

Miami-Dade County Public Schools  
Office of Evaluation and Research  
1500 Biscayne Boulevard  
Miami, Florida 33132

**Evaluation of the  
School Improvement Zone  
Year 1: 2004-05**

February 2006

**Principal Evaluators/Authors:  
Linda R. Sorhaindo, Ph.D.  
Steven M. Urdegar, M.B.A.**

**THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA**

Mr. Agustin J. Barrera, Chair  
Ms. Perla Tabares Hantman, Vice-Chair  
Mr. Frank J. Bolaños  
Ms. Evelyn Langlieb Greer  
Dr. Robert B. Ingram  
Dr. Martin Karp  
Ms. Ana Rivas Logan  
Dr. Marta Pérez  
Dr. Solomon C. Stinson

*Ms. Arielle Maffei, Student Advisor*

**Rudolph F. Crew, Ed. D.  
Superintendent of Schools**

Ms. Carolyn Spaht  
Chief of Staff

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Description of the Program.....	1
Design of the Evaluation .....	5
Research Questions .....	5
Data Sources.....	5
Context.....	6
Implementation.....	6
Perceptions of Parents, Students, and Teachers .....	7
Academic Achievement .....	8
Student Performance on the FCAT-NRT.....	8
Student Performance on the FCAT-SSS .....	12
Other Student Outcomes .....	12
Results.....	13
Context of the Zone .....	13
Implementation.....	14
Perceptions of Teachers, Parents, and Students .....	16
Academic Achievement.....	21
Student Performance on the FCAT-NRT.....	21
Student Performance on the FCAT-SSS .....	27
Other Student Outcomes .....	29
Conclusions.....	31
References.....	35
Appendix A.....	37
Brief Report of the Activity of School Leaders: Year 1 of the School Improvement Zone .....	39
Appendix B.....	41
Teacher Survey.....	43
Parent Survey .....	46
Secondary Student Survey .....	48
Elementary Student Survey.....	49
Appendix C.....	51
Student Expositions as an Opportunity to Feel Proud: One Antidote to Expectations of Failure in Zone Schools .....	53

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1	School Improvement Zone Schools by Feeder Pattern, 2004-05	4
Table 2	List of Zone and Non-Zone Schools for the Quasi-Experiment	10
Table 3	Predictors in the Regression Equation	11
Table 4	Responses to the Teacher Survey Items Addressing Implementation	15
Table 5	Selected School Characteristics	15
Table 6	Responses to the Teacher Survey Items Addressing Teacher Perceptions	17
Table 7	Summary of Responses to the Parent Survey	19
Table 8	Summary of responses to the Student Survey	20
Table 9	Regression Weights for Reading	23
Table 10	Regression Weights for Mathematics	23
Table 11	Residual Scores in Reading	24
Table 12	Residual Scores in Mathematics	26
Table 13	Comparison of FCAT- SSS Reading Achievement Level Change	28
Table 14	Comparison of FCAT- SSS Mathematics Achievement Level Change	29

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1	Residual Scores in Reading	24
Figure 2	Residual Scores in Mathematics	26

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The School Improvement Zone (Zone) is a comprehensive program being implemented in 39 of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools' lowest performing schools. It is designed to bolster the performance of the students in these schools under the direct supervision of the Superintendent. Primary aspects of the initiative include a core literacy program that extends from prekindergarten through grade 12, a structured curriculum and instructional strategies that build across grade and school levels, an extended day and school year to provide additional instructional time, and enhanced professional development for teachers. An evaluation of the program is scheduled to be conducted annually for the first three years of the Zone's operation, with collaboration between the district's Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) and Florida International University's (FIU) Center for Urban Education and Innovation at the College of Education. This report is the first in a series of three reports, which reflects evaluation findings in the Zone's inaugural year.

The evaluation examined the context surrounding implementation of the Zone, the implementation of its primary components, perceptions of various stakeholder groups, and impact on student achievement. Preliminary findings reported by FIU suggest that morale in Zone schools is quite low, and that key components of the initiative have not been implemented with complete success. These findings are in accord with those obtained by the district's OPE. Some school-level characteristics associated with higher levels of achievement did improve; however, not to a greater extent than seen in other, similar schools.

As the primary goal of the Zone is to improve student achievement, this served as the main indicator of progress. Controlled comparisons of student achievement were conducted, examining the performance of students in Zone schools in comparison with that of students who attend other, similar schools. While students in the Zone schools did generally not perform as well as students in the other schools, the deficits were small.

When considering the findings herein, it must be noted that full implementation of the program was only scheduled to occur merely two or three months prior to the standardized testing and other data collection activities on which the findings are based. Accordingly, the results may be considered as preliminary findings, which will be used as a baseline for comparisons in subsequent years. More successful results may be achieved when the full impact of the initiative can be realized.



## **INTRODUCTION**

The School Improvement Zone (Zone) is a comprehensive program designed to bolster the performance of the district's lowest performing schools. Approved by the School Board of Miami-Dade County on August 18, 2004, the primary aspects of the initiative include a core literacy program that extends from prekindergarten through grade 12, a structured curriculum and instructional strategies that build across grade and school levels, an extended day and school year to provide additional instructional time, and enhanced professional development. The stated goal of the program is to "advance high achievement while eliminating low performance" in 39 of the district's lowest performing schools, placed under the direct supervision of the Superintendent. In order to administer the program consistently across the various administrative regions of the district, schools in the Zone were administered by the Deputy Superintendent for School Improvement (Office of School Improvement, 2004b). Following its approval in August, 2004, staff began the union negotiations, planning, and professional development activities necessary for implementation of the reforms called for in this initiative. The major components were scheduled to be in place by January 18, 2005. An evaluation of the program is scheduled to be conducted annually, for the program's first three years of operation. The evaluation is a cooperative endeavor to be carried out by the district's Office of Program Evaluation in conjunction with the Center for Urban Education and Innovation at the College of Education of Florida International University.

### **Description of the Program**

The School Improvement Zone emphasizes a differentiated approach to instruction focused on the elimination of low student performance and the promotion of high achievement for students in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. The program utilizes research-based instructional materials and innovative instructional strategies in a structured curriculum to advance teaching and learning. The Zone program, which spans prekindergarten through grade 12, addresses the needs of at-risk youngsters in poorly performing schools (Office of School Improvement, 2004a). It is comprised of the following critical components, each of which is addressed in ensuing paragraphs.

- (a) Comprehensive literacy
- (b) Early childhood readiness
- (c) Student development teams
- (d) Extended day and year
- (e) Professional development

The comprehensive literacy component was developed for all students. It is comprised of the following elements: differentiated instruction, and targeted tutoring and intervention. Specific emphasis is placed on providing students who are reading below grade level with a contiguous balanced literacy program. Instructional materials are geared to the students' reading level as opposed to their age-determined grade level. A common set of instructional materials is adopted for each distinct grade organization, which must be used by all schools that participate in the program (Office of School Improvement, 2004b).

The elementary reading program is aligned to three series published by Houghton-Mifflin; *Legacy of Literacy*, *Early Success*, and *Soar to Success*. The *Legacy of Literacy* series is used for the core program, *Early Success* is used as the intervention for students in grades K through 2, and *Soar to Success* is used as the intervention for students in grades 3 through 5. Tier 3 students (those retained more than once) in K-5 use a more intensive program called *Voyager Passport*. The secondary reading program in grades 6 through 12 for students who are on grade level is the McDougal-Littell *Language of Literature* series. Middle school students who are reading at one or more grades below grade level use Scholastic's *Read 180* as do senior high students reading at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level or below. Senior high students reading at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level or 2 grades below grade level use Scholastic's *Read XL* program. Limited English proficient students use a series by Ellis at all grade levels (Office of School Improvement, 2004a).

The early-childhood readiness component is designed to help preschool youngsters acquire the skills needed to succeed in school. This component incorporates assessment, early literacy, math/science content, and character education. Professional development for prekindergarten teachers is also provided (Office of School Improvement, 2004b).

Students that persistently fall behind in school need continuous assistance to help them to succeed. To assist these students, the Zone provides Student Development Teams. These teams operate like Child Study Teams for students in Exceptional Student Education programs, to analyze student difficulties and intervene to remove barriers to student achievement. A Student Development Team is comprised of teachers, administrators, and community involvement specialists. A school psychologist, education specialists, and social workers may also be included (Office of School Improvement, 2004b).

The Zone also offers an extended-day and an extended school year. At Zone schools, the school day is extended one hour longer than at other M-DCPS schools each day except Wednesday. The school year at Zone schools is also five days longer than at non-Zone schools. Senior high students who have passed the High School Competency Test (HSCT) may opt out of the extended time. For the inaugural year of implementation, 2004-05, the school year was extended five days past the school year at non-Zone schools.

Finally, the Zone provides intensive professional training and development to teachers and administrators in participating schools. Professional development for teachers and administrators is provided in various ways, including Critical Mass Training, Coaching Models, Saturday Academies, and Wednesday Workshops. The Critical Mass Training is an intensive program targeted at certain subject areas or grade levels. The Coaching Model utilizes trained reading specialists, who provide professional development through demonstration lessons, feedback on strategy implementation, and planning with classroom teachers. The Saturday Academies and Wednesday Workshops provide professional development in areas such as using assessment data, capacity building, and differentiated instruction (Office of School Improvement, 2004a).

Schools were chosen to participate in the Zone based on three criteria: (1) low academic performance for three years, (2) membership in a feeder pattern in which low performance is widespread, and (3) possession of the leadership capacity necessary to successfully adopt a comprehensive school reform program (Office of School Improvement, 2004b). Nine of the



schools selected to participate in the Zone were already under state mandate for school improvement. Overall, 39 schools across eight feeder patterns were selected to participate in the program. These schools are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**School Improvement Zone Schools by Feeder Pattern, 2004-05**

Region	High School	Feeder Schools
I	Hialeah-Miami Lakes	Bunche Park Elementary Opa-Locka Elementary
II	Miami Norland	Myrtle Grove Elementary Norland Elementary Norland Middle Parkway Middle
III	Miami Central	Lakeview Elementary Dr. H. W. Mack/West Little River Elementary Madison Middle Westview Middle
III	Miami Northwestern	Holmes Elementary Martin L. King Jr. Elementary K-2 Brownsville Middle Charles Drew Middle
IV	Miami Edison	Thena Crowder K-3 Edison Park Elementary Little River Elementary Toussaint L'Ouverture Elementary Morningside Elementary Shadowlawn Elementary Horace Mann Middle Miami Edison Middle
IV	Miami Jackson	Paul Dunbar Elementary Santa Clara Elementary Allapattah Middle
IV	Booker T. Washington	Phillis Wheatley Elementary Jose De Diego Middle
VI	Homestead	Florida City Elementary Leisure City K-8 Laura Saunders Elementary Campbell Drive Middle

## DESIGN OF THE EVALUATION

The School Board of Miami-Dade County approved the School Improvement Zone (Zone) in August 2004 for implementation during the 2004-05 school year. The major components of the initiative were scheduled to be in place by January 18, 2005. The evaluation of the program will examine its first three years of operation. It was designed as a joint venture between the Center for Urban Education & Innovation at Florida International University (FIU) and the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) of Miami-Dade County Public Schools. The evaluation consists of a context component, an implementation component, and an outcomes component. The context component comprises a detailed description of the environment and the conditions that led up to the development of the Zone, the planning and preparation for its implementation, and the implications of the implementation with regard to the culture of the schools. Based on a Memo of Understanding between the two organizations, the context portion of the evaluation is the primary responsibility of the FIU evaluation team. The implementation component examines what actually happens at the schools and around the district in terms of the Zone coming online, and implementation of the day to day activities in the Zone. Both the FIU and OPE teams contribute to this component of the evaluation. Finally, the outcomes component of the evaluation addresses the efficacy of the Zone. This component is the primary responsibility of the OPE.

### Research Questions

The three components of the evaluation are addressed by a series of questions which define the specific focus of the evaluation. The questions are as follow:

1. What was the context surrounding the adoption of the Zone?
2. Is the Zone being implemented according to program design?
3. What are the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholder groups (parents, students, and teachers) toward the Zone?
4. What is the impact of the Zone on the students' academic achievement?
5. What is the impact of the Zone on other student outcomes that impact achievement?

### Data Sources

In order to address these questions, the FIU and OPE evaluation teams drew data from a variety of sources. FIU utilized a qualitative research design, calling for in-depth interviews with district and school administrators, as well as observations at Zone events and in Zone schools. In addition, surveys of Zone principals and assistant principals were administered. The district's OPE utilized a mixed-methods design, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data collection methodology. Data sources utilized by the OPE were: 1) district publications<sup>1</sup>; 2) students' demographic and

---

<sup>1</sup> District publications served largely to provide information about the required components of the Zone in the preparation of the evaluation plan and data collection instruments. They include *District and School Profiles, 2003-04* and *2004-05* produced by the M-DCPS Office of Data Quality Management.

academic achievement data from the student database system; 3) surveys of students, parents, and school staff; and 4) interviews with district administrators. The combination of approaches used by FIU and OPE provide a comprehensive view of the Zone. The specific sources for each question are described below.

### **Context**

As stated above, the context component of the evaluation was the primary responsibility of the FIU evaluation team. Context refers to the overall environment for which the program was designed, and into which it was incorporated. Also addressed is planning and preparation prior to implementation and the resulting impact on the school's culture. The FIU evaluation team used qualitative research methods to explore these issues and to address subsequent implementation. Baseline data was collected, via surveys of Principals and Assistant Principals at all Zone schools; and more comprehensive in-situ processes were used in a sample of nine schools. Field notes were transcribed for all observations, including Zone administrator meetings, interactions between district administrators and school leaders, Town Hall Forums, and in class sessions and special events held at Zone schools<sup>2</sup>. Summaries of these activities will provide a rich description of the context of the Zone.

### **Implementation**

It is important to determine whether the Zone was implemented according to program design before an assessment of its impact can be made. Therefore, the evaluation addressed the degree and nature of program implementation. Data were drawn from three sources to address this issue: from observations and principal interviews, from surveys conducted of the schools' teachers, and from *District and School Profiles, 2003-04* and *2004-05*.

The first source of data was obtained through principal interviews and school site observations conducted by FIU staff, as described above. This data source provides a narrative description of the ethos of Zone schools as well as the implementation of the primary components of the initiative. Completion of this portion by FIU staff serves as an independent assessment of the fidelity of program implementation.

The second source of data was obtained through surveys of the teachers assigned to Zone schools, collected by OPE. The Teacher Survey is comprised of 7 items that address teacher demographics, 35 items that adhered to a Likert-scale format, and one open-ended item for teacher comments. Numeric equivalents for the Likert-scaled item responses ranged from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to a high of 5 (strongly agree) with 3 provided as a neutral response. Four out of the 35 items on the Teacher Survey addressed implementation. Survey forms were distributed through school mail to each teacher assigned to a Zone school, approximately 2,400 were sent out to teachers in May 2005. The analysis of the results from the survey was limited to descriptive statistics. (A copy of the Teacher Survey form may be found in Appendix B.)

---

<sup>2</sup> A more detailed summary of the methodology used by FIU staff is provided in Appendix A.

The third source of data was obtained by OPE staff from district publications which feature district-wide compilations of statistics, including *District and School Profiles, 2003-04 and 2004-05*. One of the objectives of the Zone was to improve school level variables associated with higher levels of achievement. Such variables include student-teacher ratio, average years teaching experience, percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and percentages of new and beginning teachers. Changes in the schools' status from 2003-04 to 2004-05 were examined for Zone schools, and compared to other similar district schools<sup>3</sup>. Independent sample *t*-tests were used to compare the changes and to assess the statistical significance of the differences. In addition, other means of gauging teacher movement in the Zone are in development.

### **Perceptions of Parents, Students, and Teachers**

Effective implementation of a complex intervention requires the support of many stakeholder groups. Therefore, the attitudes of these stakeholders toward the program are an important consideration. Data were drawn from surveys of three stakeholder groups: teachers, parents, and students. Copies of each instrument are presented in Appendix A.

The first queried teachers in Zone schools, and was described in detail in the preceding section. Thirty-one of the Likert-scaled items on the Teacher Survey addressed teachers' perceptions of the Zone schools.

The second survey targeted parents of participating students. The Parent Survey was designed to ascertain the parents' level of satisfaction with their child's school and their perceptions of the Zone. It addresses home-school communications, the extent to which the parents feel welcomed at the school, and their level of involvement. The Parent Surveys were anonymous. They were comprised of 16 items, which largely adhered to a Likert-scale format. Numerical values of the item responses ranged from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to a high of 4 (strongly agree). A neutral response option was not provided. However, a mean value of "2.5" would indicate that parents were evenly divided on the issue, with as many parents agreeing as disagreeing with an item.

