



STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN FLORIDA'S LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICT
Miami-Dade School District Holds the Key to Closing Florida's Achievement Gap

Highlights

Something important is happening in the Miami-Dade School District (MDS).

On the 2005 FCAT, the district outperformed the state in the gain in the percentage of students reaching proficiency in both math and reading. This is particularly remarkable in view of the district's historically dismal performance – no urban district in the state had performed worse.

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test results indicate that, between 2004 and 2005:

◆ **Miami-Dade School District, overall, doubled the percentage gains of the state**—the percent of students reaching proficiency in each grade in both reading and math increased 64 points across all grades (28 in reading and 36 in math), compared to a statewide average percentage point gained over all grades of 32 points (12 in reading and 20 in math).

◆ *At the elementary level*, the district gained 20 percentage points in reading compared to the state's 9 percentage point gain and 16 points in math compared to the state's 9 percentage point gain.

◆ *At the middle school level*, the district gained 5 percentage points in reading compared to the state's 1 percentage point gain and 12 points in math compared to the state's 7 percentage point gain.

◆ *At the high school level*, the district gained 3 percentage points in reading compared to the state's 2 percentage point gain and 8 points in math compared to the state's 4 percentage point gain.

◆ The percentage of students in third grade (statewide) achieving proficiency in reading rose one percentage point—from 66% in 2004 to 67% in 2005. At this rate of gain, all of Florida's third graders will not be reading on grade level until the year 2048, or 42 years from now.* Over the same year, the percentage of third grade students in Miami-Dade School District (MDS) achieving proficiency in reading rose 4 percentage points—from 57% to 61%. At this rate of gain, all of MDS's third graders will be reading on grade level in the year 2015.

◆ The percentage of students in sixth grade (statewide) achieving proficiency in math rose one percentage point—from 46% in 2004 to 47% in 2005. At this rate of gain, all of Florida's sixth graders will not be achieving at grade level until the year 2058, or 52 years from now.* Over that same year, the percentage of sixth grade students in MDS achieving proficiency in math rose 5 percentage points—from 35% to 40%. At this rate of gain, all of MDS's sixth graders will be achieving on grade level in math in the year 2017.

While MDS overall proficiency results in reading and math were not yet at the state average, they are gaining fast. **It is unclear what is responsible for the large 2005 FCAT gains in MDS.** In order to determine this, we need to look beyond the average test scores of the district as examined in this preliminary report.

Whatever is working to raise student achievement in Florida's largest, most diverse school district shows promise for accelerating the pace of student achievement statewide.

*Note: Gains presume no programmatic or other interventions that would affect student achievement



Florida TaxWatch recommends that policymakers determine what is happening in MDSD—particularly with regard to teacher effectiveness—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.

Why Is This Important to the State?

Florida’s opportunity to develop a strong state workforce that can compete effectively in a global, knowledge-based economy rests partially upon the state’s ability to raise the achievement of all students to heretofore-unprecedented levels.

Florida must pay close attention to the quality of tomorrow’s workforce. Florida’s workforce-age population—as a percent of the total population—already ranks last among all the states. This relatively small workforce must support a growing elderly population—the largest in the nation, as well as a growing school-aged population.

Florida’s future workforce will be one of the most diverse in the nation. The state’s student population is 51.2 percent minority. Unfortunately, student achievement among Black and Hispanic student populations lags behind the achievement of white students. Black and Hispanic students are currently less likely to graduate from high school than white students. According to one report, the graduation rate among white students was at 75% while among black students it was 50% and Hispanic students 59%. Among other effects, such achievement gaps threaten to decrease the state’s level of personal income.

Miami-Dade School District has Florida’s largest and most diverse student population. In MDSD, of the 366,000 students, 90.2 percent are minority, compared to 51.2 percent of the statewide student population.

Unless we close the achievement gap in MDSD, we will not close the achievement gap in the State of Florida. In spite of recent gains in student achievement in the state, we must find a way to accelerate the rate of student achievement and to completely close the achievement gap between white and minority students.

A bold initiative. Superintendent Rudy Crew has grouped 39 failing schools serving 43,960 students into the School Improvement Zone (SIZ). Changes in the Zone schools, instituted in 2004, prior to the FCAT 2005, include requiring teachers to participate in mandated professional development and paying highly qualified teachers salary incentives to teach in the Zone.

