



***State of the
School System
Report***
October 24, 2002

*Prepared by
School Board Chair Perla Tabares Hantman*

MEMORANDUM

October 24, 2002

TO: Members of The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

FROM: Perla Tabares Hantman, Chair
The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

SUBJECT: **STATE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM REPORT**

In 1999, in response to recommendations from our stakeholders, the School Board adopted a five-year Strategic Plan to guide the district's progress. The plan was organized under three goals: School to Career, Effective Learning Environment and Efficient Management Practices. In 2000, the Board directed its chair to present an annual report on the state of the school system. As I reported to the Board at its October 23, 2002 meeting, the purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Board and our stakeholders with an overview of progress and challenges consistent with the goals of the strategic plan. It is not meant to provide a line-by-line accounting of the status of each objective and related action steps defined in the plan.

Goal One: School to Career

Focus: preparing students for graduation, post-secondary education and employment. Prepare students to be responsible citizens and instill in them a desire to continue to learn throughout their lives.

Curriculum and Instruction

Miami-Dade County Public Schools continues to make significant strides in student achievement through innovative programs, research-based best practices, district-wide staff development and on-site classroom support. We have expanded pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds. We developed a guide titled Resources for Teaching Students About Terrorism following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. We used results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study-Repeat (TIMSS-R) to conduct a curriculum-mapping project to streamline the curriculum and ensure comprehensive coverage of all required standards. We received high marks from the State's Office of Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) for the implementation of the Comprehensive Reading Plan. Equally important, the district increased opportunities for students to become bilingual and bi-literate by expanding dual language programs to more than 55 schools.

During the 2002 - 2003 school year, emphasis will continue to be on increasing student achievement. A comprehensive Assistance Plus Initiative to increase reading instruction at the secondary level has been implemented in low achieving schools. District Assistance Plus Teams composed of specialists from all curriculum areas will provide additional support to classroom teachers.

The most pressing challenge in curriculum and instruction will be to maintain this high level of quality support in an era of decreased funding. Something else to consider is our district's compliance with a new state law banning "social promotion," the practice of advancing failing students from one grade to the next. This law places great emphasis on third-grade reading performance. If a student does not score at Level 2 or higher on the FCAT in reading by the end of Grade 3, by law, the student must be retained. The law poses some great challenges to major urban districts. Approximately 35 percent of our third-graders have scored below Level 2 in the past.

Student Performance

As a district, we continue to make improvements in the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Our FCAT Reading scores increased in every grade level tested, from a two-point increase in Grade 10 to a nine-point gain in Grade 3. Increases of seven to nine points were achieved in five of the eight grade levels tested. FCAT Writing combined average scores showed increases at grades 8 and 10, but decreased slightly in grade 4. FCAT Mathematics scores increased at all grade levels except 8 and 10, which mirrored a decline at the statewide level as well.

School Performance

The performance of our schools as graded by the Florida Department of Education indicated marked improvements in our district, with 103 of our schools graded "A" in 2002, compared to 51 in 2001. Another 55 schools were graded "B" in 2002, compared to 24 in 2001. Eighty-four were graded "C" compared to 109 the year before. The number of "D" schools dropped from 99 to 39. However, we had 14 "F" schools with five schools designated "F" twice in the last four years. Although we are proud of our overall performance, one "F" is one too many. The Board is committed to improving the performance of all schools, especially those graded "F." Towards that end, the Board approved a performance excellence plan for double "F" schools, as well as an Assistance Plus initiative to support the work of teachers and administrators in those schools.

School Support Teams

To assure our district achieves new, rigorous state and federal student-achievement requirements, it is essential that schools focus on early intervention with students who are struggling academically. In the past, the district's Child Study Teams often waited until a student failed before referring him or her for a psycho-educational evaluation. In some instances, that evaluation did not lead to a special education placement and often left teachers with little new, practical information to help a failing child achieve.

To make sure that no child is left behind, our district is phasing out Child Study Teams in favor of School Support Teams (SST) to better reach struggling students early and directly by assessing students' needs, implementing appropriate remedies and monitoring students' progress. This year, 33 schools are using SST, with the goal of district-wide implementation over the next few years. In the eight original pilot schools, where the SST process is in its second or third year, there has been a reduction in referrals to exceptional education and an increase in the quality of the interventions for remediation.