Sets of 30 Parent Surveys were sent via school mail to the teachers of two randomly selected classrooms at each Zone school. Copies of the Parent Survey were provided in English, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole. The accompanying instructions directed the teachers to distribute survey instruments to each student in their class. Students were instructed to return the completed instrument to their classroom teacher, which were then returned to OPE as class groups. The analysis of the results from the survey was limited to descriptive statistics.

The third survey targeted students who were enrolled in the Zone schools. Two forms of the survey instrument were used to accommodate elementary and secondary students. Sets of 30 survey forms were sent through school mail to the teacher of one randomly selected classroom at each of the 39 Zone schools. Instructions to the teachers requested that they administer the survey to their students, place the completed forms in a provided large envelope, and return the set to OPE through school mail. Individual students' responses were anonymous. The Elementary Student Survey and Secondary Student Survey were both comprised of 15 items, four of which pertain to

---

<sup>3</sup> A description of the process used to select the control schools is provided in the following section.

attitudes towards the program. The remainder of the items covered general and demographic information. The items on both forms generally adhered to a yes/no format. As such, the analysis was limited to the frequency and percentage of yes and no responses.

### **Academic Achievement**

The Zone focuses on improving the students' achievement in some of the district's lowest performing schools. Two sources of data were used to assess the impact on the students' academic achievement, each is listed below, with a detailed description following.

- 1) The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test – Norm-Referenced Test (FCAT-NRT) is a secure form of the Stanford Achievement Test – 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (SAT-10). It is a standardized norm-referenced test designed to measure participants' performance in comparison to a national normative sample of students. It thereby facilitates comparisons among individuals and groups. The FCAT-NRT is administered statewide to all students in grades 3 through 10 in March of each school year. The M-DCPS concurrently administers a commercially available form of the SAT-10, to students in grade 2.
- 2) The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test – Sunshine State Standards (FCAT-SSS) is a standardized, criterion-referenced test of reading and mathematics designed to measure students' mastery of the knowledge specified by the Sunshine State Standards. In 2004 and 2005, this test was administered to students in grades 3-10.

### ***Student Performance on the FCAT-NRT***

To gauge the students' performance on the FCAT-NRT, a quasi-experiment was conducted as part of the evaluation. A quasi-experiment is a technically acceptable alternative to a true experiment, which is often conducted in natural social settings where true experiments are not technically feasible (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The specific quasi-experimental design used in the evaluation is a form of the non-equivalent control group design. This design essentially involves using pre and posttest scores to compare the performance of a group of subjects who are exposed to an experimental treatment (i.e., the experimental group) with that of a group who are not (i.e., the control group). The two groups are considered nonequivalent because the subjects were not randomly assigned to them (as is the case with a true experimental design). Consequently, the pretest scores are used as evidence of the comparability of the two groups prior to the treatment. In applying the nonequivalent control group design to the analysis of the Zone students' FCAT-NRT scores, the Zone schools represent the experimental treatment.

### ***Samples***

All students who attended the Zone schools were included in the quasi-experiment if they had valid pre (2004) and posttest scores (2005), and were enrolled in the same school during October and February of the 2004-05 school year. This criterion for inclusion is the state of Florida's participation requirement for inclusion of students in school performance grades (Evaluation and Reporting Office, 2005). It is meant to ensure that accountability indices accurately reflect the student populations they are intended to measure.

A control group of students from similar schools was also defined. The schools were matched on a series of contextual factors thought to have impact upon student achievement. These factors include the percentage of enrolled students eligible for the free and reduced priced lunch (FRL) program, the percentage of black students, and the percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) students. A cluster analysis procedure was used to group the schools mathematically on relevant variables. Separate cluster analyses were conducted for the elementary, middle, and senior high schools, and the K through 8 centers; and a control school was selected for each Zone school<sup>4</sup>. The selected schools are listed on Table 2. The control schools include 14 designated as STELLAR (Schools Targeting Excellence in Literacy, Learning, and Reading) schools and 24 maintaining traditional M-DCPS educational and administrative protocols. One Zone school was not matched, due to its grade configuration. The criteria for inclusion of individual students in the analyses were the same for the control schools as for the treatment group (all students with valid pre and posttest scores who were enrolled in the same school during October and February of the 2004-05 school year).

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis for the FCAT-NRT scores involved a three-step process. First, expected posttest, or “par” scores, were calculated for each student. Then, the degree to which a student’s actual posttest score met the par score was assessed (via a residual score). And finally, the performance of Zone students was compared to that of students in the control schools. This process is explained in detail below.

First, multiple regression analysis was used to predict the students’ expected posttest scores, or “par” scores. A student’s par score would be his or her expected level of achievement, given a “standard” educational experience in the district, and individual demographic and academic characteristics. Par scores serve as a means of gauging the actual academic achievement of the students – whether their actual scores were higher or lower than what was expected. The par scores are based on the individual students’ pretest scores and other archival data which are associated with academic achievement. The pretest score was a student’s 2004 FCAT-NRT (grades 3 – 10) or SAT (grade 2) score in the appropriate content domain (i.e., reading or mathematics).

The following demographic predictors were used as predictors in the regression analysis: gender, ethnicity, FRL program status, LEP classification, Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program status, and retention status. Each demographic predictor was represented by a series of dichotomously coded numbers (0 or 1). A complete list of the predictor variables used in the regression equations is found in Table 3. The posttest or measure of the students’ actual achievement was a student’s 2005 FCAT-NRT (grades 3 – 10) score in the appropriate content domain.

---

<sup>4</sup> For the interested reader: To select the control schools, a cluster analysis was employed. This involved generation of a proximity matrix for each level, which provided the mathematical distance between the Zone schools and all other schools in the district. A tree-diagram called a dendrogram was used to graphically depict those distances. Then, for each Zone school, a control school with the same grade organization was selected by choosing from among those schools at the end-points of the dendrogram. Where multiple possible control schools were available, the one in closest demographic proximity was selected. Where no potential control schools were found at the end-point of the dendrogram, the closest matching school at the nearest branch was selected. This process was repeated until each experimental school was paired with a demographically similar control school.

**Table 2**  
**List of Zone and Non-Zone Schools for the Quasi-Experiment**

Group		
Level	Zone (Treatment)	Non-Zone (Control)
Elementary	Bunche Park Elementary	Carrie P. Meek/Westview Elementary
	Dr. Henry W. Mack/W. Little River	Broadmoor Elementary
	Edison Park Elementary	Van E. Blanton Elementary
	Florida City Elementary	Naranja Elementary
	Holmes Elementary	Charles R. Drew Elementary
	Lakeview Elementary	Amelia Earhart Elementary
	Laura C. Saunders Elementary	Dr. William A. Chapman Elementary.
	Little River Elementary	Fulford Elementary
	Martin Luther King Elementary	Unmatched
	Morningside Elementary	Miami Park Elementary
	Myrtle Grove Elementary	Parkway Elementary
	Norland Elementary	Scott Lake Elementary
	Opa-Locka Elementary	North Glade Elementary
	Paul Lawrence Dunbar Elementary	Carol City Elementary
	Phillis Wheatley Elementary	Lillie C. Evans Elementary
	Santa Clara Elementary	Frederick Douglass Elementary
	Shadowlawn Elementary	Kelsey L. Pharr Elementary*
	Thena Crowder Elementary	Barbara J. Hawkins Elementary
	Toussaint L'Ouverture Elementary	Benjamin Franklin Elementary*
	K-8	Leisure City K-8 Center
Middle	Allapattah Middle	Redland Middle*
	Brownsville Middle	Centennial Middle*
	Campbell Drive Middle	Lake Stevens Middle
	Charles R. Drew Middle	Carol City Middle*
	Horace Mann Middle	Thomas Jefferson Middle*
	Jose De Diego Middle	Homestead Middle*
	Madison Middle	Cutler Ridge Middle
	Miami Edison Middle	North Miami Middle*
	Norland Middle	John F. Kennedy Middle
	Parkway Middle	North Dade Middle
Westview Middle	Mays Middle Community*	
Senior	Booker T. Washington Sr.	Robert Morgan Education Center
	Hialeah-Miami Lakes Senior	South Dade Senior*
	Homestead Senior	American Senior*
	Miami Central Senior	Miami Carol City Senior*
	Miami Edison Senior	North Miami Senior*
	Miami Jackson Senior	Miami Lakes Educational Center
	Miami Norland Senior	North Miami Beach Senior
	Miami Northwestern Senior	Miami Southridge Senior*

\* STELLAR (Schools Targeting Excellence in Literacy, Learning, and Reading) schools.



**Table 3**  
**Predictors in the Regression Equation**

Predictor	Definition/Values
Pretest score	Scaled score of FCAT-NRT content domain 438 – 830 (Reading) 397 – 858 (Mathematics)
Gender	Student Gender Male Female
Ethnicity	Ethnic Classification: Black or Hispanic Black Hispanic White/Other
FRL	Free/reduced priced lunch program Eligible Not Eligible
LEP	Limited English Proficiency status Current LEP Former LEP Non-LEP
ESE	Exception Student Education status Student with Disability Gifted Non-Gifted, Non-Disabled
Retained	Retention Status Retained Not Retained

In order to determine the influence of each of the predictor variables, a preliminary analysis was conducted using a separate sample of students. This was necessary to ensure that the regression weights of each predictor variable were computed independently of the program's influence. From a pool of all students with valid test scores (who were enrolled in the same school during October 2004 and February 2005), a sample of 2,000 students was randomly selected for each grade and subtest. This included grades 3 through 10. Each sample of 2,000 students was used to compute regression equations for a particular grade level, thereby establishing regression weights for each predictor variable. The regression weights were then applied to the predictor variables of students in the Zone and control schools and used to predict the students' posttest scores. The students' scores in reading and mathematics were predicted separately. These predicted scores (par) represent the posttest score that a particular student would be expected to attain if he or she were attending a typical M-DCPS school. The difference between the actual posttest score and the par score is called the residual score. Comparisons of the mean residual scores of the Zone schools and the control group schools provide an indication of the program's efficacy.

Independent sample *t*-tests were used to compare the Zone and control schools' residual scores and assess the statistical significance of those differences. As the statistical significance of differences is impacted by sample size, additional analyses were conducted to ascertain the practical import of the findings. The effect-size statistic *d* used in this analysis takes into account not only the difference between the mean scores of two groups, but also the amount of dispersion within each group. Researchers have established guidelines for the classification of the practical significance of effect sizes in order to establish a common metric to gauge the importance of results and to facilitate the synthesis of findings across multiple studies (Cohen, 1988; Lipsey & Wilson, 1993). A common classification for *d* was proposed by Cohen (1990) who categorized practical significance as .25 = weak, .50 = moderate, and .80 = strong.

### ***Student Performance on the FCAT-SSS***

FCAT-SSS results are used by the state to report student progress as required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110). As such, it is of value to ascertain the level of improvement Zone schools have achieved in this regard. The same treatment and control groups used in the FCAT-NRT analysis were used in the FCAT-SSS analysis. The analysis addressed the issue of student movement from one achievement level to another.

FCAT-SSS achievement levels were used in this analysis, which could range from 1 (low) to 5 (high). The difference between a student's achievement level on the 2004 and 2005 administrations of the FCAT-SSS was computed. For the purposes of this analysis, students whose 2004 achievement levels were 1 or 2 were considered to have made learning gains if they gained one or more achievement level. Students whose 2004 achievement levels were 3, 4, or 5 were considered to have made gains if they maintained their previous level or gained one or more levels. The students resulting change scores were then partitioned into two groups: those who made gains and those who did not. Separate analyses were conducted for reading and mathematics; however, achievement level data for students in grades 3 – 10 were combined.

Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) analyses were performed to compare the percentages of student who made gains at Zone and control schools. Separate comparisons were made in reading and mathematics. To determine the practical significance of any differences, the effect size Phi was computed. Phi measures the extent to which the percentages of students making gain in each group are different. Phi ranges from 0 (same) to 1 (different). Cohen (1988) has classified the practical significance of Phi as follows: .10 = weak, .30 = moderate, and .50 = strong.

### **Other Student Outcomes**

Other student outcomes considered for inclusion in this evaluation were: student transfers into and out of Zone schools, student attendance, mobility; and incidence of students referred to indoor and outdoor suspensions. These school-level attributes are reported yearly in the *District and School Profiles* publication. Appropriate statistical tests will be applied to each of these indicators, to compare the Zone schools with other, similar schools.

## RESULTS

The School Improvement Zone was scheduled to be implemented during the 2003-04 school year with the major components in place by January 18, 2005. The evaluation of the program in Year 1 took place mainly during the spring of 2005. The evaluation was designed as a joint venture between the Center for Urban Education & Innovation at Florida International University (FIU) and the Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) of Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Data was gathered by FIU and OPE from a variety of sources including interviews, observations, a review of district records, surveys of teachers, parents, and students, and the analysis of assessment results. The findings are presented below.

### Context of the Zone

FIU spearheaded the context component of the evaluation, and will be providing a summary of the findings under separate cover. A descriptive report of Student Expositions was submitted as an indication of the impact of changes imposed by the School Improvement Zone<sup>5</sup>, and is summarized below.

Described are Student Expositions held during the last week of the extended school year, June 7 and 8, 2005. These expositions provided an opportunity to “shift the focus from student FCAT scores to a more personal and informative portrait of the students’ work.” Student work was displayed, student performances held, Parent-Teacher Conferences were planned, and district and school outreach took place to invite parents and community members to attend. FIU staff visited seven Zone schools during the two-day period, and conducted observations and informal interviews with school staff, students, and visitors. The report notes that parent/community attendance was minimal, with the exception of one middle school which drew “a gymnasium full of family members for their traditional awards ceremonies and 8<sup>th</sup> grade promotional exercises.” Plans were in place to conduct observations during Parent-Teacher Conferences, “an integral component of the Student Expositions;” however, none took place during the visits that could be observed “because of the lack of parental response.” The report notes a similar lack of attendance by community members and district officials. In addition, the description notes, “Just as the community was absent, there was also evidence of considerable student absenteeism at the high school and to a lesser extent at the middle school level. [Although] absenteeism was not notable at the elementary schools,” it is identified as a “symptom of a more profound problem with the extended school year.”

Nonetheless, despite the low levels of attendance at the Student Expositions, the FIU team “found teachers and students who demonstrated a vibrant sense of pride and joy with the effort, quality, and aesthetic presentation of student work produced for the Student Expositions.” Despite their pride, evaluators note a “pervasive discontent among teachers.” Teachers noted difficulties with timing, end of school obligations, as well as a “lack of support and direction” for

---

<sup>5</sup> The report, entitled “*Student Expositions as an Opportunity to Feel Proud: One Antidote to Expectations of Failure in Zone Schools*” (Pagan and Stepick, 2005) appears in Appendix C in its entirety.

the event. Included in the report is a description of the Student Exhibition at the seven schools visited, and recommendations for similar events to be held in the future.

### **Implementation**

The implementation component of the evaluation addresses the degree to which all components of the Zone were put into place and functioned as planned. As stated above, FIU staff will provide a description of their findings from direct observations at the schools under separate cover. OPE staff used several sources of data to address some aspects of program implementation, including a survey of teachers, school-level data obtained from district publications, and interviews with district administrators.

One of the primary sources of data concerning implementation of the Zone initiative was a survey of teachers working in Zone schools. Approximately 2,400 survey instruments were distributed to these teachers; however, due to changes in location numbers and other staffing changes, surveys were not received by every teacher. Nevertheless, completed surveys were returned by 993 teachers representing each of the 39 Zone schools, yielding a minimum return rate of 41.4%. It should be noted that a follow-up request, urging teachers to complete and return the survey, went out to teachers in the form of an email message from the United Teachers of Dade's liaison to the Zone. Even so, the return rate was much lower than typical return rates for teachers in the district. Additionally, nearly a quarter (211) of the surveys that were returned had the school identifier removed, despite assurances of the confidentiality of individual teachers' responses. The low response rates and efforts to avoid identification suggest that the teachers were hesitant to provide their opinions regarding the Zone. While these factors should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings, it is unlikely that non-respondents would have diametrically opposite views from the respondents. Sufficient numbers of responses were received from schools across the Zone to provide an indication of the teachers' perceptions.