Student Achievement in Florida is Important to the Nation and Student Achievement in Miami-Dade School District is Important to the State

Florida educates one of every 20 students in the nation. Therefore, what happens in Florida’s classrooms is important not just to Florida’s economic future but to the economic viability of the nation as well. Florida’s economic competitiveness in a large part determines the nation’s competitiveness in the global marketplace.

Furthermore, Florida has seven of the nation’s largest 25 school districts—more than any other state. One in five students in the top 25 largest U.S. school districts is educated in one of these seven Florida districts. **Only New York City Public Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District and the City of Chicago School District have more students than does Miami-Dade School District. MDSD, with over 366,000 students, is by far the largest of the state’s seven largest districts, educating one of every 7 students in Florida.**¹

Because the student population of MDSD is as diverse as it is large, raising student achievement in MDSD can be the key to closing the achievement gap between white and minority students in the State of Florida. **Ninety percent of MDSD students are minority. The district educates one of every four minority students in the state, one of every six Black students, and three of every eight Hispanic students.**

¹ http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/100_largest/discussion.asp

In Florida, Miami-Dade Educates:

- 1 of every 7 students
- 1 of every 4 minority students
- 1 of every 6 Black students
- 3 of every 8 Hispanic students



Table 1 highlights the diversity of the MDSD student population relative to the statewide student population. In MDSD:

- 9.8 percent of students are white, compared to 48.8 percent of the statewide student population
- 59.7 percent of students are Hispanic, compared to 22.5 percent of the statewide student population
- 90.2 percent of students are minority, compared to 51.2 percent of the statewide student population

The minority is now the majority, requiring increased attention and effort to close the achievement gap.

RACE	DADE		STATE	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
WHITE	36,041	9.8	1,287,343	48.8
BLACK	102,757	28.1	621,936	23.6
HISPANIC	218,724	59.7	594,543	22.5
ASIAN	4,137	1.1	56,078	2.1
AMERICAN INDIAN /ALASKAN NT	338	0.1	7,991	0.3
MULTI-RACIAL	4,102	1.1	70,517	2.7
TOTAL MINORITY	330,058	90.2	1,351,065	51.2
MEMBERSHIP	366,099		2,638,408	

Source: Florida Department of Education, Education Information Services, email correspondence dated August 10, 2005. Membership figures are for the 2004-2005 school year.

Miami-Dade School District Student Achievement in the Global Arena

International comparisons of student performance are becoming increasingly critical, as the U.S. workforce must compete in a global marketplace. One international study, the Third International Math and Science Study-Repeat (TIMSS-R), measured the mathematics achievement of 8th graders in 13 states, nine school districts, and five regional consortia of districts across the United States, comparing it against the performance of 23 countries. Several large U.S. city school districts, including MDSD, participated. They are to be commended for doing so. Table 2 (page 5) summarizes the results of this study using international benchmarks,¹ showing how mathematics scores are distributed within each participating U.S. jurisdiction and each participating nation. The results, while shocking, provide important data:

- Singapore’s mathematics performance was the best among all participating entities—46 percent of their students reached the highest benchmark. Only nine percent of U.S. students reached this level, and only two percent in Miami-Dade reached this level.
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Miami-Dade schools scored the lowest of any participating U.S. district, state or consortia; The district had fewer students reach even the lowest quarter benchmark than Indonesia, Morocco, the Philippines, and South Africa.
- Among the largest states that participated, Pennsylvania and Texas had 91 and 90 percent of their students reach the lowest quarter benchmark, as compared to Miami-Dade’s 61 percent.

Among the urban districts that participated, Chicago Public Schools, Jersey City Public Schools, and Rochester City School District in New York all greatly outperformed Miami-Dade School District.

¹ Third International Math and Science Study-Repeat (TIMSS-R) 1999. International benchmarks are points on the achievement scale chosen to describe specific achievement levels. Students reaching a particular benchmark demonstrated the knowledge and understandings characterizing that benchmark as well as those characterizing the lower benchmarks. Some students scoring below a benchmark may indeed know or understand some of the concepts that characterize a higher level.