Alternative Education and Dropout Prevention

The Board recognizes that when a student drops out of school, it is as much our failure as theirs. By operating alternative education and dropout prevention programs in cooperation with more than 40 community-based organizations, we are providing students with the opportunity for meaningful education. These partnerships offer job training and emphasize good work habits, proper attitude, character building and social values, which can yield improvements in academic performance. Since many at-risk youngsters are prone to settle differences through violence, the district has introduced an anger management program called Culture of Peace and Nonviolence. The program provides schools with additional personnel to teach conflict resolution skills and to help defuse tense situations among students through constructive learning activities.

Applied Technology Programs

Our challenge in a high-tech global economy is to infuse our students with *School To Career* skills, which emphasize business systems and technological training. In cooperation with *One Community One Goal* and contributions from the Annenberg Grant, eight new Academies of Information Technology are now up and running. To date, more than 20 agreements have been established between our industrial education programs and the associates of science program of Miami-Dade Community College. These provide students with the opportunity to transfer high school credits to a post-secondary institution.

With support from the local construction industry, we now have a "Construction Zone" program that provides information about careers in the construction industry to middle and senior high school students. Other success stories include Miami Edison Senior High School, which proudly graduated its first class of practical nursing students. Cedars Hospital, one of our business partners, contributed to the cost of the state licensure exam and extended job offers to graduates who pass the exam. And finally, within the past year our students received more than 94 state, regional and national awards in the applied technology arena.

Adult/Vocational Education & Lifelong Learning

We are committed to providing citizens, young and old, with opportunities to acquire the job skills needed to succeed in the work force. More than 149,000 adults, the largest enrollment in the state, depend on our adult and vocational education programs. Today, we have successful partnerships with more than 90 community-based organizations that are providing part-time hourly teachers serving our adult learners. Our ties with business and industry such as Honda Motors, Maytag, Toyota, Whirlpool, Microsoft, CISCO, Oracle and others, have led to an effective curriculum that is based on the latest industry and technology standards. Student performance, as measured by job placements and completions, increased more than 31 percent in Adult General Education and nearly 17 percent in Vocational Education.

Public Educational Choice Options

School choice provides competition to charter and private schools as well as the state's voucher program. The Board must work closely with staff, students, parents and the community to expand offerings by developing our own innovative school choice models, identifying those that are working elsewhere and administering school choice programs sanctioned by the state. The new competitive environment makes it imperative that we create the most effective level of service and programs to help parents and students succeed. Our district offers a myriad of educational programs outlined below:

Magnet Programs: Today Miami-Dade County Public Schools offers 77 magnet programs in 67 schools that serve 29,000 students. The district was just named the recipient of a \$14.6 million federal Voluntary Public School Choice Program grant that will allow us to greatly expand choice options for parents and students.

Satellite Learning Centers and Controlled Choice: The district currently has four satellite learning centers in facilities provided by local corporations. These centers offer parents the ability to have their elementary school children educated in public schools at the parents' work places. In addition, there are currently 14 controlled choice elementary schools, in regions III and IV, with each school maintaining a different theme. A study will be conducted this year to explore the feasibility of expanding the program to additional areas.

State Voucher Scholarship Program: In accordance with the terms of Florida's A+ Plan, our district implemented the Opportunity Scholarship Program for the first time in 2002 – 2003. It is interesting to note that 89 of the 330 students who met eligibility requirements and elected to attend private schools have since chosen to return to Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

Charter Schools: Our district now sponsors 25 charter schools that serve the educational needs of 7,519 students. We have the largest number of charter schools in the state and anticipate that 32 charter schools with a population of 26,500 students could possibly be operational by the 2003 - 2004 school year. Although the charter school movement is still relatively new, we have already learned some valuable lessons associated with monitoring, contract compliance and providing accountability to parents who choose these schools. With more charter schools coming on line in the future, we must be ready to better monitor and enforce compliance of contractual agreements with their operators.

Grants and Federal Legislative Affairs

Our district intensified its efforts to obtain supplemental grant funding from the state, federal and foundation sources. As a result, the district has seen a 22.34 percent increase in competitive grant award funds and a 2.98 percent increase in entitlement grant funds from fiscal year 2000 - 2001 to fiscal year 2001 - 2002. That represents a gain of \$235.7 million in supplemental funding to the district. In the first four months of this fiscal year alone, the district has accepted \$202,115,247 in grant awards, attributable in part to the district's lobbying efforts in Washington. We continue to lobby on many fronts, including funding formula reforms, school safety, school construction and technology in schools.