Response options for the Teacher Survey adhered to a Likert scale format that ranged from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to a high of 5 (strongly agree), with 3 provided as a neutral response. The mean item response across all respondents was calculated for every item. A mean item response of "3" would indicate that the average score across all teachers was "neutral" or that as many teachers "agreed" as "disagreed." Table 4 displays a summary of the responses to the five items on the Teacher Survey that address implementation. The table displays the item, the number of respondents, the mean item response, and the standard deviation for each item.

One major aspect of the Zone was an emphasis on an increased level of professional development. Four items on the Teacher Survey addressed the issue of professional development. Teachers generally agreed that they were "encouraged to pursue further professional development" ( $M=3.98$ ,  $n=966$ ). However, the average item scores on the three other items were all close to the neutral score of 3: professional development "is at a good level" ( $M=3.18$ ,  $n=966$ ); "takes into account my individual interests and needs" ( $M=2.78$ ,  $n=982$ ); and that "it is not difficult to gain access to in-service courses" ( $M=3.11$ ,  $n=980$ ). In particular, it may be noted that the teachers endorsed the incidence of professional development geared to an individual's needs to a lesser extent than any of these items.

**Table 4**  
**Responses to the Teacher Survey Items Addressing Implementation**

	Item	<i>n</i>	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Standard deviation
1.	All aspects of the Zone program are fully operational.	966	2.81	1.20
3.	I am encouraged to pursue further professional development.	981	3.98	1.15
18.	The required professional development is at a good level.	966	3.16	1.27
22.	The professional development planning in the school takes into account my individual needs and interest.	982	2.78	1.27
31.	It is not difficult to gain access to in-services courses	980	3.09	1.29

<sup>a</sup>Mean item scores could range from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to a high of 5 (strongly agree).

One item directly addressed overall implementation of the program. The item read, “all aspects of the Zone are fully-operational.” The mean response was slightly below the neutral score of 3 ( $M=2.81$ ,  $n=966$ ), indicating that on average, the teachers did not endorse full implementation of the components that make up the Zone.

Additional data regarding Zone implementation was obtained from district publications, which provide school-level statistics on variables that have been found to impact student achievement. Included were pupil-teacher ratio, percentage new and beginning teachers, years of teaching experience, and percentage of teachers with advanced degrees. Table 5 displays the results of these analyses.

**Table 5**  
**Selected School Characteristics**

Variable	Zone					Control			Difference*	
	<i>n</i>	2003-04		2004-05		2003-04		2004-05		<i>t</i>
		Mean	Mean	Change	Std. Dev.	Mean	Mean	Change	Std. Dev.	
Pupil-teacher ratio	38	17.7	16.2	-1.5	1.3	19.1	17.9	-1.1	1.7	-1.13
Teachers New to School (%)	38	18.5	19.7	1.2	9.8	19.1	16.3	-2.7	12.7	1.51
Beginning Teachers (%)	38	13.1	12.1	-1.0	5.9	12.7	9.8	-2.9	6.3	1.40
Average Years Teaching	38	9.2	9.8	0.6	1.1	9.9	10.3	0.4	1.0	0.45
Teachers with Advanced Degrees (%)	38	41.1	40.9	-0.2	6.5	45.7	43.5	-2.2	4.5	1.53

\* Significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences, if any, are noted by an asterisk beside the *t*-value.

Pupil-teacher ratio was included because one of the objectives of the Zone was to improve individualized attention received by students. The pupil-teacher ratio went down in both the Zone and non-Zone control group schools. During the 2003-04 school year, the pupil-teacher ratio was 1.4% lower at Zone schools and 1.7% lower during the 2004-05 school year. Thus, the Zone

schools had an advantage in terms of pupil-teacher ratio both before and following implementation of the Zone. Differences between the Zone schools and the control schools may also be examined by looking at the change in the ratio from school year 2003-04 to 2004-05. The change was analyzed with a *t*-test. There was no significant difference ( $t=-1.13$ ,  $p > .05$ ) found in the change from year to year in the Zone ( $M=-1.5$ ,  $n=38$ ) and the control schools ( $M=-1.1$ ,  $n=38$ ) on pupil-teacher ratio.

The actual value and change from 2003-04 to 2004-05 are also examined for the other variables. It may be seen that in every case, variables associated with high achievement are lower in the Zone schools than in the control schools in 2004-05. Zone schools had higher percentages of new and beginning teachers, lower percentages of teachers with advanced degrees, and the teachers had slightly fewer years teaching experience. To ascertain whether this situation is improving or getting worse, differences were calculated comparing the 2003-04 and the 2004-05 school years. In the Zone schools, the changes are moving in the “right” direction with a slight reduction in the percentage of beginning teachers and slightly higher average years of teaching experience. However, they are moving in the “wrong” direction with regard to the percentage of teachers new to the school and the percentages of teachers with advanced degrees. Independent sample *t*-tests were used to compare the changes for Zone and control schools. As the table shows, no significant differences were found for any of the selected characteristics.

### **Perceptions of Teachers, Parents, and Students**

Surveys of three stakeholder groups at Zone schools were conducted: teachers, parents, and students. The Teacher Survey included many items that addressed their perceptions of the Zone schools in addition to those addressing implementation that have already been discussed. These items can be classified into four categories, (a) teachers’ involvement in school functioning and decision making, (b) the level of staff cohesion at the school, (c) school discipline, and (d) school spirit. Table 6 displays a summary of the responses to those items.

As seen in the table, ten items addressed teachers’ involvement in school functioning, and decision making. The means of the teachers’ responses to these items ranged from a low of 1.73 to a high of 4.17. It may be recalled that a mean item score of “3” represented a neutral point on the scale for the Teacher Survey, indicating that as many teachers agreed as disagreed. Of the 10 items, all but one of the items that addressed this topic was at or less than the neutral point on the scale. A mean item score of 4.17 indicates that most teachers agreed that they were “clear about their professional responsibilities.” The lowest means were for two items which addressed being involved in budget decisions and in the selection of new teachers.

**Table 6**  
**Responses to the Teacher Survey Items Addressing Teacher Perceptions**

Item	<i>n</i>	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Standard Deviation
<b>School Functioning/Decision Making</b>			
2. I am involved in school budget decisions.	979	1.73	0.98
4. I participate in making decisions about the implementation of new programs in the school.	981	2.38	1.27
5. I participate in making decisions about the selection of other teachers for my school.	985	1.78	1.05
6. Principals, other teachers, and school personnel solicit my advice.	986	2.83	1.32
7. I always know how much authority I have in this school.	980	3.06	1.29
9. My advice is solicited by others.	979	3.17	1.23
17. I am clear about my professional responsibilities.	980	4.17	0.86
21. I am given the opportunity to teach other teachers.	974	2.73	1.24
23. I am given the responsibility to monitor programs.	977	2.55	1.19
26. I have an opportunity to teach other teachers about innovative ideas.	978	2.72	1.20
<b>Staff Cohesion</b>			
10. I have an opportunity to be involved in cooperative work with other members of staff.	986	3.68	1.11
11. I feel accepted by other staff in the school.	993	4.04	0.94
12. There is good communication between staff members in the school.	990	3.20	1.22
13. Teachers frequently discuss and share teaching methods and strategies with each other.	992	3.44	1.14
14. My own expectations about discipline are the same as most other teachers at this school.	990	3.32	1.21
15. I am always clear about what others at school expect of me.	988	3.55	1.13
16. There is good communication between groups in this school.	977	2.88	1.13
27. Teachers in this school can rely on their colleagues for support and assistance when needed.	982	3.52	1.12
35. I receive support from my colleagues.	979	3.78	0.94
<b>Discipline</b>			
19. The rule and sanctions relating to discipline in this school are well understood by both staff and students.	979	2.58	1.33
32. There is an agreed philosophy on discipline in this school.	977	2.52	1.28
34. The rules and sanctions relating to discipline are enforced in a consistent fashion in this school.	975	2.31	1.23
<b>School Spirit</b>			
20. Teachers go about their work with enthusiasm.	980	2.81	1.18
25. The morale in this school is high.	978	2.36	1.23
29. There is good team spirit in this school.	975	2.66	1.28
33. Teachers take pride in this school.	978	3.01	1.18
<b>Overall</b>			
28. This school is better since becoming a Zone school.	981	2.42	1.20

<sup>a</sup>Mean item scores could range from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to a high of 5 (strongly agree).

Nine items dealt with the area of staff cohesion. For staff cohesion, mean responses ranged from a low of 2.88 to a high of 4.04. Some items garnered neutral responses, but the teachers tended to agree with the majority of these items. The highest mean item score related to feeling accepted by the other staff (item #11), followed closely by the item that stated, "I receive support from my colleagues." The lowest mean item score in this group was for item 16, which read, "There is good communication between groups in the school." This relatively low score may have been due to the teachers' interpretation of "groups," which may have referred to other stakeholder groups in the school (i.e., administrators or parents).

Returning to Table 6, it may be seen that three items addressed school discipline. The mean responses ranged from a low of 2.31 to a high of 2.58 indicating that teachers tended to disagree with each item. The items addressed an agreed-upon philosophy of discipline, whether the rules are well understood and enforced, and consistent enforcement of discipline. The teachers were clearly concerned about this aspect of their schools' operation.

Finally, four items addressed school spirit. For school spirit, mean responses ranged from a low of 2.36 to a high of 3.01, all responses were at or below the neutral point. The highest mean item score (at the neutral point) was in response to the item which stated, "Teachers take pride in this school." The lowest score was for an item which directly addressed morale.

Not fitting into any of the aforementioned categories was item #28 which asked the teachers' whether they believed the school was better since becoming a Zone school. As was the case with the majority of the items, the mean item response indicated that teachers tended to feel that the school was not better.

Teachers were also afforded an opportunity to address any topic through their responses to an open-ended item. Of the 993 teachers that completed the Teacher Survey, 20.5 percent ( $n=204$ ) responded to the open ended question. Individuals who respond to open-ended items are often those whose attitudes are extreme. Thus, it is not surprising that most of the comments were negative. The most frequent negative comment pertained to concerns regarding the need for more security and the enforcement of discipline ( $n=28$ ). Those were followed by professional development concerns ( $n=21$ ) such as offerings filling too quickly, the need for more variety, the need for more accessibility, and the desire for compensation for workshop attendance. A number of teachers ( $n=18$ ) opined that morale was low. The bulk of negative comments ( $n=94$ ) did not focus in a single area. Concerns cited included wasted time, wasted resources, frustrated teachers and students, anger and disappointment, no student buy-in, and "burn out" of teachers and students.

Not all of the teachers' comments were negative. A number of teachers ( $n=21$ ) made general positive comments about the Zone which expressed satisfaction with the grouping of level 1 students, the efficacy of morning tutorials, and the benefits of an extra hour for struggling readers.

The second stakeholder group that was addressed via a survey was the parents of students in Zone schools. Approximately 2,340 surveys were distributed to targeted parents. Completed surveys were returned by 567 parents, yielding a minimal return rate of 24.2%. This is slightly



higher than typical rates of return for surveys of parents conducted in this fashion. Therefore, it is sufficient to allow for the generalization of the survey results to the population of Zone parents.

Table 7 displays a summary of the responses to the Parent Survey where response options adhered to a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), and did not provide a neutral response. As such, a mean value of "2.5" would represent the center, or neutral point of the scale. The table displays the item, the number of respondents, the mean item response, and the standard deviation for each item.

The parents' opinions were somewhat more positive than those of the teachers. Parents generally agreed that they feel "welcomed" when they come to their child's school (#1), and that the school "provides services needed by [their] child and family" (#4). However, none of the other items on the Parents' Survey received high enough mean item responses to indicate general agreement (a score of "3"). With regard to communication, the parents' responses were somewhat positive to items that addressed being kept informed (#5) and being respected by teachers and administrators (#8). Somewhat positive responses were also given to items regarding safety (#3) and discipline policies (#9).

Three items directly addressed changes that occurred as a result of the school becoming a Zone school. Parents somewhat agreed that the longer school day is beneficial (#11). However, the responses to the other two items were generally neutral indicating that as many parents agreed as disagreed: "My child is happier about school since it became a Zone school" (#6); and "The school is better since it became a Zone school" (#10). Thus, the results indicate that parents appear to be unconvinced of the benefits of the Zone program that operated at their child's school.

**Table 7**  
**Summary of Responses to the Parent Survey**

	<i>n</i>	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Standard Deviation
1. I feel welcomed when I come to the school.	548	3.11	0.73
2. I believe that my child gets a good education at this school.	557	3.05	0.75
3. I believe that my child is safe at this school.	536	2.85	0.89
4. The school provides services needed by my child and family.	478	3.03	0.78
5. I am regularly informed about what is happening at the school.	546	2.90	0.84
6. My child is happier about school since it became a Zone school.	535	2.34	1.06
7. I have helped to make decisions about the school	360	2.36	0.94
8. I feel as though the teachers and administrators at this school respect me and my opinions.	486	2.97	0.77
9. The discipline policy is fair and consistent at this school.	518	2.87	0.86
10. The school is better since it became a Zone school.	488	2.60	1.05
11. The longer school day is beneficial to my child.	539	2.72	1.04
12. I have been asked to visit or help in the school or my child's class.	467	2.55	1.00

<sup>a</sup>Mean item scores could range from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to a high of 4 (strongly agree).

The third stakeholder group surveyed was students in Zone schools. The survey instruments were distributed to 1,170 targeted students, at the 39 Zone schools. Completed surveys were returned by 692 students, yielding a return rate of 59.1%. This rate of return is sufficient to provide an indication of the opinions of the students who are directly impacted by the program.

The Student Survey was used to ascertain students' opinions and perceptions concerning their school. It adhered to a yes/no format. Table 8 displays a summary of the responses to the Student Survey. The table displays the item, the number of respondents, and the percentages of "Yes" and "No" responses for each item.

**Table 8**  
**Summary of Responses to the Student Survey**

	Item <sup>a</sup>	n	Percent	
			Yes	No
1.	My teachers really want me to do well in school.	691	94.6	5.4
2.	I take a lot of things home to my parents.	685	64.1	35.9
3.	In my classes the work is hard to do.	670	35.4	64.6
4.	I like school more since it became a Zone school.	685	33.0	67.0
5.	Students seem to like their classes.	680	51.0	49.0
6.	Adults from home are often invited to come to school.	683	67.6	32.4
7.	Most students can do their work without help.	679	63.9	36.1
8.	There are a lot of activities for my family at our school.	674	47.3	52.7
9.	I have homework to do every night.	683	66.8	33.2
10.	The school is better since it became a Zone school.	686	41.4	58.6
11.	I tell my parents about the work I do in school.	687	68.1	31.9
12.	The students and teachers are proud of this school.	683	59.8	40.2

<sup>a</sup>Items 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, and 12 are worded slightly differently on the Elementary and Secondary versions of the survey.

As the table shows, nearly all of the students affirmed the item that stated, "My teachers really want me to do well in school" (#1). In addition, with regard to informing their parents of their educational experiences, the majority agreed that they "tell my parents about the work [they] do in school" (#11), and that they "take a lot of things home to [their] parents" (#2). Most teachers also indicated that "adults from home are often invited to come to school" (#6).

On items that addressed classes that challenge students to achieve high standards, most students affirmed that, "I have to do homework every night" (#9), however they did not indicated finding that work difficult: "in my classes the work is hard to do" (#3). This was further affirmed in item #7 which states that "most students can do their work without help."

Two items directly addressed changes since their school became a Zone school. Only about a third agreed that "I like school more since it became a Zone school" (#4), and less than half felt

that “the school is better since it became a Zone school (#10). Despite these tepid reviews, the majority of the students agreed that “the students and teachers are proud of this school” (#12).

Results from the School Climate Surveys, conducted annually by Research Services in the Office of Accountability and Systemwide Performance, tended to align with the Zone surveys. “Parents in the Zone schools have been less generous in their appraisals than the averages for the district.” The largest negative change was seen on the item related to the school maintaining high academic standards. Also, several items on the teachers’ version of the climate survey seem to reflect conflict and dissatisfaction with administrative leadership (Office of Accountability and Systemwide Performance, 2005).

In summary, at the conclusion of the 2004-05 school year, stakeholder’s opinions regarding the schools were mixed. Generally, the teachers seem aware of their role in the school, and satisfied with their relationships with their peers, however, they seem to be frustrated with discipline in the schools and the opportunities they have to participate in school operations. Overall, the teachers did not feel that the school had improved since becoming a Zone school. Parents endorsed items that indicate satisfaction with the general operation of the school and indicated that the longer school day was beneficial. But they generally remained unconvinced that the school had improved. Finally, the students noted their teachers’ efforts on their behalf, and the majority even noted that they were proud of their school. However, these endorsements failed to be reflected in their assessment of the change since becoming a Zone school. Thus, in its first year of implementation, the stakeholder groups fail to endorse that the change has been for the better as a result of the program.

