the most diverse in the nation. The state’s student population is 51.2% minority. Student achievement among black and Hispanic student populations lags behind the achievement of white students.

The Miami-Dade School District has Florida’s largest and most diverse student population, with 90% of its students being minorities.

The TaxWatch report notes that unless the achievement gap in the Miami-Dade School District is closed, the same gap in the state of Florida will remain. There are national implications as well. The report notes that Florida educates one of every 20 students in the nation and has seven of the largest 25 school districts in the country.

Florida TaxWatch notes that further research is needed to examine what each Miami-Dade school did differently in 2005 than in 2004, particularly with regard to teacher effectiveness.

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The Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability produces research and makes recommendations regarding issues pertaining to educational policies/practices and fiscal accountability toward improved financial and student performance in Florida’s pre-K-12 schools.

Florida TaxWatch is a private, non-profit, non-partisan research institute that over its 26 year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens’ hard-earned tax dollars. Our mission is to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and education on government revenues, expenditures, taxation, public policies and programs and to increase the productivity and accountability of Florida Government. On the web at www.floridataxwatch.org