In October, the Board accepted a \$1 million "Reinventing Education" grant from IBM to help boost student achievement. The company chose Miami-Dade County Public Schools to receive the grant in the form of research and technical expertise, technology and cash. The partnership between IBM and the school district will lead to the creation of "The IBM Learning Village," which will provide the district with a single, user-friendly interface giving teachers Internet access to student records, lesson plans, information on state and national standards, test information and other data. That information is now available in various formats, but not readily available to classroom teachers in the district.

Advanced Courses

During the 2001 - 2002 school year, the district made great strides in boosting participation and achievement among students in advanced academic programs. The number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses increased by 16 percent and the number of passing scores on the May 2002 AP exams increased by 20 percent.

Homestead Senior High School was one of only three schools in the nation to receive *The College Board Inspiration Award* and a \$25,000 prize to use toward achieving the school's academic goals. The Inspiration Award recognizes outstanding achievement in enhancing students' qualifications to attend college, especially economically disadvantaged students.

Southwest Senior High School ranked first place in the education category of the *Team Community Problem Solving Senior Division* at the 2002 Future Problem Solving International Conference, which was held at the University of Connecticut. Students in the district's Advanced Academic Internship Program submitted projects to the prestigious *Intel Science Talent Search*. Of the 12 semifinalists selected statewide, five were from Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

The *Siemens Westinghouse Science and Technology Award* is dedicated to recognizing remarkable and talented students who challenge themselves through scientific research. An Advanced Academic Internship student from MAST Academy was the winner from the Southern Region. We are extremely proud of our students' accomplishments, which are among the ultimate measures of how well our district is preparing students for life.

The Arts, Physical Education and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC)

The district designed and developed a "How To" planner for developing and implementing career academies in the arts, physical education and JROTC. The blueprint planner resulted in new career academies in these disciplines at nine schools. In physical education, the district implemented a community-based after school activity program funded by an \$88,000 grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We were awarded a \$446,000 grant from the Carol M. White Physical Education For Progress Grant from the United States Department of Education in order to develop and implement a senior high school physical education program that will serve as a template for other programs nationally.

Our students continue to distinguish themselves in the arts, physical education and JROTC. This year, Miami-Dade County visual arts students received 22 awards in the national Scholastic Art Awards 2002. Students were recognized onstage at The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and several of the artworks were included in an installation at the Corcoran Gallery of Art adjacent to the White House. Student bands from Miami-Dade County Public Schools were featured throughout the country at such prestigious venues as the 2002 National Concert Band Festival, the International Association of Jazz Educators Convention, at Carnegie Hall and at the Duke Ellington Jazz Competition. On behalf of the Board, we salute all the talented teachers and students who bring so much recognition and prestige to our district.

Goal Two: Effective Learning Environment

Focus: To enhance the safety of students and staff and increase the quality of the learning environment.

To be effective, we must create proper learning environment and be cognizant that every child who enters school learns at his or her own pace. Many students, unfortunately, enter our schools already disadvantaged and it is up to us to do the best we can to provide an environment that will allow them to flourish and learn. While our district places a tremendous effort in providing a quality, secure learning environment, overcrowding and budget constraints create great challenges to our goal.

Classroom Overcrowding

As South Florida has grown, so has the number of students in our classrooms. School construction has not been able to keep pace with the fast population growth experienced by Miami-Dade County. The state is projecting that through 2005 – 2006, Miami-Dade County Public Schools will grow by an estimated 17,921. If the projection comes true, it will bring our total enrollment to 372,726 students. Overcrowded classrooms tax the learning environment and limit the one-on-one attention a teacher can devote to those students needing the most help.

Since June of 2001, our Overcrowding Task Force committee (OTF), composed of parents, students, teachers and administrators from both public and charter schools, has been at work assessing school overcrowding with the goal of formulating a plan of action tackling this difficult problem. The Task Force will hear a number of concerns and issues including capping enrollment at overcrowded schools, offering students spaces at less-utilized schools, working with local government agencies to explore use of facilities as classrooms, encouraging the development of charter schools in overpopulated areas and considering double sessions where appropriate only as a temporary solution. Recently, the situation has been made more complex by a new state law that all portables must be code compliant. This will limit the number of portables currently being used by some overcrowded schools.