### **Academic Achievement**

The academic achievement of students in the Zone was addressed, as outlined in the Design section, using two sources of data: Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test/Norm Referenced Test (FCAT-NRT) scores in reading and mathematics; and FCAT-Sunshine State Standards (FCAT-SSS) scores in reading and mathematics. The results of the analyses from each of these sources will be discussed in turn.

#### *Student Performance on the FCAT-NRT*

Of primary interest was whether students attending the Zone schools performed better than would be expected if they had attended other public schools in Miami-Dade County. As previously described in the Design section, a non-equivalent control group design was employed, in which pre and posttest scores were used to compare the performance of students in the Zone with a similar group of students who attended other district schools (i.e., the control group). The 2004 administration of the SAT-10 was the pretest for grade 3, and the 2004 administration of the FCAT-NRT was the pretest for grades 4 through 10. The posttest was the 2005 administration of the FCAT-NRT.

It may be recalled that the analysis for the FCAT-NRT involved a three step process. First, multiple regression analysis was used to predict the students’ posttest scores from a set of predictor variables which included the pretest scores and demographic variables known to be associated with

achievement. For each grade and subtest, a regression equation was generated based on a random sample of 2,000 students with valid test scores who were enrolled in the same school and grade during October 2004 and February 2005.

Tables 9 and 10 display the regression weights for the FCAT-NRT reading and mathematics subtests, respectively. The demographic variables in the table are dichotomously coded. For example, male students are coded 1 and female students are coded 0. When variables are coded in this manner, the regression weight gives the difference between the posttest scores of a typical student in the category coded as 1 and that of a typical student in the category coded as 0 (reference category). When a variable is comprised of several mutually exclusive categories, then all but one of the categories are represented as separate dichotomous variables, and the reference category is that which is obtained when all the variables in the set are 0. For example, in the case of student ethnicity, separate dichotomous variables have been defined for the classifications of black and Hispanic. The reference category occurs when both variables are coded 0, as it is for the classification white/other. The expected contribution of the predictor variables for a typical student can be discerned by inspecting the weights displayed in the table. For example, the Table 9 shows that among third graders, the reading posttest score of a typical male student is 4.48 points lower than a typical female student. The reading posttest score of a typical student who is eligible for the FRL program is 6.04 points lower than a typical student who is not eligible. Further, the reading posttest score of a typical student who is retained is 6.45 points lower than a typical student who is not. Regression weights for non-dichotomous variables are applied to the value of that variable. For example, as Table 9 also shows, for a typical student, a unit increase in the reading pretest score is associated with a 0.62 point increase in their reading posttest score. The intercept, a constant applied to the regression equation at each grade level, is the value that the posttest score is expected to assume when all the predictors are equal to zero.

The second step of the analysis involved using the regression weights to make predictions of the students' posttest scores separately for each grade and subtest, and examining the difference between the students' predicted and actual scores. These predicted, or par scores, were computed individually for all students in the Zone and control schools. Par represents the posttest score that a particular student with a given set of demographic characteristics and a particular pretest score would be expected to attain, regardless of a school's particular program. The difference between the actual posttest score and the par score for a student represents the amount of achievement over and above what is expected, given his or her pretest and demographic characteristics. These differences, known as residual scores, can be negative or positive. A negative value indicates that the actual level of achievement was lower than par and a positive value indicates that it was higher than par.

Table 11 displays the mean actual posttest scores, the mean par scores, and the mean residual scores in reading for the groups of students in the quasi-experiment. A casual examination of the table reveals that the mean actual posttest scores of the students in the Zone schools are consistently lower than that of the students in the control schools. The par scores are also consistently lower, due to the inclusion of pretest scores in the regression model. As such, the residual scores, from which the influence of demographic factors and initial levels of achievement have been removed, are the appropriate means of comparing the two groups. These residual scores are also depicted graphically in Figure 1.

**Table 9**  
**Regression Weights for Reading**

Predictor (Reference Category)	Grade							
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Intercept	257.39	258.67	273.53	207.74	232.86	187.06	236.10	171.92
Pretest	0.62	0.60	0.59	0.70	0.66	0.74	0.67	0.78
Gender (Female=0) <sup>a</sup>								
Male (1)	-4.48	-3.68	-0.36	-4.61	-3.46	-4.47	-2.79	-5.33
Ethnicity (White/Other=0,0) <sup>a</sup>								
Black (1,0)	-7.35	-9.51	-5.04	-5.72	-3.67	-3.65	-6.97	-5.99
Hispanic (0,1)	-1.51	-3.81	0.57	-0.71	-1.56	-0.60	-1.49	-2.63
Reduced Price Lunch (non-FRL=0) <sup>a</sup>								
FRL Eligible (1)	-6.04	-0.76	-3.51	-3.20	-0.54	-3.21	-2.37	-0.69
Limited English (non-LEP=0,0) <sup>a</sup>								
Current LEP (1,0)	-1.16	6.56	-2.41	-2.42	-0.78	0.78	-5.43	-8.97
Former LEP (0,1)	-0.74	-1.10	-0.43	0.64	0.17	-0.38	-0.39	0.44
Exceptional Student (non-ESE=0,0) <sup>a</sup>								
Disabled (1,0)	-6.38	-2.00	-4.42	-13.91	-7.89	-10.76	-13.65	-17.57
Gifted (0,1)	15.19	14.77	10.56	13.47	11.21	18.21	10.19	14.59
Retained (0=non-Retained) <sup>a</sup>								
Retained (1)	-6.45	-1.00	-10.25	-5.00	-4.39	-9.36	-11.68	-13.54

<sup>a</sup> Category used as a reference with which other levels of a categorical variable are compared.

**Table 10**  
**Regression Weights for Mathematics**

Predictor (Reference Category)	Grade							
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Intercept	187.83	239.44	167.98	187.74	189.12	239.91	254.58	332.47
Pretest	0.74	0.63	0.76	0.74	0.74	0.67	0.66	0.53
Gender (Female=0) <sup>a</sup>								
Male (1)	0.89	0.27	0.10	-1.04	-1.27	1.08	0.55	1.11
Ethnicity (White/Other=0,0) <sup>a</sup>								
Black (1,0)	-6.59	-7.47	-5.35	-5.83	-6.80	-5.57	-2.73	-6.05
Hispanic (0,1)	4.38	-1.45	-2.93	-5.47	-2.48	-3.59	-2.02	-2.17
Reduced Price Lunch (non-FRL=0) <sup>a</sup>								
FRL Eligible (1)	-4.87	-4.58	-3.91	-5.92	-3.99	1.22	-0.61	-1.64
Limited English (non-LEP=0,0) <sup>a</sup>								
Current LEP (1,0)	-13.58	-1.81	1.45	4.30	7.30	2.55	2.62	0.89
Former LEP (0,1)	-1.72	0.94	0.78	2.96	1.98	0.39	1.93	-0.58
Exceptional Student (non-ESE=0,0) <sup>a</sup>								
Disabled (1,0)	-8.80	-7.19	-8.91	-4.79	-3.62	-10.63	-4.48	-4.25
Gifted (1,0)	17.99	13.71	12.24	22.36	12.68	10.07	8.99	11.16
Retained (0=non-Retained) <sup>a</sup>								
Retained (1)	-6.94	-2.23	-5.01	-10.10	-12.39	-6.46	-12.84	-7.34

<sup>a</sup> Category used as a reference with which other levels of a categorical variable are compared.

**Table 11**  
**Residual Scores in Reading**

Descriptive Statistics												
Grade	Zone					Control					Difference <sup>b</sup>	
	<i>n</i>	Actual	Par <sup>a</sup>	Residual	Std. Dev.	<i>n</i>	Actual	Par <sup>a</sup>	Residual	Std. Dev.		
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>			<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Mean</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
3	1785	593.5	597.7	-4.18	22.10	1911	599.4	601.5	-2.11	22.34	-2.82**	-0.09
4	1307	612.1	614.8	-2.79	19.52	1599	620.5	619.0	1.49	20.73	-5.68**	-0.21
5	1005	633.7	635.0	-1.27	19.46	1197	642.0	643.7	-1.71	19.80	0.52	0.02
6	3321	635.1	635.6	-0.55	20.35	3858	641.9	642.9	-1.00	21.26	0.92	0.02
7	3524	646.7	647.6	-0.91	18.67	4386	652.9	654.6	-1.73	19.41	-1.91*	0.04
8	3401	664.7	666.2	-1.49	21.98	4399	674.0	674.6	-0.58	24.05	-1.71	-0.04
9	4316	670.9	671.9	-0.94	21.60	5004	684.2	683.9	0.28	22.41	-2.65**	-0.06
10	3802	677.8	679.2	-1.40	22.61	4725	690.6	689.8	0.83	24.34	-4.34**	-0.09

Note. The analysis is based on the scaled scores of the 2004 and 2005 administrations of the FCAT-NRT.

<sup>a</sup> Par represents the posttest score predicted for a student with a given set of demographic characteristics and a given pretest score.

<sup>b</sup> The practical significance of *d* is: .25 = weak, .50 = moderate, and .80 = strong (Cohen, 1988).

\**p* < .05

\*\**p* < .01

Significant *t*-values in favor of the Zone schools are printed in italics.

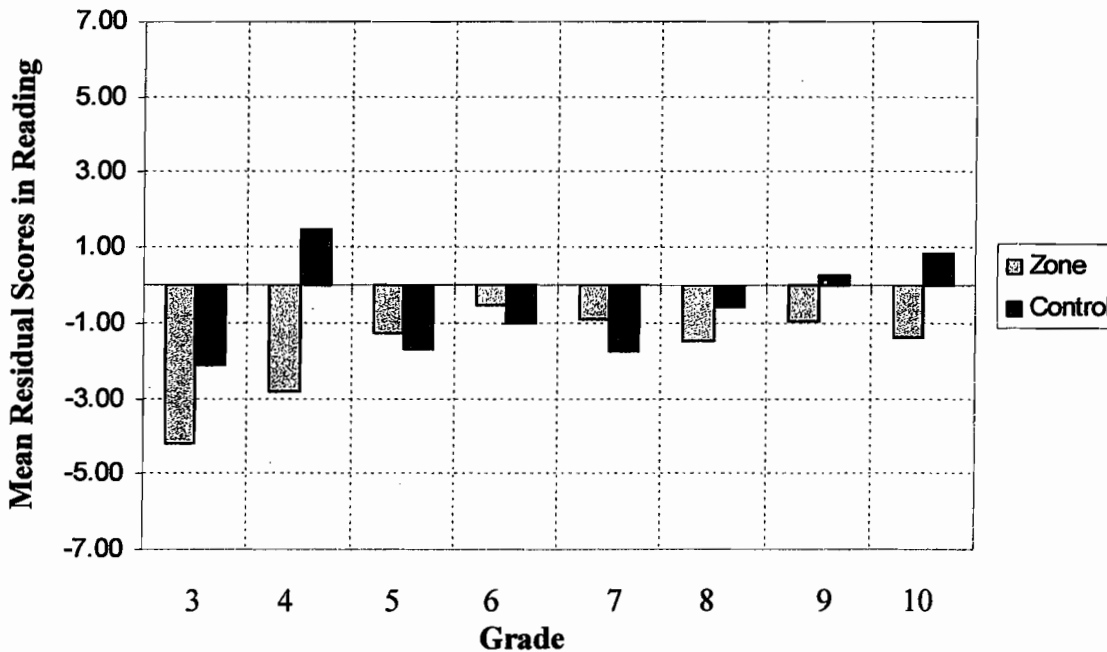


Figure 1. Residual scores in reading.

A review of the data listed in Table 11 and illustrated in Figure 1 shows that in the majority of grades, students in both the experimental and the control schools failed to meet par. While students in the Zone schools did not meet par in any grade, students in the control schools met or exceeded par at grades 4, 9, and 10. The table also includes the results of independent sample *t*-tests of the differences between the groups' residual scores. Differences that proved to be significant are signified by *t*-scores labeled with an asterisk in the second last column of the table. As the table shows, the mean-residual score of students in the Zone schools significantly exceeded that of students in the control schools at grade 7, while the mean-residual scores of students in the control schools significantly exceeded those of students in the Zone schools in grades 3, 4, 9, and 10. Thus, in reading the Zone students outperformed the control students at one grade level (grade 7), while the control students outperformed the Zone students in four grade levels (grades 3, 4, 9, and 10). Comparisons at grades 5, 6, and 8 were not statistically significant. Finally, the effect size of those differences is displayed in the last column of Table 11, as a measure of the practical significance of the findings. An effect size of less than .25 is considered to be weak. As shown in the table, all of the effect size statistics were less than .25, indicating that even the statistically significant differences in the performance of the Zone and control students were small.

Table 12 displays the groups' actual, par, and residual scores in mathematics. A casual review of the actual and par scores in mathematics reveals the same pattern of performance as seen in reading. Students in the Zone schools scored lower than did their counterparts in the control schools, but the predicted, par scores, were also lower, thus facilitating comparison of the residual scores. These residual scores are depicted graphically in Figure 2. Returning to Table 12, which is identical in format to Table 11, it may be seen that only fourth grade students in the control schools met or exceeded par. In no other instance did either students in the experimental or control groups meet or exceed par. The table also shows that the mean-residual scores of students in the Zone schools were significantly lower than those of students in the control schools at grades 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9 while comparisons at grades 5, 8, and 10 were not statistically significant. Thus the only significant differences identified were in favor of the control schools. Nonetheless, while students in the Zone schools generally did not perform as well as students in the control schools, an examination of the effect size statistics in Table 12 shows that the practical significance of the deficits was weak.

**Table 12**  
**Residual Scores in Mathematics**

Descriptive Statistics												
		Zone				Control					Difference <sup>b</sup>	
Grade	n	Actual	Par <sup>a</sup>	Residual		N	Actual	Par <sup>a</sup>	Residual		t	d
		Mean	Mean	Mean	Std. Dev.		Mean	Mean	Mean	Std. Dev.		
3	1784	590.6	597.2	-6.56	28.12	1904	598.7	600.1	-1.39	26.78	-5.72**	-0.19
4	1305	608.7	612.6	-3.92	20.71	1603	619.5	618.9	0.62	23.20	-5.52**	-0.21
5	1004	629.3	631.4	-2.11	21.70	1199	639.3	640.6	-1.29	22.78	-0.85	-0.04
6	3316	639.6	642.1	-2.47	20.91	3853	648.8	650.2	-1.34	21.75	-2.22*	-0.05
7	3507	654.0	656.0	-1.99	18.90	4376	663.4	664.0	-0.70	19.94	-2.93**	-0.07
8	3397	672.8	674.4	-1.58	18.58	4393	681.8	683.5	-1.74	19.01	0.38	0.01
9	4299	687.9	690.2	-2.28	16.82	4989	698.4	699.4	-1.04	17.67	-3.46**	-0.07
10	3799	688.8	689.3	-0.41	15.94	4724	696.3	696.8	-0.50	17.41	0.25	0.01

Note. The analysis is based on the scaled scores of the 2004 and 2005 administrations of the FCAT-NRT.

<sup>a</sup> Par represents the posttest score predicted for a student with a given set of demographic characteristics and a given pretest score.

<sup>b</sup> The practical significance of *d* is: .25 = weak, .50 = moderate, and .80 = strong (Cohen, 1988).