**TABLE 2 – Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS-R) 1999
Mathematics Achievement**

Percentage of 8th Grade Students Reaching International Benchmarks

Countries	Benchmarks				States	Benchmarks			
	Top 10 percent	Top Quarter	Median	Lower Quarter		Top 10 percent	Top Quarter	Median	Lower Quarter
United States	9	28	61	88	Connecticut	11	31	67	91
Australia	12	37	73	94	Idaho	5	24	61	88
Belgium-Flemish	23	54	85	98	Illinois	10	29	65	92
Bulgaria	11	30	66	91	Indiana	9	30	69	94
Canada	12	38	77	96	Maryland	8	27	57	87
Chile	1	3	15	48	Massachusetts	10	31	68	92
Chinese Taipei	41	66	85	95	Michigan	10	33	70	92
Cyprus	3	17	51	84	Missouri	4	20	58	89
Czech Republic	11	33	69	94	North Carolina	7	25	57	88
England	7	24	58	89	Oregon	10	32	69	91
Finland	6	31	75	96	Pennsylvania	9	28	65	91
Hong Kong, SAR	33	68	92	99	South Carolina	10	30	60	88
Hungary	16	41	74	94	Texas	13	37	66	90
Indonesia	2	7	22	52					
Iran, Islamic Rep. Of	1	5	25	63	Districts				
Israel	5	18	47	77	Academy School	12	38	75	95
Italy	5	20	52	83	District, CO				
Japan	33	64	89	98	Chicago Public	2	12	41	81
Jordan	3	13	32	62	Schools, IL				
Korea, Rep. Of	37	68	91	99	Delaware Science	5	22	51	83
Latvia-LSS	7	26	63	92	Coalition, DE				
Lithuania	4	17	52	85	First in the World	22	56	87	98
Macedonia, Rep. Of	3	12	38	72	Consort, IL				
Malaysia	12	34	69	94	Fremont/Lincoln	6	23	58	84
Moldova	4	16	45	81	Westside PS, NE				
Morocco	0	0	5	27	Guilford County,	10	33	66	91
Netherlands	14	45	81	96	NC				
New Zealand	8	25	56	85	Jersey City Public	6	17	48	82
Philippines	0	1	8	31	Schools, NJ				
Romania	5	19	49	80	Miami-Dade	2	9	29	61
Russian Federation	15	37	72	94	County PS, FL				
Singapore	46	75	93	99	Michigan Invita-	12	39	77	96
Slovak Republic	14	40	78	96	tional Group, MI				
Slovenia	15	39	74	95	Montgomery Co.,	17	45	77	95
South Africa	0	1	5	14	MD				
Thailand	4	16	44	81	Naperville Sch.	24	59	91	99
Tunisia	0	4	32	80	Dist. #203, IL				
Turkey	1	7	27	65	Project SMART	11	34	70	95
					Consortium, OH				
					Rochester City	2	9	32	73
					Sch. Dist., NY				
					SW Math/Sci.	11	32	68	93
					Collaborative, PA				

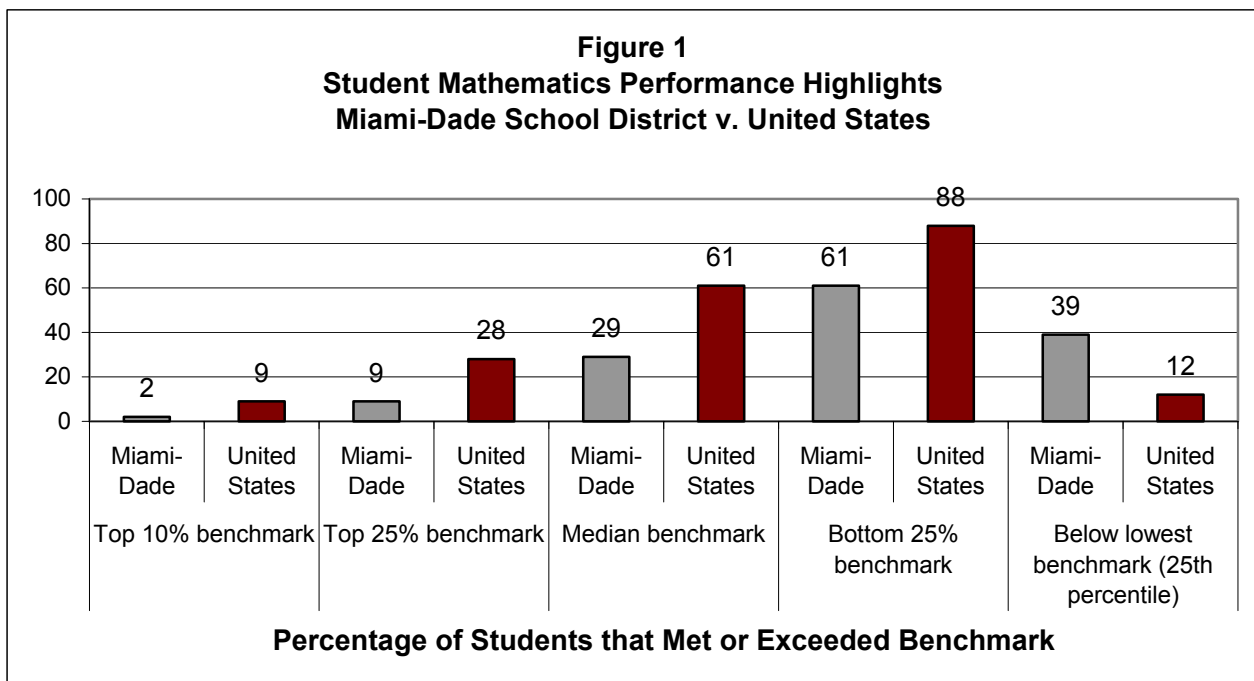
Source: TIMSS-R 1999 Benchmarking Study - Boston College and Florida TaxWatch.