In the meantime, the district's current five-year construction work program proposes to add 23,925 student stations through the construction of additions to existing schools and building of 13 new schools. Two old schools will see most of their buildings torn down and replaced with new ones. In addition, the district continues to seek available financing sources, such as Certificates of Participation and Qualified Zone Academy Bonds (QZAB), to complete capital projects as expeditiously as possible.

As a Board, we should take the initiative of working more closely with local government in order to ensure that our schools meet the growth patterns of new housing developments. We have a responsibility under the law and to our citizens to make every effort to provide every child with an adequate classroom as well as an equitable education.

Students At-Risk

To increase the achievement of low-performing students by enhancing their school experience, a nontraditional Title I Model Program is being implemented over a two-year period. The model addresses several causal factors such as societal influences, family and community characteristics, school readiness and school experiences that influence student achievement. The program includes an extended day tutorial program, mentoring and counseling services, professional development and parental involvement activities.

With the change in the state funding for Pre-kindergarten programs, the district has earmarked \$18 million of Title I funding to provide at-risk four-year-olds with a variety of meaningful learning experiences. Title I is providing pre-kindergarten services at Title I eligible schools. Among the various delivery models being implemented are High/Scope and Montessori. Through Title I, we are continuing a quality instructional model using state-certified classroom teachers, full-time paraprofessionals and implementing the support services associated with a quality pre-K program.

Campus Safety

On-campus crime has dropped significantly with violent crime down 34 percent during the first six months of 2002. Among the factors responsible for the improvement are monitoring by an increased number of school resource officers, peer counseling, inter-group relations programs promoting greater understanding between ethnic groups, TRUST counseling on substance abuse, the Silence Hurts program (transitioning this year to SpeakUp) and the Youth Crime Watch program, which encourages students to report suspected crimes. Our school district police are at the forefront of Community Oriented Policing-In Schools (COP-IS) and receive more than \$8,000,000 in federal funds to deploy its own proprietary school resource officer program. The Miami-Dade Schools Police Department is deployed consistent with Best Safety Practices and is implementing recommendations made in the OPPAGA report.

Community Involvement

Community involvement in the growth and development of children is recognized as one of the benchmarks of a quality school system and we continue to rely on it in the educational arena. Today, our district boasts one of the largest school volunteer and business partnership programs in the country. More than 20,000 volunteers and business partners donate their services in over 30 areas, including tutoring students, chaperoning field trips and assisting in classrooms and with other school activities. In addition, our Parent Teachers Association and Parent Teachers and Students Association now have chapters at nearly every one of our schools. Today, with more than 59,000 members, the Dade County Council PTA/PTSA is the third largest council of its kind in the nation. We are very proud of our partnerships with the business community and our dedicated parents.

Goal Three: Efficient Management Practices

Focus: To ensure that school system operations conform to the highest business and professional standards of effectiveness, efficiency and ethics.

Improving our Accountability

In addition to providing our students a well-rounded education in a safe environment so that they have every opportunity to learn, we must have an effective school operation that relies on the most efficient and effective business practices including a strict adherence to high ethical principles.

Efficient business systems are a hallmark of successful private and public organizations. In 1999, when the Board drafted a new strategic plan to guide our school district's progress, one of the toughest challenges we faced was to turn around our business operations and make them more efficient. Since the Board approved the strategic plan and the appointment of Superintendent Merrett R. Stierheim, we have made progress in streamlining our operations through a number of initiatives with positive benefits for our district. They are listed below:

Efficiency and Competition Commission: In December of last year, the Board authorized the Superintendent to review the structure of the Miami-Dade County government Efficiency and Competition Commission (ECC) and report to the Board with a recommendation for establishing a similar committee at the school district. This year, the Board approved a 21-member Efficiency and Competition Committee as a standing advisory committee reporting directly to the Board. The ECC is charged with implementing and overseeing cost reduction initiatives in the district's operations and rewarding employees for identifying creative cost-savings ideas. The ECC will put in place quality, productivity standards and measure how well the district's resources are being used.