\**p* < .05

\*\**p* < .01

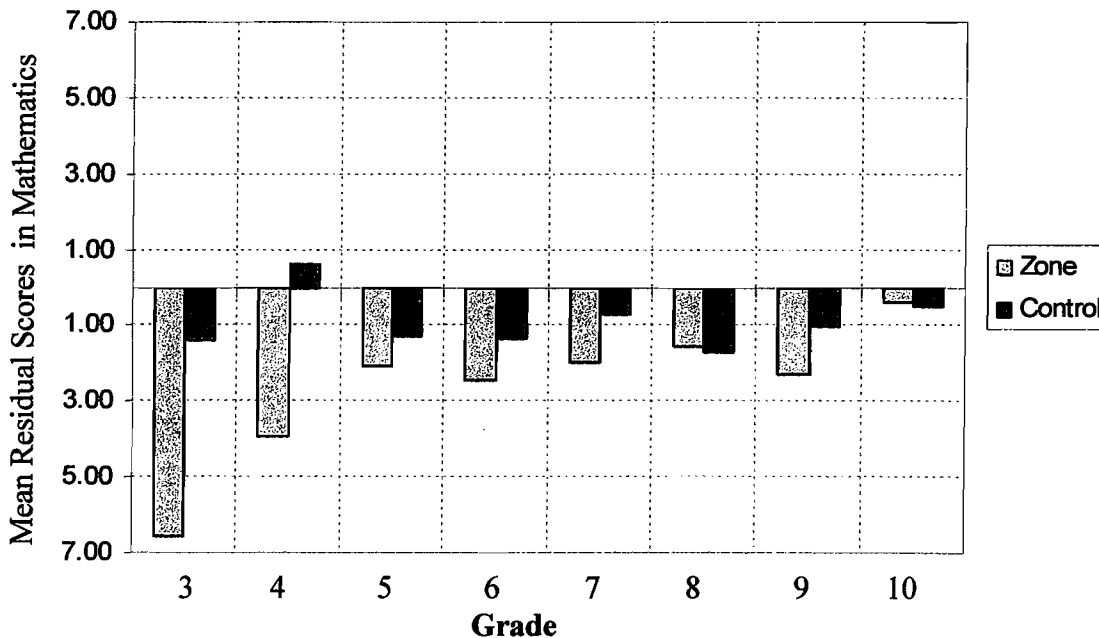


Figure 2. Residual scores in mathematics



Thus, the findings indicate that students who attended schools in the Zone program underperformed their counterparts in the control schools in both reading and mathematics in about half of the by-grade comparisons. Although, the actual scores of students in both the Zone and control groups were, on average, lower than was predicted, this is not surprising given the combination of factors in those schools that are typically associated with lower levels of student achievement. While the aforementioned differences between the Zone and control schools were statistically significant, the practical significance of the size of the deficits was weak. As such, preliminary findings indicate that the reading and mathematics achievement of the students in the Zone schools was comparable, or slightly lower than that of students in similar M-DCPS schools.

### *Student Performance on the FCAT-SSS*

The second measure of academic performance examined movement of students from lower to higher achievement levels on the FCAT-SSS. This analysis was done across grade levels (3<sup>rd</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>). Combining results across grade levels is possible because the FCAT-SSS is designed to assess students' performance with regard to meeting specified criterion (Sunshine State Standards) established for each grade level. Thus, a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student scoring "proficient" has met the same standard of performance on a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade test, as has a 9<sup>th</sup> grade student scoring "proficient" on a 9<sup>th</sup> grade test.

In order to measure changes in achievement level, the difference between each student's 2004 achievement level and the 2005 achievement level was calculated. For students at level 1 in 2004, a gain was considered any 2005 score at level 2-5. For students at level 2 in 2004, a gain was considered any 2005 score at level 3-5. For students at level 3-5 (considered to be at or above "proficient" status) in 2004, a gain was considered to be any 2005 score equal to or above the 2004 score. Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) analyses were performed to compare the percentages of students who made gains at Zone and control schools. Comparisons that produced significant results were further analyzed using a Phi ( $\Phi$ ) coefficient to determine effect size. Separate analyses were performed for reading and mathematics. The results are displayed in Table 13 and Table 14 respectively. These two tables display the number and percent of Zone and control students at each achievement level on the 2003-04 administration of the FCAT-SSS and the number and percent of those students at the 2004-05 achievement levels, the Chi-square, and Phi statistics.

For students that had both 2004 and 2005 FCAT-SSS scores, the same proportion of students scored in level 1 in reading each year, in both the Zone and control schools. Looking at the first four columns of Table 13, it may be seen that in 2003-04, 54.8% of the students in Zone schools scored in level 1 of the FCAT-SSS in reading. Following down these columns, 21.7% of the students in Zone schools scored in level 2, 17.2% in level 3, 5.4% in level 4, and 0.9% in level 5. Their counterparts in control schools performed similarly, but with slightly higher percentages in the higher achievement levels. In 2004-05, 54.8% of the students in Zone schools scored in level 1, followed by 23.1% in level 2, 16.4% in level 3, 4.7% in level 4, and 0.9% in level 5.

Now, to examine changes in achievement level from year to year, it may be seen by following across the first row of statistics in Table 13 that of the students in Zone schools who initially scored in level 1, 83.0% remained in level 1 the following year (2004-05); 13.4% improved one

level, to level 2; 3.2% improved two levels, to level 3; 0.4% improved three levels, to level 4; and one student (>0.0%) improved four levels, to level 5.

**Table 13**  
**Comparison of FCAT- SSS Reading Achievement Level Change**

2003-04				2004-05										X <sup>2</sup>	Φ
				Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4		Level 5			
Level	Group	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Zone	11605	54.8	9627	83.0	1559	13.4	375	3.2	43	0.4	1	>0.0	85.52*	0.06
	Control	10955	42.4	8553	78.1	1848	16.9	495	4.5	54	0.5	5	>0.0		
2	Zone	4586	21.7	1607	35.0	2113	46.1	798	17.4	66	1.4	2	>0.0	3.11	0.02
	Control	6122	23.7	2072	33.8	2809	45.9	1144	18.7	88	1.4	9	0.1		
3	Zone	3647	17.2	349	9.6	1141	31.3	1773	48.6	352	9.7	32	0.9	11.05*	0.03
	Control	5916	22.9	417	7.0	1797	30.4	2863	48.4	737	12.5	102	1.7		
4	Zone	1149	5.4	19	1.7	84	7.3	495	43.1	450	39.2	101	8.8	3.22	0.03
	Control	2306	8.9	33	1.4	179	7.8	912	39.5	932	40.4	250	10.8		
5	Zone	181	0.9	0	0.0	1	0.6	45	24.9	82	45.3	53	29.3	2.56	0.06
	Control	522	2.0	1	0.2	12	2.3	91	17.4	229	43.9	189	36.2		
ALL	Zone	21168		11602	54.8	4898	23.1	3486	16.5	993	4.7	189	0.9		
	Control	25821		11076	42.4	6645	25.7	5805	21.3	2040	7.9	555	2.1		

Note: Chi-Square values compare the percentage of students in the Zone and control schools who made achievement level gains. For levels one and two (2004), achievement level gains are defined as an improvement of one or more levels. For levels 3, 4, and 5 (2004), achievement level gains are defined as improvement of zero or more levels.

<sup>a</sup> The practical significance of Φ is: .10 = weak, .30 = moderate, and .50 = strong (Cohen, 1988).

\*p < .05

The last two columns of the table display the results of tests of statistical significance used to determine whether the shifts in achievement for students in Zone and control schools were the same, or different. As may be seen in the second last column of Table 13, two statistically significant differences were identified between Zone and control students in reading. These were in the shifts out of levels 1 and 3 from 2003-04 to 2004-05. The percentage of level 1 students at the Zone schools, who made achievement level gains was smaller than that of their counterparts at the control schools; 83% of the students initially scoring in level 1 in Zone schools remained in level 1, while 78.1% of their counterparts in control schools remained in level 1. The other statistically significant difference was in the percentage of who scored in level 3 in 2003-04. Higher percentages of the students at the Zone schools slipped from level 3 to levels 1 or 2 in 2004-05.

The significant differences were further analyzed to determine the practical significance of the findings. Because statistical significance is more easily obtained when the sample size is large, as

in the previous analyses, it is prudent to look at practical significance as well. For the Chi-square analysis, the appropriate post hoc analysis is the calculation of a Phi-coefficient, displayed in the last column of Table 13. The Phi-coefficient is a measure of the effect size that may be classified as: .10 = small, .30 = medium and .50 = large. As may be seen in Table 13, all of the comparisons indicate weak practical significance. So while there are statistically significant differences in the degree of improved performance of Zone and control students on the FCAT-SSS in reading, the differences are small.

Table 14 displays the same information for students' performance in mathematics, as described for reading in Table 13 above. For example, the percentage of students in Zone schools who scored in level 1 in mathematics decreased from 49.5% in 2003-04 to 44.7% in 2004-05 while the percentage of students in the control schools in level 1 decreased from 36.9% in 2003-04 to 32.0% in 2004-05.

**Table 14**  
**Comparison of FCAT- SSS Mathematics Achievement Level Change**

2003-04				2004-05										$\chi^2$	$\Phi$
Level	Group	N	%	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4		Level 5			
				N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Zone	10473	49.5	7849	74.9	2108	20.1	503	4.8	12	0.1	1	0.0	70.71*	0.06
	Control	9510	36.9	6620	69.6	2289	24.1	548	5.8	53	0.6	0	0.0		
2	Zone	5057	23.9	1373	27.2	2301	45.5	1290	25.5	92	1.8	1	0.0	22.74*	0.05
	Control	6267	24.3	1370	21.9	2924	46.7	1845	29.4	125	2.0	3	0.0		
3	Zone	3931	18.6	209	5.3	979	24.9	2155	54.8	563	14.3	25	0.6	33.93*	0.06
	Control	6290	24.4	241	3.8	1328	21.1	3543	56.3	1135	18.0	43	0.7		
4	Zone	1367	6.5	10	0.7	66	4.8	489	35.8	698	51.1	104	7.6	29.58*	0.08
	Control	2846	17.0	15	0.5	97	3.4	819	28.8	1614	56.7	301	10.6		
5	Zone	317	1.5	2	0.6	1	0.3	27	8.5	145	45.7	142	44.8	3.06	0.05
	Control	863	3.3	1	0.1	4	0.5	39	4.5	381	44.1	438	50.8		
ALL	Zone	21145		9443	44.7	5455	25.8	4464	21.1	1510	7.1	273	1.3		
	Control	25776		8247	32.0	6642	25.8	6794	26.4	3308	12.8	785	3.0		

Note: Chi-Square values compare the percentage of students in the Zone and control schools who made achievement level gains. For levels one and two (2004), achievement level gains are defined as an improvement of one or more levels. For levels 3, 4, and 5 (2004), achievement level gains are defined as improvement of zero or more levels.

\* The practical significance of  $\Phi$  is: .10 = weak, .30 = moderate, and .50 = strong (Cohen, 1988).

\*p < .05

Following across the first row of statistics in Table 14 to look at the shift in levels, it may be seen that of the students in Zone schools who initially scored in level 1 in mathematics, 74.9% remained in level 1 the following year (2004-05); 20.1% improved one level, to level 2; 4.8%

improved two levels, to level 3; 0.1% improved three levels, to level 4; and again one student (>0.0%) improved four levels, to level 5.

Looking in the last two columns of Table 14, it may be seen that in mathematics, the differences in the proportions of Zone and control students who made gains were statistically significant at all levels except level 5. The percentage of level 1 students at the Zone schools who made achievement level gains was smaller than that of their counterparts in the control schools; 74.9% of the students initially scoring in level 1 in Zone schools remained in level 1, while 69.9% of their counterparts in the control schools remained in level 1. Of the students who scored in levels 2, 3, and 4 in 2003-04, higher percentages of the students at the Zone schools slipped to lower levels in 2004-05. Again, the significant differences were further analyzed to determine the practical significance of the findings. In mathematics, as in reading the effect indicate weak practical significance.

Also of interest is the teacher's perspective of how the Zone has impacted student achievement. On the Teacher Survey, teachers disagreed with item #8 which stated, "Student achievement was improved by implementation of the Zone" (Mean = 2.79, n = 983). As of the end of the first few month of implementation, it appears that the teachers' assessment matches the findings of the statistical analyses. While students in the Zone schools did generally not perform as well as students in the control schools, the deficits were small.

#### **Other Student Outcomes**

Other student outcomes were considered for inclusion in this evaluation, including: student transfers into and out of Zone schools, student attendance, mobility; and incidence of students referred to indoor and outdoor suspensions. These school-level attributes are reported yearly in the *District and School Profiles* publications. However, there is a delay in availability of these indicators, with publication of the prior year's data in the current year's publication (i.e., data from 2003-04 published in the report covering the 2004-05 school year). Thus, data from the inaugural year of the Zone was not available when this report was prepared. These indicators will be examined in the evaluation reports covering Years 2 and 3.

## CONCLUSIONS

In August 2004, the School Improvement Zone (Zone) was approved for implementation in 39 of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools' lowest performing schools. The groundwork was laid in the early months of the 2004-05 school year, with the major components of the program scheduled to be in place by January 2005. Primary aspects of the initiative include a core literacy program that extends from prekindergarten through grade 12, a structured curriculum, and instructional strategies that build across grade and school levels, an extended day and school year to provide additional instructional time, and enhanced professional development opportunities for the teachers. In order to administer the program consistently across the various administrative regions of the district, schools in the Zone were placed under the direct supervision of the Superintendent, administered by the Deputy Superintendent for School Improvement (Office of School Improvement, 2004b).

An evaluation of the initiative is scheduled to be conducted annually for the first three years of its operation. This report is a product of the evaluation in Year 1, which was carried out primarily during the spring semester of 2005. As such, the report for Year 1 reflects only the first few months of implementation, and the full impact of the initiative may not have been realized. Therefore, these findings may be considered preliminary.

The evaluation was designed as a collaborative effort by the district's Office of Program Evaluation (OPE), in conjunction with the Center for Urban Education and Innovation at the College of Education of Florida International University (FIU). The specific focus of the evaluation was defined by a series of questions, derived from the stated objectives of the program. These questions can now be addressed.

### **1. What is the context of the Zone?**

Context data was collected by FIU staff via observations and in-depth interviews held with district personnel and in the Zone schools during the Year 1. The full findings from these research efforts were not available at the time this report was published, and will be provided to the district under separate cover. However, preliminary findings indicate that there were some problems in garnering parent and community support during Student Expositions held in the last week of the extended year program. Low student attendance at secondary schools during the extended time was identified as a "symptom of a more profound problem with the extended school year." Nonetheless, while a "pervasive discontent among teachers" was noted by the researchers, this did not negate a "vibrant sense of pride and joy" demonstrated by teachers and students in their presentation of student work produced for the Expositions.

### **2. Is the Zone being implemented according to program design?**

Fidelity of implementation was examined by both FIU and OPE staff, using qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Findings from FIU, resulting from observations at Zone schools, will provide an external assessment of implementation,

and will be furnished under separate cover. Implementation was also examined by OPE staff through surveys of teachers at Zone schools and an examination of school-level characteristics. With regard to opportunities for professional development, the teachers responses indicated that they were encouraged to pursue such activities, but that they were not always able to gain access to courses that take into account their individual needs and interests. Overall, the teachers failed to endorse full implementation of the components that make up the Zone initiative.

Examination of school-level data indicates that the pupil-teacher ratio in Zone schools improved from 2003-04 to 2004-05, however it did so to no greater degree than in other, similar district schools. Similarly, with regard to attributes of the teaching staff, the percentages of beginning teachers and average years of teaching experience improved in Zone schools; while the percentage of teachers new to the school and those with advanced degrees declined in 2004-05. As with the pupil-teacher ratio, these shifts did not differ significantly from those in similar schools. Shifts in staffing may be expected with the implementation of any major new school reform. As such, these statistics may be considered baseline measures that will be monitored in coming years.

**3. What are the attitudes and perceptions of parents, students, and teachers?**

Stakeholders' opinions were somewhat mixed regarding the schools' status since being designated as Zone schools. Generally, the teachers seem aware of their role in the school, and satisfied with their relationships with their peers, however, they seem to be frustrated with discipline and the opportunities they have to participate in school operations. Overall, the teachers did not feel that the school had improved since becoming a Zone school. Parents endorsed items that indicated satisfaction with the general operation of the school and believed that the longer school day was beneficial. But they generally remained unconvinced that the school had improved. Finally, the students noted their teachers' efforts on their behalf, and the majority even noted that they were proud of their school. However, these endorsements failed to be reflected in their assessment of the change since becoming a Zone school. Thus, in its first year of implementation, the stakeholder groups fail to endorse that the change has been for the better.

**4. What is the impact of the Zone on the students' academic achievement?**

Two sources of data were used to conduct a controlled comparison of the academic achievement of students in Zone and other, similar district schools (control schools). Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test/Norm Referenced Test (FCAT-NRT) results provide a direct means of comparing the achievement of students in the Zone and similar schools. By contrast, FCAT-Sunshine State Standards (FCAT-SSS) results offer criterion-referenced indicators of the degree to which the students measured up to the levels of proficiency required by state and federal statutes. The two sources of data serve as complementary measures of the students' academic performance.