Comparisons of the Nation's 8th Grade Mathematics Scores on the TIMSS-R with Those of Miami-Dade:

- 9 percent of U.S. students reached the top 10 percent benchmark compared to 2 percent of MDS student
- 28 percent of U.S. students reached at least the upper quarter benchmark compared to 9 percent of MDS student
- 61 percent of U.S. students reached the median benchmark or above compared to 29 percent of MDS student
- 88 percent of U.S. students reached at least the lower quarter benchmark compared to 61 percent of MDS student
- 12 percent of U.S. students fell below the lowest benchmark—the 25th percentile of achievement compared to 39 percent of MDS student

Source: TIMSS-R 1999 Benchmarking Study – Boston College and Florida TaxWatch



Seven years have passed since the TIMSS-R was given to Miami-Dade's 8th graders in 1999. During that period of time, Florida policymakers created the A+ Plan, an accountability system that establishes rigorous academic performance standards for all students at every grade level.² The federal accountability plan, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), mandates that every child reach proficiency in reading and math by the year 2013. Florida's students must make realistic annual progress toward that goal (as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) to guarantee that our children will cross that goal line. **Florida has been intensely focused on raising student achievement and particularly in closing the achievement gap between the performance of white students and that of minority students.**

² Sunshine State Standards (SSS) are subject matter grade level expectations that form the basis for the FCAT state assessment. The progress of children and schools is measured against these standards.



Florida's future competitiveness in a national and global context depends upon how policymakers use the results of such student achievement assessments to address the deficiencies that they illuminate.

Rudy Crew, Superintendent of Miami-Dade School District, has undertaken the initiative of raising student achievement in the district.

How is Miami-Dade School District Doing Now?

More recent mathematics performance scores for Miami-Dade's 8th grade students can be found in their FCAT scores³ (See Table 3).

Between the years 2002 and 2005, Miami-Dade School District increased the percentage of 8th grade students scoring at achievement level three or above (defined as proficiency) by 10 percentage points.

Although MDSD is not the worst performing district in the state for 8th grade mathematics⁴, as noted, it is the largest district in Florida, and by far the largest district among the lowest performers. **No urban district in the state has performed worse.**

Table 3 2005 FCAT Reading and Math Scores					
Percent of Students Achievement Level 3+ (Proficiency)					
Grade	Year	Statewide		Miami-Dade	
		Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Elementary Schools					
3	2004	66	64	57	56
	2005	67	68	61	63
4	2004	70	64	68	62
	2005	71	64	69	61
5	2004	59	52	49	47
	2005	66	57	64	57
Middle Schools					
6	2004	54	46	40	35
	2005	56	47	44	40
7	2004	53	50	41	40
	2005	53	53	43	44
8	2004	45	56	35	46
	2005	44	59	34	49
High Schools					
9	2004	32	55	22	41
	2005	36	59	28	48
10	2004	34	63	26	53
	2005	32	63	23	54

The 2005 FCAT results show the percent of 8th grade students reaching proficiency in math in MDSD is 49%. All of Florida's other large districts outperformed MDSD in this grade and subject (Brevard, 73%; Broward, 63%; Duval, 54 %; Hillsborough, 62%; Lee, 59%; Orange, 57%; Palm Beach, 62 %; Pinellas, 60%; Polk, 50%; Seminole, 70%; and Volusia, 57 %).