Office of Performance Improvement & Research: On the heels of the creation of the Efficiency and Competition Committee, the Board will review establishing an office of performance improvement and research. The office will open in the near future and will consist of productivity-management professionals charged with generating cost savings, exploring ways to make our business operations more efficient through better service delivery, applying modern management technologies and conducting work site reviews. Productivity-management units are not a new concept. Government and other institutions that have implemented and used them effectively have realized millions of dollars in cumulative savings. Working closely with the Efficiency and Competition Committee, our productivity-management unit is expected to aid us in achieving our goal of conforming the district's operations to the highest business and professional standards.

Ethics

Successful organizations that strive for operational efficiency must also hold their leadership and employees to the highest ethical standards. A public office is a public trust and our citizens have the right to secure and sustain that trust against abuse. Abuse of the public's trust leads to mistrust and undermines an organization's credibility and authority.

Ethics Advisory Committee: Public and private institutions are not immune to unethical conduct. Certainly, past mistakes by the school district eroded the public's trust. To regain that trust, the School Board approved the creation of an Ethics Advisory Committee to serve as an advisory body. The committee's mission is to guard the public trust by, among other things, educating the public, candidates for election to the Board, members of the Board and employees of the district as to the required standards of ethical conduct and by interpreting and applying those standards of conduct.

Office of Inspector General: Along with the establishment of an Ethics Advisory Committee, the School Board this year established the position of Inspector General. The Superintendent was instructed to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the Florida Department of Education's Office of Inspector General. The Inspector General unit will work independently from the Board and the Superintendent and will be in a position to prevent and detect fraud, waste and inefficiencies in our operations. The Inspector General will further promote accountability, integrity and ethical conduct throughout the district. The Inspector General will be free to initiate inquiries or investigations and to undertake reviews, audits and other actions as deemed necessary to determine any activity that may involve criminal or unethical conduct. With the establishment of the Inspector General position and the Ethics Advisory Committee, our School Board has taken a major step to assure the public of its commitment to accountability and transparency in district operations.

Media Access: One of the best ways to promote accountability and transparency is to improve communications with news media representatives and the public. We have done this in a number of ways. Over the past year, we have held special briefing sessions for editors and reporters, including our student press, allowing them the opportunity to gain in-depth understanding of critical, complex issues facing the district and to ask questions freely of Board members, the Superintendent and executive staff. This has increased access and accuracy in reporting by news organizations. Today, the media has more access to all levels of school employees. Our employees have more training and administrative support in working with and providing information to the media.

Internet Phone Directory: Also this past year, the district published for the first time its employee and office directory, its school directory and its school locator map on the Internet, making this information available around the clock to thousands of parents and students. This action also saved the district thousands of dollars in recurring printing and processing costs. This information is automatically updated from our mainframe computers to the Internet site, providing our public with the most current, accurate information available.

WLRN Editorial Integrity Policy: The Board approved an editorial integrity policy for WLRN Public Television and Radio ensuring that the Board's radio and television stations remain accountable and responsive in their programming decision while conforming to sound fiscal and management practices. The new policy better positions the district's licensed broadcast operations to provide a wide range of quality programming to educate and culturally enrich the South Florida community they serve. WLRN today has an advisory board of South Florida residents and business people who provide guidance to the station's general manager on matters of radio and television programming.

Non-School Sites Cost Savings

A year ago, the Board underscored its commitment to reaching its strategic goals by hiring a new superintendent and charging him with improving district operations and restoring the district's credibility in the community. Along with the initiatives already mentioned, the Superintendent enacted an administrative reorganization that included some adjustments to the administrative salary structure, the reassignment of executive-level personnel and the abolishment of positions. The intent was to reduce the central bureaucracy and channel more resources to the classroom.