With regard to the FCAT-NRT results, the students in Zone schools scored lower across the board, than did their counterparts in the control schools. However, such a comparison does not take into consideration the students' initial ability levels. To provide an unbiased comparison of growth, the students' actual reading and mathematics scores were compared to their "par" scores. Par scores are individually predicted scores, based on pretest scores and other applicable student characteristics. These represent the scores that might be expected, given attendance at "typical" schools in the district. The difference, or residual between the actual and par score provides an indication of the program's efficacy. In reading, the students in the Zone schools scored comparatively higher than predicted in one of the eight grades tested (grade 7); and the students in the control schools scored comparatively higher than predicted in four of the eight grades (grades 4, 5, 9, and 10). In mathematics, the students in the control schools scored comparatively higher than predicted in five of the eight grades tested (grades 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9); and the students in the Zone schools, in none. Thus, statistically significant differences in favor of the control schools were identified in about half of the comparisons on the FCAT-NRT, although the differences identified were small.

With regard to the FCAT-SSS, higher proportions of the students in the Zone schools than in the control schools scored in level 1 in both the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. For students with both 2004 and 2005 FCAT-SSS scores, the percentages of students scoring in level 1 remained the same in reading and decreased in mathematics for both the Zone and control schools. Controlled comparisons of the shift from lower to higher levels of achievement resulted in statistically significant differences for six of ten comparisons, each showing less shift to higher levels of achievement for students in the Zone schools than in the control schools. However, in each case the magnitude of the difference was small.

**5. What is the impact of the Zone on other student outcomes that impact achievement?**

Other student outcomes considered for inclusion in this evaluation were: student transfers into and out of Zone schools, student attendance, mobility; and incidence of students referred to indoor and outdoor suspensions. School-level data from the inaugural year of the Zone was not available when this report was prepared. These indicators will be examined in the evaluation reports for Years 2 and 3.

In summary, the preliminary results from the evaluation of the School Improvement Zone in its first year of operation are somewhat less than encouraging. Preliminary findings reported by FIU investigators suggest that morale is low in Zone schools, and that a key component of the initiative, the extended school year, was not entirely successful. The full report of their findings, to be issued under separate cover when available, should provide additional insight regarding the questions of context and implementation. While the component calling for an extended day and week was implemented, teachers in Zone schools indicated that all components of the initiative were not fully implemented in 2004-05. Some of the school-level characteristics associated with





## **APPENDIX A**

### **Brief Report of the Activity of School Leaders: Year 1 of the School Improvement Zone<sup>6</sup>**

---

<sup>6</sup> Report provided from Anthony Normore, FIU to Jerome Levitt, MDCPS-OPE, December 7, 2005.



## **Brief Report of the Activity of School Leaders: Year 1 of the School Improvement Zone<sup>7</sup>**

**Report compiled by:** Drs. Anthony H. Normore and Mary V. Alfred, FIU

Studies suggest that little research has focused on the everyday reality of school leaders in disadvantaged schools and assert that urban school leaders must focus on improving pedagogy, developing a thorough knowledge of the student body of the school, and expanding beyond school-based learning to serve community needs, and building capacity for schools to network and form partnerships with various segments of community. Accordingly, the Zone targets administrators for professional development in these areas and promises to hold Zone administrators responsible for student achievement in their schools. For purposes of this report, we used qualitative research methods to investigate the impact of the current training and preparation programs of school administrators across the Zone schools. Additionally, we monitored and recorded the actual implementation practices by the school leaders in the nine schools selected for in-depth work.

### **Activity Conducted to Date with School-Based Administrators:**

The focus population for this component of the larger project was the school-based administrators within the School Improvement Zone (i.e., 39 principals, 55 assistant principals) and the Deputy Superintendent in charge of the Zone. To begin the data collection, a baseline survey was administered to the whole population of Zone principals and assistant principals during a professional development session in the Fall, 2004. We will administer another survey questionnaire to this same cohort toward the end of the research. Since January, 2005, multiple semi-structured interviews have been conducted with a sample of the targeted population (i.e., nine Zone schools selected for in-depth work including 3 elementary, 3 middle, and 3 senior high schools within particular feeder patterns). Further interviews have been conducted with other school-based administrators who are an integral part of the School Improvement Zone, but not part of the sub-sample population. In total, we completed 20 individual interviews, most of which were conducted during the Summer, 2005. These interviews are currently being transcribed. Additionally, we have generated field-notes from observing the interactions between the Deputy Superintendent, assistant superintendents and school leaders during a series of professional development training and preparation activities that were scheduled in year one of the SIZ implementation. We also attended Town Hall Forums and recorded field-notes accordingly. Currently, we are conducting a preliminary analysis of the data gathered through the initial surveys. Once the interviews are transcribed we will then begin an analysis of these data.

In April 2006, we will be facilitating an Interactive Symposium comprised of several school-based leaders from the Zone. The symposium has been accepted for the proceeding at the Annual Conference of American Educational Research Association (AERA) scheduled in San Francisco, California. Our hope is to provide the opportunity for 6 M-DCPS zone principals to share their experiences with a broader audience that captures the first year of the School Improvement Zone initiative.

---

<sup>7</sup> Report provided from Anthony Normore, FIU to Jerome Levitt, MDCPS-OPE, December 7, 2005.

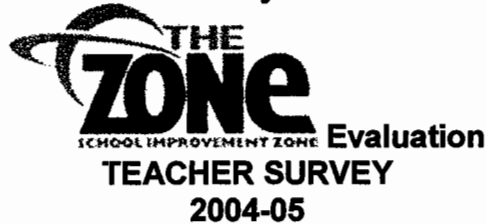


**APPENDIX B**

**Data Collection Instruments**



Miami-Dade County Public Schools



This survey is being conducted as part of an evaluation of the School Improvement Zone. Your opinions are an important part of this evaluation. It should take about 15 minutes to complete the survey form. The form is coded to follow-up with non-respondents; however, your identity will be kept confidential. Please return the completed form in the envelope provided within one week of the time you receive it. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Linda Sorhaindo at 305-995-7544.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

*Please read each of the following items. Based on your experience in this school, circle your response to each item. Please respond to every question to the best of your ability.*

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	All aspects of the Zone program are fully operational.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I am involved in school budget decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I am encouraged to pursue further professional development.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I participate in making decisions about the implementation of new programs in the school.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I participate in making decisions about the selection of other teachers for my school.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Principals, other teachers, and school personnel solicit my advice.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I always know how much authority I have in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Student achievement was improved by implementation of the Zone.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	My advice is solicited by others.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I have an opportunity to be involved in cooperative work with other members of staff.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I feel accepted by other staff in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	There is good communication between staff members in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Teachers frequently discuss and share teaching methods and strategies with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	My own expectations about discipline are the same as most other teachers at this school.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I am always clear about what others at school expect of me.	1	2	3	4	5

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Please read each of the following items. Based on your experience in this school, circle your response to each item. Please respond to every question to the best of your ability.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
16.	There is good communication between groups in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I am clear about my professional responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	The required professional development is at a good level.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	The rules and sanctions relating to discipline in this school are well understood by both staff and students.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Teachers go about their work with enthusiasm.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I am given the opportunity to teach other teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	The professional development planning in the school takes into account my individual needs and interests.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I am given the responsibility to monitor programs.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	My work objectives are always well defined.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	The morale in this school is high.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I have an opportunity to teach other teachers about innovative ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	Teachers in this school can rely on their colleagues for support and assistance when needed.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	This school is better since becoming a Zone school.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	There is good team spirit in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	There are opportunities in this school for developing new skills.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	It is not difficult to gain access to in-service courses.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	There is an agreed philosophy on discipline in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	Teachers take pride in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
34.	The rules and sanctions relating to discipline are enforced in a consistent fashion in this school.	1	2	3	4	5
35.	I receive support from my colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5



**INSTRUCTIONS**

The following questions apply to the class that you currently teach. If you teach more than one class, base your answers on your homeroom class, or the class with which you spend the most time. For each of the following items, provide the requested information or place a check (✓) in the box corresponding to your response.

36. How many students are in your class? \_\_\_\_\_ students

37. What grade(s) do you teach? (Check as many as apply.)

K  1  2  3  4  5  6  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers skip to question 40. All other teachers please continue.

38. How many of your students scored in Level I on the FCAT-SSS reading or mathematics test administered in Spring 2003? 

Reading Level 1	Math Level 1
_____	_____ students

39. How many of those students participate(d) in each of the following supplementary academic activities.

- a. After-school academic program (not after-school care) \_\_\_\_\_ students
- b. Before-school academic program \_\_\_\_\_ students
- c. Pull-out tutorials \_\_\_\_\_ students
- d. ESE or ESOL services \_\_\_\_\_ students
- e. Other supplementary services (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_ students

40. How many years have you taught in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools \_\_\_\_\_ years

41. What is the highest degree that you have completed? (check one..)

B.A. or B.S.  M.A. or M.S.  Specialist  Ph.D. or Ed.D.

42. If you wish to comment on any of the questions, please do so.

---

---

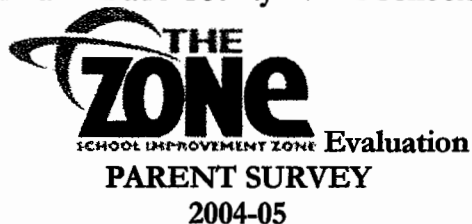
---

---

**Thank you for completing this survey.**

Please return in the enclosed envelope via school mail to:  
Dr. Linda Sorhaindo, Office of Evaluation and Research - Location Code 9020

Miami-Dade County Public Schools



Dear Parent:

The Office of Program Evaluation is currently conducting site visits at selected ZONE schools. Part of this study includes finding out how parents feel about their child's school. Your opinions are an important part of this study. Please complete this survey and return it to your child's teacher in the envelope provided. If you have any questions, please feel free to call Dr. Linda Sorhaindo at 305-995-7544. We appreciate your cooperation.

*Please read each of the following items. Circle the response which most accurately reflects how you feel about each item using the following scale:*

*SD= Strongly Disagree    D =Disagree    A =Agree    SA =Strongly Agree.*

*Circle N/A if you do not have any experience regarding the item, or if it does not apply to you.*

- SD D A SA N/A 1. I feel welcomed when I come to the school.
- SD D A SA N/A 2. I believe that my child gets a good education at this school.
- SD D A SA N/A 3. I believe that my child is safe at this school.
- SD D A SA N/A 4. This school has services available that address the needs of my child and family (for example, before/after school care, health/counseling services).
- SD D A SA N/A 5. I am regularly informed about what is happening at the school.
- SD D A SA N/A 6. My child is happier about going to school since it became a ZONE school.
- SD D A SA N/A 7. I have helped to make decisions about the school (for example, School Improvement Plan, EESAC Committee, personnel selections, or other decisions)
- SD D A SA N/A 8. I feel as though the teachers and administrators at this school respect me and my opinions.
- SD D A SA N/A 9. The discipline policy is fair and consistent at this school.
- SD D A SA N/A 10. This school is better since it became a ZONE school.
- SD D A SA N/A 11. The longer school day is beneficial to my child.
- SD D A SA N/A 12. I have been asked to visit or help in the school or my child's class.



Miami-Dade County Public Schools



Evaluation  
SECONDARY STUDENT SURVEY

2004-05

Dear Student:

This is *not* a test. A study is being conducted at your school. Part of this study includes finding out how students feel. Your opinions are an important part of this study. Please complete this survey and return it to your teacher.

<b>INSTRUCTIONS</b>		
Please read each of the sentences that follow.		
Circle "Yes" if you think that the sentence describes your class.		
Circle "No" if you do not think that the sentence describes your class.		
1.	My teachers really want me to do well in school.	Yes No
2.	I take a lot of things home to my parents.	Yes No
3.	In my classes the work is hard to do.	Yes No
4.	I like school more since it became a Zone school	Yes No
5.	Students seem to like their classes.	Yes No
6.	Adults from home are often invited to come to school.	Yes No
7.	Most students can do their work without help.	Yes No
8.	There are a lot of activities for my family at our school.	Yes No
9.	I have homework to do every night.	Yes No
10.	The school is better since it became a Zone school.	Yes No
11.	I tell my parents about the work I do in school.	Yes No
12.	The students and teachers are proud of this school.	Yes No

**Please answer the following questions:**

13. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years old
14. What grade are you in? (check one)       8<sup>th</sup> Grade       10<sup>th</sup> Grade
15. Are you a female or a male?       Female       Male

**Thank you for completing this survey.**

Miami-Dade County Public Schools



Evaluation  
ELEMENTARY STUDENT SURVEY  
2004-05

Dear Student:

This is *not* a test. A study is being conducted at your school. Part of this study includes finding out how students feel about their class. Your opinions are an important part of this study. Please complete this survey and return it to your teacher.

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Please read each of the sentences that follow.

Circle "Yes" if you think that the sentence describes your class.

Circle "No" if you do not think that the sentence describes your class.

1. My teacher really wants me to do well in school.	Yes	No
2. I take a lot of things home to my parents.	Yes	No
3. In our class the work is hard to do.	Yes	No
4. I like school more since we became a Zone school	Yes	No
5. Children seem to like the class.	Yes	No
6. Adults from home are often invited to come to school.	Yes	No
7. Most children can do their schoolwork without help.	Yes	No
8. There are a lot of activities for my family at our school.	Yes	No
9. I have homework to do every night.	Yes	No
10. Our school is better since we became a Zone school.	Yes	No
11. I tell my parents about the work I do in school.	Yes	No
12. The students and teachers are proud of my school.	Yes	No

Please answer the following questions:

13. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years old

14. What grade are you in? (check one)       3<sup>rd</sup> Grade    4<sup>th</sup> Grade    5<sup>th</sup> Grade

15. Are you a girl or a boy?       Girl       Boy

Thank you for completing this survey.



**APPENDIX C**

**Student Expositions as an Opportunity to Feel Proud: One Antidote to Expectations of Failure in Zone Schools**





December 14, 2005

Dr. Jerry Leavitt,  
Director  
Office of Program Evaluation  
Miami Dade County Public Schools

Dear Jerry,

Please find enclosed a report written for your office concerning the observations of the FIU Zone evaluation team during the two days of Student Expositions at the end of the 2004-05 academic year. We hope the report will be of interest to those attempting to understand the impact of the changes imposed by the School Improvement Zone.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions raised by the report.

Sincerely,

Carol Dutton Stepick

Field Research Director  
Immigration & Ethnicity Institute  
Center for Labor Research & Studies  
Florida International University  
Miami, FL 33199

Encl.



## **Student Expositions as an Opportunity to Feel Proud: One Antidote to Expectations of Failure in Zone Schools**

Luis Pagan  
Carol Dutton Stepick

**Abstract:** Expositions of student work at the end of the extended school year are one of many reform efforts in a specially formed School Improvement Zone in Miami Dade schools. This descriptive analysis offers examples of successful attempts to engender pride even in the face of formidable social and cultural obstacles.

In schools where both faculty and students expect failure, often little energy and few resources are expended to find ways to engender pride and motivate students toward successful work. As part of a massive reform, 39 of Miami-Dade County Public School district's (MDCPS) schools designated low-achieving were incorporated into a special School Improvement Zone (SIZ). Approved by the School Board of Miami-Dade County on August 18, 2004 the initiative encompasses four major changes: (a) a core literacy program that extends from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, (b) a structured curriculum and instructional strategies that build across grade and school levels, (c) an extended day and school year to provide intensive literacy instruction for retained and struggling students, and (d) the provision of professional development activities and Student Development Teams to ensure that the human resources needed in these schools are available.

Prior to the January 2005 initiation of the Zone, Dr. Irving Hamer then serving as Deputy Superintendent of School Improvement for Miami-Dade Public Schools (MDCPS), asked FIU's Center for Urban Education and Innovation (CUEI) to undertake an independent evaluation of the SIZ implementation.

This report is based on the field notes from a two-day slice of the FIU research team's participant observation specifically at the Student Expositions, exhibits of student work held during the last week of the extended school year, on Tuesday, June 7, and Wednesday, June 8, 2005. The FIU team visited seven Zone schools<sup>8</sup> in these two days and the observations gathered reflect on one component of the initiative, ie, how the extended school year was used.

At a time when there is a fervent emphasis on high-stakes testing, Dr. Hamer envisioned the Student Exposition as an event that would shift the focus from student FCAT scores to the more personal and informative nature of student work. One of the ideas behind the Student Expositions was to emphasize success and achievement in schools where there has been a prevailing culture of failure and/or low performance and expectations.

---

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Anthony Normore visited Laura C. Sanders Elementary, Florida City Elementary, and Campbell Drive Middle School. Dr. Elizabeth Cramer visited Laura C. Sanders Elementary. Dr. Linda Spears Bunton and Shelby Gilbert visited Norland Senior High School. Christine Winter observed at Homestead Senior High School, Luis Pagan at Horace Mann Middle School, and Janice Giles at Miami Edison Senior High School. Drs. Alex Stepick, Anthony Normore and Mary Alfred attended planning meetings for the Zone-wide event.