Consistently, in every grade, in both reading and math, a far lower percentage of students in MDSD are reaching proficiency than the state average. **However, in terms of making progress, the district outperforms the state in the gain in the percentage of students reaching proficiency in both of these critical subject areas.**

Table 3 (above) shows that MDSD is coming from behind and **MDSD is outperforming the state in the gain in the percentage of students reaching proficiency in both math and reading.**

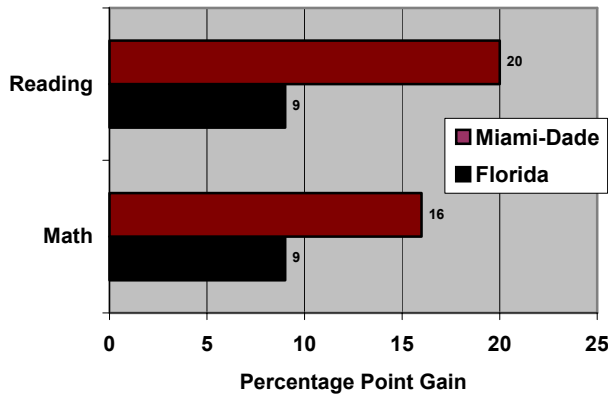
³ The FCAT is a different measure than used in the international study; therefore the exact mathematical skills measured on these two tests may vary somewhat. FCAT scores in this report were accessed on 8/12/2005 at <http://fcats.fldoe.org>.

⁴ In the comparison of 8th grade math performance, three districts (Hardee, Okeechobee, and Osceola) also had only 49 percent of students reaching proficiency. Seven districts performed worse (Escambia, 48 percent; Gadsden, 31 percent; Glades, 45 percent; Hamilton, 34 percent; Hendry, 45 percent; Jefferson, 30 percent; and Madison, 39 percent).



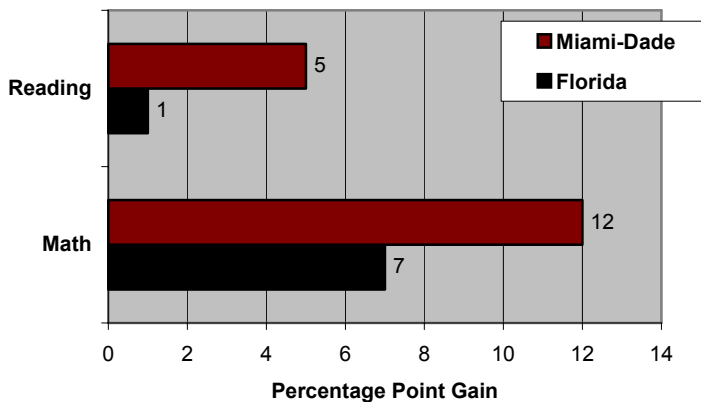
Between the years 2004 and 2005, in four of the eight grades tested (grades 3, 5, 7 and 9), MDSD made its largest annual gain ever. These results coincide with Superintendent Rudy Crew's implementation of the School Improvement Zone Initiative. In just this one year the percentage points gained overall is substantial; MDSD gained 64 points across all grades (28 in reading and 36 in math), compared to a statewide average percentage point gained over all grades of 32 points (12 in reading and 20 in math). Figures 2, 3, and 4 show how these gains are distributed at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Figure 2
Elementary School Level



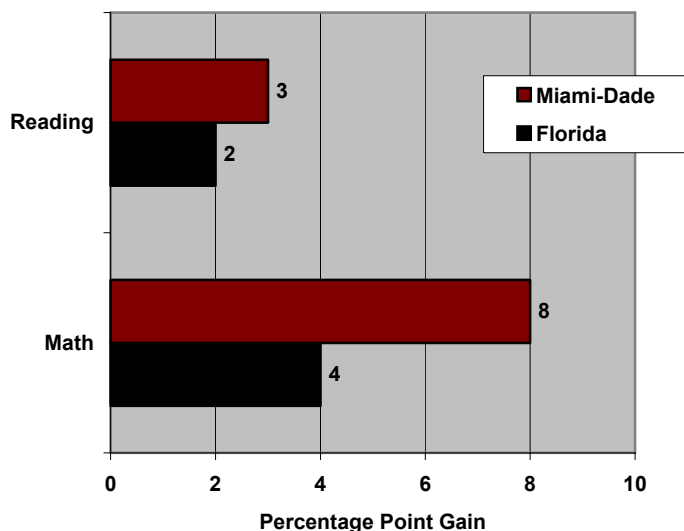
At the elementary level, Miami-Dade School District gained 20 percentage points in reading compared to the state's 9 percentage point gain and 16 points in math compared to the state's 9 percentage point gain.