The Superintendent's reassignment and/or abolishment of 173 administrative staff positions beginning late last year netted a cost savings of more than \$11 million in fiscal year 2001 - 2002 and a recurring cost savings of more than \$16 million in fiscal year 2002 - 2003. In addition, a district wide reorganization produced cost savings of more than \$75,000 in fiscal year 2001–2002 and nearly \$600,000 in recurring savings in fiscal year 2002 - 2003. A number of other non-school-site cost cutting actions such as reducing the number of pagers, portable phones and vehicles; and freezing nonessential travel, reducing administrative supplements and cutting administrative staff budgets by five percent yielded \$10 million in savings in fiscal year 2002 - 2003 and more than \$1 million in fiscal year 2001 - 2002. In total, the staff reassignments and/or job abolishments (\$16 million) and other cost cutting measures (\$10 million) yielded more than \$26 million in recurring cost savings to the district in fiscal year 2002 - 2003. Those savings (\$26 million), coupled with \$24 million in cuts approved by the Board in August 2001, and the more than \$1 million dollars in cost savings realized in fiscal year 2001 – 2002, amount to more than \$50 million in savings realized from streamlining of non-school-site administration over the last 24 months.

Finance

Though we have made great progress in streamlining our operations, the financial picture of the district continues to be a difficult one. The economy of our state and our nation was affected following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Funding for all state programs, including education, was affected by the economic downturn. Despite the soft economy in 2001, the legislature appropriated a substantial amount of discretionary revenue to public schools for 2002 – 2003. Unfortunately, due to the economic hurdles of 2001 those discretionary funds were absorbed in meeting obligations caused by the reductions in 2001 and increases in the cost of personnel. In addition, we must continue to monitor student enrollment, which is lower than the previous school year (2000 – 2001) and will have a further financial impact on the district. At the current time, our contingency funds stand at \$20 million – less than what we hoped them to be. The goal is to have contingency funds of \$50 million or 2 percent of our operating budget to maintain a good credit rating. Our credit rating dropped in April of 2002. Our general obligation bonds were reduced from A1 to A2 and our Certificate of Participation (COPS) dropped from A2 to A3.

Land Acquisition Reforms

An issue of great concern to the public and the media has been the past land-purchasing practices of the district. We heard the public, we heard the State and we made changes. The Board approved a new educational facilities planning and construction rule in response to a state assessment and to recommendations from the State's Land Acquisition and Facilities Advisory Board. The new rule establishes procedures that promote a transparent site-acquisition and facilities-planning process and provide for external oversight and community participation through a well-rounded panel of experts and stakeholders, sitting as members of the new School Site Planning and Construction Committee. This month, the district will close on its first major land purchase since the new procedures went into effect and is negotiating for three other properties to be the sites of a new senior and two new middle schools. With the new, more effective rules in place, the district is conducting due diligence on a number of different sites that would accommodate six new school projects over the next five years.

The district has also undertaken a complete review of its leases, with an eye toward reducing lease costs through space consolidation or re-negotiation of terms and conditions where possible. The lease initiative, to be completed at calendar year's end, will be an additional cost saver to the district.

The district has also become increasingly proactive in collaborating with other governmental entities, specifically to negotiate joint-use agreements for shared public land. Our professionals have increased their interaction with local governments as it relates to land use and zoning applications to make sure that we are reaching the community, hearing their concerns and being as efficient as possible in our land and zoning issues.

OPPAGA Sharpening the Pencil Best Practices Recommendations

In 2001, the Florida Legislature passed the *Sharpening the Pencil Act* to improve management and use of resources and to identify cost savings in school districts statewide. Under this act, our district underwent a "best practices" review by the Legislature's Office of Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) during the 2002 – 2002 school year. OPPAGA reported that the district could improve operations, save money and demonstrate better stewardship of public resources. Of 214 best practices identified by OPPAGA, our school district was found to be using 130, equivalent to 61 percent efficiency. While there is no question that there is room for improvement and that we are determined to improve, there is also much that we can be proud of as evidenced by the OPPAGA assessment.

Chief among the report's recommendations was for the district to better integrate its operational activities with the Board's strategic plan. The report also urged the district to develop and implement performance measurement for all of its activities, particularly its business operations. The district welcomed the OPPAGA review and is in the process of implementing its recommendations.

One of the initiatives the OPPAGA report recommended is that the School Board attain master board status. The Master Board program is voluntary and was established by the Florida School Boards Association. The program aims at honing the leadership skills of board members thereby fostering an effective governance team. Our school board attained master board status in September of this year by completing 40 hours of training in statewide forums and onsite workshops.

To aid and support the implementation of OPPAGA performance-improvement recommendations, the district has adopted the Malcolm Baldrige/Sterling Council approach to management. This nationally recognized model for performance assessment and improvement is applicable to private and public sector organizations, including health and education institutions. The district is implementing the Baldrige/Sterling model to improve accountability in our schools and in our food and nutrition, maintenance, transportation, construction, information technology, personnel management and procurement operations.