During the extended week when the student exhibits were displayed, white banners decorated with fireworks, the planet Earth, and a NASA-labeled rocket ship soaring into outer space adorned all Zone schools, imploring all who attended in “Celebrating Success.” The Student Exposition was an entreaty on the part of Dr. Hamer to shift emphasis from high-stakes testing to “the real work: teacher-student relationship, student work, teacher judgment,” etc. (Interview with Dr. Irving Hamer, June 28, 2005). Even though the Expositions functioned to draw attention to the vital aspects of teaching and learning, Dr. Hamer’s message manifested itself differently within each school.

#### **Methodology:**

Descriptions of all observations made during the Student Expositions provided by all members of the FIU team are based on the methodology of standard ethnography. During the time spent observing, FIU team members made brief jottings on note pads of the events, activities, performances exhibits and comments from participant teachers and students. After the day’s observation period, these jottings were expanded into extensive notes to flesh out the details of that day’s observations. Each member of the observation team followed a protocol of observations and questions for teachers, students and parents to allow comparison among the schools. Several common themes emerged.

#### **Parent-Teacher Conferences:**

Looking ahead to anticipated interviews with parents, the FIU team was especially interested in the Parent-Teacher Conferences, an integral component of the Student Expositions. These conferences were slated to be student-led. The teacher’s role was to facilitate the discussions, and the parent would ask the questions. Upon receiving permission from the teacher, the parent and the student, all FIU observers were prepared to document this interaction as their first priority.

Despite letters sent to parents announcing the Student Exhibitions and the Parent-Teacher Conferences, and despite the outreach through the media, only two or three or no parents at all appeared at any of the Zone schools where there was an observer from FIU. Even though the members of the FIU team positioned themselves to potentially sit-in on the scheduled parent-teacher conferences, none were observed because of the lack of parental response. This was true even for one of the middle schools that drew a gymnasium full of family members for their traditional awards ceremonies and 8<sup>th</sup> grade promotional exercises.

Although outreach to parents is typically the burden of individual school administrators and teachers, the district expended significant effort planning outreach for the Student Expositions. A member of the FIU team observed and documented one of the phases of preparation for this event at a planning meeting for the Student Expositions held at a Zone Retreat for M-DCPS District Staff. During this meeting a detailed strategy was laid out primarily dealing with getting the word out about the exhibitions. Plans to publicize the celebration included letters for parents from the principals, flyers in three languages (English, Spanish and Haitian-Creole), letters to faith-based organizations, letters to Dade Partners, the University and Community Advisory Board, and local Chambers of Commerce, a WLRN interview with Dr. Hamer, radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs), and ads in the Herald and Nuevo Herald.

We were unable to document how much and what form of the plan was implemented. We do not know what communiqués actually reached parents, the extent of media outreach or resultant coverage. Among the sub-sample of schools observed by the FIU team there was little evidence that outreach to stimulate parent-teacher conferences had adequately reached its intended audience.

Overall teachers were dejected by the lack of parental response to the Student Expositions and Parent-Teacher Conferences. Some teachers expressed anger and frustration and perhaps their expectation of failure. Other teachers expressed compassion and an understanding of the real circumstances of many of their students' families.

Even though the lack of parental involvement in the education of children is an endemic problem, teachers also realized that the message may have not been delivered. Many teachers suspected that parents never received the letters announcing the Student Expositions because the students were charged with taking them home. One teacher revealed that she watched these letters become paper airplanes in her classroom. At the very least, one school administrator confessed that it would have been better to schedule these meetings with each parent individually and directly.

### **Community Participation**

Hopes that community members and business organizations, both targeted in the outreach for this event, would support children during this occasion did not materialize. Except at two schools, the team did not see or hear reports of any visits by members of the School Board or representatives from regional or central office administration visiting. This may have been because these people were at one or more of the 32 other Zone schools not observed by the FIU team. In some of the seven schools we did visit our team member was the only audience or visitor over the course of several hours.

A particular point of contention for teachers was the lack of visibility of Zone officials throughout the Zone schools, and during the Student Exposition. This perceived show of disinterest certainly had more impact on teachers than on students. Turn-out by district staff and School Board members could have been an appropriate strategy to build morale and support for the Zone among teachers.

### **Attendance**

Just as the community was absent, there was also evidence of considerable student absenteeism at the high school and to a lesser extent at the middle school level. Absenteeism was not notable at the elementary schools. Absenteeism affected the Student Expositions, but was also a symptom of a more profound problem with the extended school year.

Teachers' analysis of the high rates of absenteeism at the high school level centered on two critiques, the timing of the Student Expo during the final week of the extended school year and the lack of motivation for students to attend the final week.

### **The Exhibits and Performances<sup>9</sup>**

Of the seven schools observed by the FIU team, two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school were in full exhibition mode on the two days scheduled for the Student

---

<sup>9</sup> Detailed descriptions of the exhibits and performances are included as an appendix.

Exposition. The other three schools (two high schools and one middle school) were in the process of dismantling their exhibits and were clearly not expecting any visitors. Of the schools with their exhibits up and awaiting visitors one elementary and one middle school sadly lacked either an internal or external audience. The few students who were encountered at these schools were eager and proud to explain their exhibits. One elementary and one high school carried on festively in the absence of an outside audience. At the elementary school (Laura C. Sanders) students and staff formed appreciative audiences for performances and exhibits. At the high school (Miami Edison) students were not absent and were observed proudly and enthusiastically appreciating the exhibition in the media center. Their teachers were equally proud and admiring of the student work.

At all but two elementary schools and one high school, the student expositions were conglomerates of individual and group projects mostly showing regular classroom work. Many were impressive and creative and amply demonstrated successful work performed by students. At two elementary schools (Laura C. Sanders and Florida City Elementary) and one high school (Miami Edison) the expositions were organized around a central theme and one staff member coordinated efforts to put on a specific two-day program.

At all the schools where FIU researchers observed, they found teachers and students who demonstrated a vibrant sense of pride and joy with the effort, quality, and aesthetic presentation of student work produced for the Student Exposition. With the particular success enjoyed at Miami Edison Senior High, many teachers were more than willing to share their thoughts on why the student exhibits developed into such a positive experience. Several teachers verbalized how excited they were to see the tremendous effort put forth by the students. Many teachers voiced their pleasant surprise at how everything came together. Most of all, teachers displayed an immense pride in the way that the students had made every effort to research independently and efficiently and creatively display the products of their research. Face beaming with happiness, one teacher said, "this was such a successful event, the kids need this."

Despite the pride and enthusiasm elicited by the nature of the student exhibits, there was a pervasive discontent among teachers. Critical of its timing, many teachers explained that the student exhibitions were inconvenient for them because they had to have their classrooms completely clean and cleared out before the end of the week. At four of the seven schools, FIU researchers observed students and teachers cleaning out storage areas and restocking shelves with new books for next year, and classrooms void of student exhibits. Teacher comments reinforced their preoccupation with end of the school year obligations, and how this conflicted with the Student Expositions.

In addition to logistical concerns, there were also prevalent objections reflecting the perception that there existed a lack of support and direction to plan, prepare for, and stage the Student Expositions. Of particular importance, the teachers felt that they were excluded in the planning of the Student Exposition.

By focusing on the successful Student Expositions observed at Laura C. Saunders Elementary and Miami Edison Senior High, it is evident that these productions shared some attributes. Notably, even though the student exhibits demanded a collective effort on the part of students, teachers, specialists, and school administrators, one individual was primarily responsible for the organization of the student exposition. The expositions at these schools were conceptualized as spiraling around a common theme. With the "Taste of the Islands" theme, the coordinator at Miami Edison H.S. organized an opportunity for the high school students to explore the diverse social, cultural, and political landscape of the Caribbean. Considering the demographics of Miami

Edison H.S., the cultural connection that linked the students to this theme was fundamental to the commendable effort displayed leading up to, and during the student exposition. According to one of the teachers, "The work was actually relevant to their backgrounds and they were engaged." As a result, these students responded with both academic and aesthetic flair. At Laura C. Saunders Elementary, the coordinator chose the "Under the Sea" theme. Students were able to be an appreciative audience of their peers' performances and other work on this central theme.

The process by which students prepared their student exhibits was also revealing. When teachers gave their students class time to work on their projects, it became evident to teachers that this exercise harnessed essential learning skills. Noting that his students usually score very low on the *Reference and Research* component of the FCAT, a teacher from Miami Edison Senior High stated, "I think a great benefit of the expo is that it is a useful way to teach reference and research skills. It helped the creative learners. Teaching research skills across learning styles is important because some are visual learners, some are more right brain than rational." Consequently, teachers promoted these skills by reserving time in the Media Center for those students needing to do research for their student exhibits.

Researchers repeatedly heard teacher's complaints about being excluded from the planning and preparation for the Student Expositions. They perceived the event as imposed without consultation. Teachers understood that the idea was handed down from the District Staff to school administrators, who then assigned new responsibilities to school practitioners. Some of the teachers' lack of enthusiasm or commitment to this event could be explained by the fact that they were not involved in the process from the beginning. A combination of perceived lack of support and direction and the lack of agency on the part of teachers resulted in more frustration and confusion than celebration at most of the schools that were observed.

Even though the MDCPS district conducted a coordinated mass effort of promoting and publicizing the Student Exposition using every available media channel, the paucity of parental participation in the event, and the absence of community and business organizations, is still a discouraging finding. Even though there are several reasons why parents did not attend, from ambivalence to employment, the use of students to deliver newsletters beckoning parents to take part in the celebration of student work is clearly ineffective. As suggested by a school coordinator, it would be more constructive if each school reaches out to parents individually, especially for scheduling parent-teacher conferences.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

As might be expected, observing the first Student Expositions revealed both positive and negative indicators for engendering both student pride and participation. This analysis offers constructive recommendations for future productions.

- Because the most impressive student exhibits and presentations were successfully managed by a common theme, it is recommended that each school determine a mechanism by which a theme can be generated.
  - This theme should be relevant to the students, their backgrounds, and the unique history, environment, and setting of each school. The theme should foster a personal connection with the students to elicit an effort and energy from which vibrant student exhibits can be generated.
  - It is recommended that an individual, or group of individuals, be delegated the responsibility of coordinating, organizing, and overseeing the student expositions at each school. As part of this commitment, this individual or team should be sensitive to input from students, teachers, and the community.

- A forum should be assembled to gather input to determine the best time to schedule this event on the school calendar. It is apparent that discussions as to how the student exhibitions are positioned related to the FCAT will be prominent.
  - Since the extended week at the end of the school year represented an obstacle that hindered the success of student expositions at most schools, it is recommended that consideration be given to scheduling these student exhibitions earlier in the year.
- Further attention must be paid to how to motivate students and successfully use the extended school year and avoid rampant absenteeism.
- Since teachers observed the promotion and development of important learning skills during the process by which students prepared their student exhibits, it is recommended that students be given designated class time to work on their projects. It was specifically noted that students employed reference and research skills, one of the five components of the FCAT. Additionally, this endeavor engaged students from across all learning styles.
  - It is also recommended that, since many students may not have computers at home, the Media Center be utilized so that students may use the Internet as a research tool.

Since teachers play an integral role in the work and achievement of students, it is imperative to address their inclusion in the process by which student work and achievement is commemorated.

- It is recommended that a mechanism be established that incorporates teachers more directly into the vision, logistics, and content of the student exposition. Teachers should be encouraged to share their ideas and be included in all stages of its conceptualization, facilitating a greater commitment and enthusiasm in the preparation, planning, and production of the student exhibits.
- Additionally, in order to address the perceived lack of support and direction from the Zone verbalized by the teachers, it is recommended that Zone officials make a more concerted and consistent effort in their involvement and visibility within all Zone schools.
- Even though considerable efforts were made to invite parents and community organizations, it is recommended that more personal efforts be made to elicit parental involvement. Specifically, an investment at each school needs to be made to individually contact each parent or caretaker, informing them of both the celebratory vision of the student expositions, and the opportunity for student, parent, and teacher conferences.

In summary, it is clearly evident that the concept behind the Student Expositions is a worthy one. This research found that even for the expositions that were relatively fruitless some students were observed taking pride in their work where formerly low achievement, complacency and failure were the expected standards. However, to insure future success of the Student Exposition across all SIZ schools more effort must be invested.



## Appendix

### **FIU Personnel at Elementary School Exhibits**

Dr. Elizabeth Cramer, an FIU professor within the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies, observed several student exhibits and presentations at Laura C. Saunders Elementary during the morning of Tuesday, June 7. She saw art projects and a 5<sup>th</sup> grade power point presentation that guided her through several imaginary scuba-diving adventures of different bodies of water. She also watched 4<sup>th</sup> graders' presentations on the local habitat and species found in the Everglades, a class of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders who presented the mystical realm of mermaids and pirates, a class of 2<sup>nd</sup> graders who recited a poem about trying hard and reaching for success and a pair of 1<sup>st</sup> grade classes with their rendition of "I'm a Manatee."

On Wednesday, June 8, Dr. Anthony Normore, an FIU professor within the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies observed a 5th grade power point presentation on fish anatomy as part of the Student Exposition program titled *Laura SEA Saunders Elementary Presents The School Improvement Zone's "Under the Sea" Literary Celebration and Student Exhibits*. Dr. Normore also was able to observe other student exhibits and artwork from 9:30 am to 11:00 am.

Afterwards Dr. Normore briefly visited Florida City Elementary for an hour and was given a principal-guided tour of the school exhibits.

### **FIU Personnel at Middle School Exhibits**

On Tuesday, June 7, Dr. Anthony Normore visited Campbell Drive Middle School for the entire school day, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Dr. Normore was led on a tour of the school exhibits by the principal and the Reading Leader. For an hour before lunch, even though several teachers had already taken down the classroom exhibits in preparation for the closing of school, Dr. Normore did visit a couple of classrooms where class projects and individual exhibits were still up for display. After spending an hour after lunch searching for other classrooms with student exhibits with no success, Dr. Normore attended an hour-long 8<sup>th</sup> grade afternoon performance of music, dancing, and cheerleading. Afterwards, Dr. Normore stayed at Campbell Drive Middle eager to observe the student-led parent-teacher conferences that were scheduled from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. However, even though the parent-teacher conferences were billed as an extension of the Student Expositions, Dr. Normore's inability to document any of these conferences mirrored the lack of parental participation at the student exhibits.

At Horace Mann Middle School, Luis Pagan, a Master's student in the College of Education's Department of curriculum and Instruction, observed the proceedings on both days that the Student Expositions were scheduled. On Tuesday, June 7, Mr. Pagan was invited to attend the 8<sup>th</sup> grade promotional exercise that was held at Miami Edicson Missile School's auditorium where friends, parents, and family members showed up in the hundreds. Billed as a "Showcase of Excellence," a handful of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were paid tribute during a portion of the event, as they were given an opportunity to display their creative gifts, from singing and playing instruments, to reciting poetry and displaying artwork. Additionally, the 35-person chorus and the 25-member band allowed a larger number of students to display their collective talents to the guests in the audience. As a tribute to the students and their work as a whole, a little less than 200 slides were projected onto a screen towards the back of the stage; the majority of the slides showed pictures of students, student work and projects, as well as students doing work in their classrooms.

Upon returning to Horace Mann M.S. in the afternoon, Mr. Pagan stopped by the Media Center where the Student Exposition was on display. Albeit void of students, parents, and faculty, all twenty-four wooden tables were adorned with several student exhibits, from group projects on display boards, to individual creations inspired by literary works.

On Wednesday, June 8 Mr. Pagan was invited to attend the 6<sup>th</sup> grade Awards Ceremony from 9:30 am to noon, and the 7<sup>th</sup> grade Awards Ceremony from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm, where students were recognized for their achievements across the full range of school subjects. After both awards ceremonies, neither the students, nor any family or community member visited the Student Exposition. Similarly, even though parent-teacher conferences were scheduled after 3:00 p.m., Mr. Pagan was unable to document these interactions due to the lack of parental attendance.

#### **FIU Personnel at Senior High School Exhibits:**

On Tuesday, July 7, both Dr. Linda Spears-Bunton, an FIU professor from the College of Education's Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and Shelby Gilbert, a doctoral student from the same department visited the Student Exposition at Miami Norland Senior High School. Despite visiting several classrooms between 7:00 a.m. and noon, Dr. Spears-Bunton and Ms. Gilbert were able to document only a few classrooms that still had their student exhibits displayed. During the same time frame on Wednesday, June 8, Dr. Spears-Bunton enjoyed having a few students show and demonstrate their work.