Figure 3
Middle School Level



At the middle school level, Miami-Dade School District gained 5 percentage points in reading compared to the state's 1 percentage point gain and 12 points in math compared to the state's 7 percentage point gain.

Figure 4
High School Level



At the high school level, Miami-Dade School District gained 3 percentage points in reading compared to the state's 2 percentage point gain and 8 points in math compared to the state's 4 percentage point gain.



To illustrate the significance of these gains, consider the following:

- The percentage of students in third grade (statewide) achieving proficiency in reading rose one percentage point—from 66% in 2004 to 67% in 2005. **At this rate of gain, all of Florida’s third graders will not be reading on grade level until the year 2048, or 33 years from now***. Over that same year, the percentage of third grade students in MDSD achieving proficiency in reading rose 4 percentage points—from 57% to 61%. **At this rate of gain, all of MDSD’s third graders will be reading on grade level in the year 2015.**
- The percentage of students in sixth grade (statewide) achieving proficiency in math rose one percentage point—from 46% in 2004 to 47% in 2005. **At this rate of gain, all of Florida’s sixth graders will not be achieving at grade level until the year 2058, or 53 years from now*** Over that same year, the percentage of sixth grade students in MDSD achieving proficiency in math rose 5 percentage points—from 35% to 40%. **At this rate of gain, all of MDSD’s sixth graders will be achieving on grade level in math in the year 2017.**

What is Miami-Dade School District Doing Right?

Miami-Dade County Public Schools has grouped the schools with the lowest performance in the district together into a **School Improvement Zone (SIZ)**. The Zone includes 43,960 students at 19 elementary schools, 1 K-8 center, 11 middle schools, and 8 high schools. Other characteristics shared by these schools are higher percentages of beginning teachers, student mobility, numbers of students in exceptional education programs, and numbers of students with limited English proficiency. All had low academic performance for three years and feeder school patterns in which low performance was widespread. Schools have been assigned to The Zone for a 36 to 48-month period to allow sufficient time for schools to eliminate patterns of low performance and stabilize consistent indicators of high achievement.

Raising student achievement in MDSD will present particular challenges due to the high concentration of students who struggle both economically and academically.

- Often, schools serving high-poverty and low-performing students are staffed with the least experienced, least qualified teachers. Students in these schools are more likely to be assigned to teachers who lack a major or a minor in their teaching field and have fewer than three years of teaching experience.⁵
- Furthermore, secondary students in schools in which African Americans and Latinos make up 90% or more of the population are twice as likely to be taught by teachers who are not certified in the subject they teach as are students in predominantly white schools.⁶
- The national shortage of highly qualified teacher applicants, especially in subject areas such as mathematics, science, and special education, compounds the difficulty of attracting teachers in these subjects to high-poverty schools.
- One recent study found that only seven states had higher rates of disadvantaged students than did Florida⁷. These subpopulations of students, more costly to educate, include students in poverty, non-English-speaking students, and students in exceptional student education (ESE) programs.

Student Population in Zone Schools

- **96 percent are Black and Hispanic**
- **78 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch, an indicator of poverty**
- **17 percent are considered limited in English proficiency**
- **15 percent have been identified as in need of Exceptional Student Education**

*Note: Gains presume no programmatic or other interventions that would affect student achievement growth.

⁵ Education Trust <http://www.edtrust.org>.

⁶ *Qualified Teachers for At-Risk Schools: A National Imperative*. <http://www.ncrel.org/quality/partnership.htm>.

⁷ *The Teachability Index: Can Disadvantaged Students Learn?* Jay Greene and Greg Forster, Manhattan Institute, September 2004.



Teacher Effectiveness in Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone

Students continue to reap academic benefits of strong teachers even after they have gone on to other classes, and, regrettably, the converse also holds true.