Improving Maintenance Operations

Our district operates 337 schools and 36 administrative sites. To maintain these facilities we have 1,133 employees represented by three labor organizations, with a total budget for fiscal year 2002 - 2003 of \$85.3 million. OPPAGA reported that our facilities maintenance operations are functioning reasonably effectively; however, OPPAGA also said that there is room for improvement. In particular, the district needs to develop performance standards, make better use of the work order management system and develop a performance appraisal process for maintenance employees. Our district is committed to heeding the OPPAGA recommendations and to establishing a performance-oriented culture in our facilities maintenance operations. To better monitor the OPPAGA recommendations, the Florida Legislature expanded the authority of its Land Acquisition & Facilities Construction Advisory Board to include oversight of the district's facilities maintenance operations. In consultation with the advisory board, the district has solicited proposals to select a maintenance management firm to implement the OPPAGA recommendations and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of facilities maintenance.

Transportation

Our district's transportation operation is massive. We operate more than 1,450 routes daily and transport more than 72,000 students twice per day. The district's 1,730 school buses cover more than 1,955 square miles, an area larger than the states of Rhode Island and Delaware. More than 3,200 employees manage the entire operation.

As noted by the OPPAGA report, our district has the second lowest reportable accident rate per million miles compared to other districts in the state. We are very proud of our safety record and the great working relationship that exists among our transportation personnel to ensure timely school bus service and the safest ride for our transported students.

Food Services

Part of a healthy, nurturing environment is providing our students with a nutritious meal. Currently we employ more than 4,000 part-time and full-time food service personnel. We serve more than 210,000 breakfasts and lunches every day in more than 375 facilities. Compared to its private-sector counterparts, our food-service operation is one of the largest restaurant chains in South Florida.

We are very close to reaching our goal of closing all our senior high school campuses at lunchtime. Last school year, we closed four more campuses. At the beginning of this school year, we closed seven more, leaving three still open where only seniors may leave at lunchtime. That privilege will end next year and all our school campuses will be closed.

We are remodeling facilities, improving equipment and purchasing the kinds of nutritious foods that interest our younger pupils and young adults. The district has hired two professional part-time nutrition educators who conducted more than 260 classroom presentations in the 2001 - 2002 school year.

Our goal is to provide our students with information regarding a good healthy diet. Towards that goal, we have enhanced our promotional activities to include student cooking contests at the Miami-Dade County Youth Fair, National "Five-a-Day Week" -- an event encouraging students to eat fruits and vegetables as part of a balanced diet -- and a number of other school site activities tied to cultural cuisines.

Teacher Training and Recruitment

Across the nation, there is an increasing demand for highly qualified teachers. To address our district's needs, our employment incentives have had to compare favorably and our recruitment efforts have had to compete aggressively with those of other districts in Florida and throughout the United States. More than 1,300 teachers were hired to open the current school year. Aside from new teacher orientation, newly hired teachers participate in ongoing professional development activities scheduled for them throughout the year. While we work to recruit and retain qualified teachers, we continue to be faced with the challenge of filling teacher positions in exceptional student education and other critical areas.

Conclusion

Finally, I want to thank my fellow board members, the superintendent and his staff for their dedicated service to our district. Together, we have listened to and made decisions on hundreds of agenda items of importance to the operation of our district and the education of our students. We have made progress and met challenges in a year where we have experienced difficult and unexpected financial issues. Although we have not unanimously agreed on every issue, we have worked diligently to represent the citizens that we were elected to serve. We have not been alone in our labors. We have been accompanied every step of the way by Superintendent Stierheim and the district's professional administrators, teachers, principals, parents, students and support staff who have provided invaluable support, recommendations and constructive criticism. Our work is far from complete. Desirable initiatives that have been started must be maintained and fully implemented. May we continue to do our best in the spirit of cooperation and reaffirm to our community that we are very serious and motivated about the special business of educating our children.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Perla Tabares Hantman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Perla" being the most prominent.

Perla Tabares Hantman, Chair
The School Board of Miami-Dade
County, Florida

cc: Superintendent
School Board Attorney
Superintendent's Executive Staff

This report is available on the Internet at
www.dadeschools.net