Some of the changes made to zone schools may be more likely to create significant change than others. For example, while many factors influence student learning, none carries the weight or import of the effectiveness of the teacher. Research has shown that the single largest

factor influencing academic growth is the effectiveness of the individual classroom teacher.⁸ Further, the research has shown the effects to be cumulative: students continue to reap academic benefits of strong teachers even after they have gone on to other classes, and, regrettably, the converse also holds true.⁹

Raising student achievement in Florida's poorest schools—in this case the 39 schools within MDSD's School Improvement Zone—means raising the effectiveness of teachers in these schools. **Notably, several characteristics of the SIZ schools deal with increasing teacher effectiveness through professional development and salary incentives (See text box below).**

The School Improvement Zone

According to information presented by MDSD, schools in the Zone are distinguished from other schools in the district. In an effort to promote higher student achievement, Zone schools offer:

- Teachers who use the latest teaching techniques, work with master teachers, implement consistent curriculum and receive a salary incentive.
- Intensive support for teachers and students and a special academic program for students.
- An extended school day (an additional hour of instruction each day for remediation and enrichment) and an extended school year (10 additional days of enrichment and remediation).
- A focus on literacy from Kindergarten to 5th grade for three and a half hours a day and a 100-minute literacy block for all students reading below grade level in grades 6 through 12.
- Professional development teams in each school responsible for coordinating 58 hours of mandated professional development for teachers.
- Transition programs for students moving from 5th to 6th grades and 8th to 9th grades. These programs focus on promotion and graduation requirements, career readiness, character education, code of student conduct compliance, study habits and FCAT preparedness.
- Bus transportation that enables students dependent on the buses to receive the services they need.
- Enrichment programs and materials for students who do not require intensive remediation.
- After school programs that better coordinate service delivery with service providers. This may involve changing the content and/or character of services.
- Common reading material across all grades and across all Zone schools.
- Intensive small group instruction for students scoring at Levels I and II on the FCAT and for students retained in grade 3.
- A focus on student assessment data that guides instruction in all Zone schools.
- Use of a technology management system to analyze assessment data.
- A research requirement for students in grades 6 through 9.
- A requirement that students create a career portfolio in middle school, starting in grade 6, and a job portfolio in senior high schools, starting in grade 9.
- Preservation of instructional areas such as art, music, physical education and world languages instruction.
- Mentor principals for identified Zone principals.

Source: Miami-Dade Public Schools, SIZ, 2nd Quarterly Report; <http://thezone.dadeschools.net>

⁸ Wright, Horn, and Sanders, 1997; Rowan, Correnti, and Miller, 2002; and Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 2000; Sanders and Rivers, 1996.

⁹ Sanders and Rivers, 1996; Rivers, 1999; Mendro et al, 1998; and Kain, 1998.



There is evidence that disadvantaged students perform substantially better in some places than in others and that some school systems effectively educate disadvantaged students more efficiently than others. One recent study measured student achievement in relation to level of student disadvantage and level of spending. Only seven states had higher rates of disadvantaged students than did Florida yet Florida's level of student achievement, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and expressed as a percentage of the achievement level predicted by their disadvantage and state education spending, outranked 30 states. This suggests that many of the state's schools are overcoming obstacles to student learning.¹⁰

Measuring Teacher Effectiveness. In today's testing and accountability environment, teacher effectiveness is ultimately measured in terms of what their students learn, as demonstrated on state and national tests. Old notions about teacher effectiveness are being questioned. Rather, research indicates that conditions such as teaching assignment and professional development are critical to building teacher effectiveness.¹¹ These conditions are among those that have been addressed in the SIZ. It is important to know if the change in these conditions has produced the FCAT gains that have been reported earlier in this report.

The FCAT uses gain scores to assess student achievement. By measuring test score gains from one year to the next, FCAT can provide us with invaluable information about the school and teacher characteristics and working conditions that lead to effective teaching. Gain scores can be used to:

- **Determine, among teachers in the same schools or districts, even with kids whose prior achievement was similar, which teachers get great gains and which teachers do not.** This allows us to match the most effective teachers with the students who need them the most.
- **Identify teachers who need help in becoming more effective.** This allows us to create teacher development programs that truly help teachers raise student achievement.
- **Aggregate pupil gains, by school, to allow for evaluation of schools, regardless of differences among entering students.**
- **Pay teachers for how effective they are at raising student achievement as evidenced by FCAT scores and other appropriate assessments.**
 - Teachers are paid according to their school district's single salary schedule, which is a system of pay steps and ladders that virtually ensures that teachers with the same years of experience and education level receive the same salary.
 - Teacher salary schedules generally reward teachers who perform poorly at the same rate as the most highly effective teacher¹². The vast majority of public school teachers are compensated irrespective of the grades or subjects or students they teach and no matter how well or poorly they perform.
 - Such standardization of teacher pay deprives managers of public schools the authority to adjust an individual teacher's pay to reflect performance or market realities. Consequently, districts must often hire unqualified or less qualified candidates to teach math and science courses.
 - There is often little compensation incentive for teachers to work with the most severely disadvantaged students—often the most difficult to teach students.¹³

¹⁰ *The Teachability Index: Can Disadvantaged Students Learn?* Jay Greene and Greg Forster, Manhattan Institute, September 2004.

¹¹ Schacter, J.; Thum, Y.M.; Reifsneider, D.; and Schiff, T., *The Teacher Advancement Program Report Two: Year Three Results from Arizona and Year One results from South Carolina TAP Schools*.

¹² Florida has legislation requiring that 5 percent of teachers' salaries be based on performance. However, implementation has been very limited. Additionally, Florida law stipulates that teacher evaluations must be based primarily on student achievement and that School Boards can freeze the salary of teachers whose performance is unsatisfactory. While the intent of State policy in this area is clear, policy implementation is less clear.

¹³ Ballou, D. and Podgursky, M. Let the Market Decide, Education Next, Spring 2001 <http://www.educationnext.org/2001sp/16ballou.html> accessed on 3/3/2005.



If differences in effectiveness among teachers can be linked to specific training and practices of teachers, educational leaders will have the information they need to drastically improve educational outcomes for Florida's millions of students.

Conclusion and Next Steps

What is happening in MDSD could hold the answers to the state's academic progress—and in particular to closing Florida's achievement gap.

It is unclear what is responsible for the 2005 FCAT gains in MDSD.

- In order to discover what is responsible for the large student achievement gains in MDSD, we need to look beyond the average test scores of the district as examined in this preliminary report. These averages can shroud differences between schools and classrooms that can be instructive in solving the problems of low performing schools. Implementation of all facets of SIZ schools surely varied across schools. And it is likely that the greatest gains from the above modifications to Zone schools will not be realized until the 2006 year or later. Florida TaxWatch offers the following questions for further consideration. The answers to these questions could be instructive.
 - What did *each* school do differently in 2005 than in 2004, particularly with regard to teacher effectiveness? To what extent did they implement the stated goals of the SIZ?
 - What were the individual student learning gains for each classroom? What happened in the classrooms with the largest gains?
 - What schools experienced the greatest average student learning gains? What happened in these schools?
 - What were the financial costs of these academic gains?
 - How were resources—human and financial—distributed among these schools?
 - Is there a relationship between resource distribution and student achievement gains at these schools? [Does the district's educational spending reflect a strong commitment to classroom resources and direct resources to programs and practices proven to increase student achievement?]

Florida's policymakers must:

- Commit to increasing teacher effectiveness as a proven means to raise student achievement at a pace that will not leave another generation of students behind.
- Direct resources to research-proven practices for raising student achievement, particularly among the state's large minority population.

Florida TaxWatch recommends that policymakers determine what is happening in MDSD—particularly with regard to teacher effectiveness—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 potential evidenced by the School Improvement Zone approach developed and implemented by Superintendent Crew is promising. This is a bold and innovative undertaking that is most worthy of further examination to determine its replicability for the rest of the state and indeed the nation.

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About CEPA

The Florida TaxWatch Center for Educational Performance and Accountability (CEPA) was formed in acknowledgement of two key realities: the growing portion of education funding in the state budget, currently at 28% and climbing, and of the profound fiscal and economic impact that quality PreK-20 education has on Florida's competitiveness, both nationally and internationally. CEPA conducts research, issues publications, and engages in meaningful actions to promote exemplary student achievement within a cost effective environment. CEPA analyzes and makes recommendations about educational policies, practices, and expenditures as regards their contributions to improved financial and student performance in Florida's schools. CEPA also identifies specific educational issues that affect the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of state government, local school districts, and postsecondary institutions. Finally, CEPA brings together partnerships and collaborations in a concentrated effort to effect positive and dynamic change in Florida's system of PreK-20 education.

Florida TaxWatch is a private, non-profit, non-partisan research institute that over its 25 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.floridatwatch.org

The Florida TaxWatch Board of Trustees is responsible for the general direction and oversight of the research institute and safeguarding the independence of the organization's work. In his capacity as chief executive officer, the president is responsible for formulating and coordinating policies, projects, publications and selecting the professional staff. As an independent research institute and taxpayer watchdog, Florida TaxWatch does not accept money from Florida state and local governments. The research findings and recommendations of Florida TaxWatch do not necessarily reflect the view of its members, staff, distinguished Board of Trustees, or Executive Committee and are not influenced by the positions of the individuals or organizations who directly or indirectly support the research.

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