At Miami Edison Senior High School Janice Giles, another doctoral student from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, observed the Student Exposition that was organized and arranged according to a coordinated theme. For a couple hours on Tuesday, and a few hours on Wednesday, Ms. Giles was entertained not only with the creativity and diversity of student exhibits, but also with music, food, performances, an upbeat ambience, student laughter, and a sense of real achievement.

At Homestead Senior High School an array of student exhibits that were displayed in the Media Center impressed Christine Winter, an FIU doctoral student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Even though these exhibits were not patronized, for a short while on both Tuesday and Wednesday, Ms. Winter was able to admire the hard work the students put into their displays.

Despite the variability they encountered in student exhibits and engagement, all members of the FIU team were greeted and welcomed warmly, and consistently provided free access to the student exhibits and school facilities.

## Descriptions of Student Expositions at Selected Zone Schools

### Laura C. Saunders Elementary School

Upon entering the school on Tuesday morning, Dr. Elizabeth Cramer immediately noticed the drawings of sea life that lined the hallways of the school. The title of the program brochure constructed for the Student Exposition announced the common theme of the exhibits and presentation: *Laura SEA Saunders Elementary Presents The School Improvement Zone's: "Under the Sea" Literary Celebration and Student Exhibits*. Ms. Ventura, the Reading Leader, was the primary organizer of the event, having been given this role by the school's administration. At the time when Ms. Ventura was delegated this responsibility, Mrs. Miner, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, had told her about a Web Quest project she was working on about sea life. Essentially, since Mrs. Miner's Web Quest project served as the springboard for the event, it seems that this schools' interpretation of the student exposition was for each student to create a project around a central theme. The school kicked this off on May 4 at their annual "May Day Celebration", and spent the month leading up to the student expositions working on the student projects. Ms. Ventura put together activities and collected materials, literature units, etc. to provide to teachers so that they could do projects with their classes for this event.

Inside the program brochure, events for the 2 days were listed by the hour and type of presentation. At approximately 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, inside the school cafeteria, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class was setting up for their 9:30 a.m. presentation on the cafeteria stage. A sixty-foot actual size drawing of a whale shark hung across the cafeteria ceiling. Shortly after, three classes of kindergarten students arrived in the cafeteria to serve as the audience for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade presentations. Aside from the kindergartners and their teachers, the Principal, the Assistant Principal, Ms. Ventura, Dr. Elizabeth Cramer, and Dr. Laura Morrison attended Mrs. Miner's 5<sup>th</sup> grade presentation.

There was a screen set up on stage with the song "Under the Sea" playing and the screen reading, *Fishy Features Web Quest from Mrs. Miner's Fish Anatomy Academy*. Students came up one by one to read at a microphone from a power point presentation about a project they did studying bodies of water. They took an imaginary scuba adventure. Each student read approximately one or two sentences about what they did. As part of this project, they worked with 2<sup>nd</sup> graders to create bar graphs about how many fish they had found. Photographs of their collaboration were featured in the power point. Also, photographs of the projects the student completed were featured (bar graphs and drawings of the fish). Students made pattern block angelfish. The 5<sup>th</sup> graders also collected data on various fish (name, species, size) and had to find the mean length of each species. During the presentation, Mrs. Miner stopped to ask the kindergarten students to solve simple math problems from the graphs that the students had created. She also incorporated stories that the kindergartners had read as part of their curriculum. The work from these projects is on the Internet through *Riverdeep* and on the Laura C. Saunders website. The presentation lasted approximately 15 minutes, and was repeated for more kindergarten classes.

In order to observe and document the student work displayed in the classrooms as part of the student exposition, Dr. Cramer was provided with two 5<sup>th</sup> grade students to escort her throughout the school. Since the rest of the hour in the cafeteria was going to be encores of the same presentation for other Kindergarten classes, Dr. Cramer had her tour guides take her first to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade classes. Upon arriving to Ms. Wall's classroom, Dr. Cramer observed the entire classroom of students playing on the computer or at their tables. Ms. Wall informed Dr. Cramer that the students did mostly art work for the student exposition, and proceeded to show her two

large art projects that were done by the whole class. One was a picture of a manatee, and the other was a large fish representing the book *Swimmy*. According to Ms Wall, Ms.Ventura, the principal organizer of the student exposition, gave to her the books to use and the activities to do for the art projects. Ms. Wall's students had also learned a song about manatees with the first grade class next door (Ms. Koppleman's class). The students were eager to sing, and upon beginning the song, the first grade class next door heard and came running in to join. Excited, the students started over and Dr. Cramer was treated to a fabulous rendition of "I'm a Manatee". Since these students were not going to perform in front of other students as part of the exposition, Dr. Cramer served as their only opportunity to sing for an audience.

After the first grade, the pair of 5<sup>th</sup> graders assigned to Dr. Cramer escorted her to Ms. McIntosh's second grade class. Ms. McIntosh called in the students from next door, and they recited a poem about trying hard and reaching for success. Upon touring the classroom, Dr. Cramer observed pictures of fish with their anatomy, and dioramas of sea life. There were also math problems done using fish.

The Media Center was the next stop on the tour of student exhibits, where 4<sup>th</sup> graders were giving presentations about their projects. Before the presentations began, Ms. Scott, the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teacher, informed Dr. Cramer that the ESE students worked on the same project for the exposition as their grade-level peers; and their work was displayed alongside their grade level peers. The fourth graders did several different exhibits (a few per class) about the Everglades. Each class made some books about the Everglades. One was about predators and their habitats, one was an A-Z guide of animals found in the Everglades, one made a current events book about happenings in the Everglades. One whole class wrote acrostic poems about animals from the Everglades, and these were displayed on a large poster. One student wrote a folklore tale about "Why the sky is blue" and read that aloud. Another class collectively presented "facts about the blue whale". Dr. Cramer observed a large poster with informational pamphlets created about different animals as well as animal tessellation drawings done by a whole class, and worksheets of addition and subtraction with sea animals displayed on a large poster. Even though the audience consisted of third graders and Dr. Cramer, the students appeared nervous while explaining each of their projects.

Fifth grade science projects were also displayed in the Media Center. These were not related to the "Under the Sea" theme. Dr. Cramer had the impression that, rather than do a new project for the expo, the teachers displayed work that the students had already done in class. This was the only group that seemed to have presented in this manner. Each of these projects was a three-fold poster board with simple experiments, such as:

- Which soap cleans dishes better: Dawn or Joy?
- Which cheese molds faster: Cheddar or Mozzarella?
- Do bananas turn brown faster in the closet or in the refrigerator?
- Which soda has the most gas?

Each experiment had a few trials and results were reported.

Although a deviation from this school's thematic approach, displays of regular classwork were part of the plan for the Student Exposition as originally envisioned by Dr. Hamer and district staff.

Dr. Cramer ended her day in the third grade classrooms. Some classes had large shark habitats that they had set up. She spent the most time with Ms. Benitez who had done something different. She did a unit on pirates and mermaids. According to Ms. Benitez, she did this because she feels that the students never have time to learn about myths and legends. Since the FCAT was over and the students wanted to do something creative, she thought the exposition was the perfect opportunity to do this. She was very excited about the expo and their projects. One of the main stories they highlighted was *Sukey and the Mermaid*, a picture book by Robert D. San Souci, and Ms. Benitez showed Dr. Cramer all of the projects related to this book. Ms. Benitez employed CRISS strategies with her student, and had KWL charts, Venn diagrams, QAR charts, reciprocal teaching posters, FCAT strategy posters, all related to pirates and mermaids, adorning her room. The students had created a list of the rules of piracy and consequences for breaking these rules based upon books they had read and research they had done on the Internet. They also created a large pirate map.

On Wednesday, Dr. Anthony Normore attended the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Web Quest presentation slated for the ten o' clock hour. Many students were in attendance. The 5<sup>th</sup> graders were lined up against a cafeteria wall, preparing to take their assigned role for their presentation. The teacher controlled the power point presentation on Fish Anatomy while the students did all the talking. Midway through their presentation, Dr. Irving Hamer entered. He greeted the principal and Dr. Normore, and commented, "This is what it's all about. Haven't these kids done some great stuff?" Dr. Normore stopped by the Media Center. Even though presentations were not being conducted at this time, Dr. Normore did observe many projects, including the "Everglades Habitat" displays. Before leaving, Dr. Normore was joined by Ms. Evelyn Greer, a School Board Member, in the Principal's office. As Dr. Normore left in the afternoon, Ms. Evelyn Greer met with the Principal and visited the student exhibits.

### **Florida City Elementary School**

During a brief hour-long visit on Wednesday afternoon, Dr. Normore was guided on a tour of the school exhibits by the principal. Dr. Normore was handed a pamphlet that highlighted the activities for the day; the pamphlet was entitled *Florida City Elementary School Presents: A Celebration of Our Writers of the Year, Our Most Improved Writers, The Haitian American Club Performers and The Florida City Elementary Choir, June 8, 2005*. Apparently, Florida City Elementary also decided to organize the student exposition around a common theme. The exhibits were displayed outside of all classrooms, in the foyer of the main entrance, on walls, on floors, and even on some ceilings. Dr. Normore heard of no other visitors to this elementary school.

### **Campbell Drive Middle School**

On Tuesday, the Principal and the Reading Leader led Dr. Normore on a tour of the student exhibits. The corridors of the school were noticeably quiet. However, upon turning the corner inside one of the buildings, Dr. Normore encountered several students with a couple of teachers cleaning out storage areas and restocking shelves with new books for next year. It was revealed to Dr. Normore that many of the students did not participate in exhibits, and that several teachers had already taken down their class exhibits so that they would not be left with the burden of cleaning up everything themselves on the last days of school.

Curious about how the student exposition was organized at Campbell Drive Middle, Dr. Normore asked how they had prepared for the student exhibits. Apparently, there were class

projects (group work) in which the whole school participated. Very few individuals did their own projects. The project was done with a focus on “interdisciplinary units,” where each student chose a book and designed artwork based on the lessons learned from the book. The two books available to the students for the exhibits were *Sounder*, by William H. Armstrong, and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, by Mildred Taylor.

Dr. Normore was first taken to an ESE classroom, where one student was present. The student (a sixth grader) had a huge display of artwork that he had worked on with the rest of his classmates spread across six tables. Serving as the spokesperson for the class, the young boy explained his work. He was excited to share but a little shy. With encouragement, he informed Dr. Normore why they had chosen this exhibit, how they pulled it all together, and what lessons he had learned from the project. The teacher continued to sit at her desk and listen to him as he explained. The project was impressively done and Dr. Normore congratulated him.

The Reading Leader and the principal were excited to bring Dr. Normore to an 8<sup>th</sup> grade class where Read 180 had been implemented. The Reading Leader explained that these students had done a wonderful arrangement for the school exhibit. Full of anticipation, the principal knocked on the door and opened it slowly so as to not interrupt carelessly. However, disappointment set in when there were no student exhibits to be seen. The teacher was sitting at her desk, while her students were sitting at the computers playing games, and sitting in desks talking with one another. The Reading Leader asked what happened to the display since the walls were completely bare. The teacher explained that they had just packed up in preparation for closure. The teacher seemed a little embarrassed. To overcome the awkward situation, she was asked if there might be some portfolios available showing the work the Read 180 students had been involved in preparing for the exposition.

Upon moving to another 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom of fifteen students, exhibits were seen hanging from the ceiling. Happily, three individual students explained their own projects, which had as their focus the books *Sounder* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Each student took a turn to explain what they had written about.

After lunch and on his own, Dr. Normore went to the auditorium where some students were setting up for a performance scheduled for that afternoon. As Dr. Normore watched them prepare the stage for the performance, two MDCPS police officers came to visit. They were friends of the Center for Special Instruction (CSI) teacher who was monitoring some of the students. One was one of the officers normally assigned to this school, while the other was assigned from a non-Zone school to assist in the Zone. This was occurring throughout the Zone schools for the last week of school.

Dr. Normore stepped out briefly in search of other student exhibits that had not been taken down. With no success, he returned to the auditorium in order to catch the afternoon performance of music, dancing, and cheerleading scheduled for 2:00 p.m. All the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who were present for the day were in attendance. The dance instructor/Assistant Principal and the cheerleading coach led the performance. Even though none sat with the students, teachers gathered in the room and cheered the students for their work. A couple of teachers joined the students to dance on the stage.

### **Horace Mann Middle School**

The Student Exposition at Horace Mann Middle School consisted of a conglomeration of student exhibits in the Media Center, and grade-level ceremonies that showcased student work and

achievement. On Tuesday morning, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Promotional Exercise was held at the Miami Edison Middle School auditorium, since the auditorium at Horace Mann Middle School was too small for the expected audience of parents, friends, and family members. After a short 5-minute bus-ride, the students lined up outside of the auditorium. It was a comical scene, as most of the students were "checking each other out." Some of the male students had suits on which were much too big, evidence that either this is a new style, or most likely, that they were wearing the suit of their father or an elder sibling. The students began filing into the first four or five rows of the auditorium, as "Pomp and Circumstance" played. The theme of the promotional exercise was "Soaring Above The Rest". Two eighth grade students served as the Masters of Ceremonies, sharing the stage with the Principal, an Assistant Principal, and a keynote speaker from the Miami Heat.

After the principal welcomed the several hundreds of friends and family members in attendance, the talents of the students were showcased. As part of the theme to demonstrate and emphasize student work, 35 to 40 students sang as part of the chorus, two individual vocalists sang, a musician played the violin, poets recited their poetry, and artists displayed their artwork, followed by a performance from the 25-member band. After the 8<sup>th</sup> graders were presented with their diplomas, and the top four academic 8<sup>th</sup> graders were given "Principal Awards," a slide show ensued. With the goal of sharing what students did at Horace Mann Middle School during the school year, a little less than 200 slides were shown in power point format, projected on a screen towards the back of the stage. Many of the slides showed pictures of students, some of their work, and students working in their classrooms.

The principal mentioned to all who attended the procession that the student exhibits would be open for display in the Media Center. In spite of a festive atmosphere, in the auditorium absolutely no one ventured to see the student exposition, despite the immaculate set-up.

The Media Center sits in a relatively small building, about the size of four to five classrooms put together. Half of the space is dedicated to books, movies, and other reference materials. In the other half all twenty-four wooden tables were adorned with several student exhibits from group projects on display boards to individual creations inspired by literary works.

One teacher had her students do a creative project described as "Hats off to Reading!" Each student wrote a book report, and created a hat following the book's theme. The work of one or two students from each period she taught was displayed. From the book *Pale Phoenix*, by Kathryn Reiss, one student constructed a round-brimmed black hat, with the head of a turkey on the top made of felt; hundreds of red and orange leaves made of construction paper adorned the hat, with excerpts from the book on each leaf. Other books featured through the creative hat displays were Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, James Cameron's *Titanic*, Maria Celeste Arraras' *Selena's Secret: The Revealing Story Behind Her Tragic Death*. Laurence Yep's *Dragon Wings* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

Much of the student's work was presented in the form of display boards. Two students represented the work done in a science class; one student's exhibit was titled *Growing on Garbage*, and the student's pictures of garbage collected at Virginia Key Beach and Biscayne Nature Center Beach. The student of another teacher presented her experiment on *Battery Life*. Vocational Education classes were represented by entrepreneurial students attempting to sell their ideas and products by manufacturing Certificates of Business, Employee Contracts, and Biz Flow Charts. One student attempted to set up his own Action Figure business, while another student opted to sell the music of the National Basketball Association.

Group work was exhibited in the section devoted to one teacher's Social Studies classes. In particular, three students took a *Road Trip* throughout the Sunshine State, and posted pictures and written experiences from their adventures featuring the Kennedy Space Center, Orlando Attractions, Hommosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, Weeki Wachee Springs, and the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino.

Even though the student exposition at Horace Mann Middle was extensive it was also apparent that not all students at this school exhibited there. Several teachers reported they were asked by the school administration to present one exhibit for each of their classes, due to the space limitation in the Media Center. Several teachers interpreted this to mean one exhibit from one student per class, whereas other teachers interpreted this as delivering a display board with an example of each student's work. It is also apparent that a theme was not generated in response to putting on the student exposition. The student exhibits displayed were examples of work already done in the classroom, not original work explicitly intended for display in the Student Exposition.

On Wednesday, awards ceremonies were held separately for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades to reward student academic and social achievement. A few parents attended these events. However, even though students took newsletters home to their parents announcing the Student Exposition, no parents stopped by the Media Center to admire the student exhibits. According to the librarian assistant only one person had stopped by on Tuesday to look at the student exhibits. The librarian assistant thought, but was not sure that this person was someone from the MDCPS district. Moreover, a teacher notified Mr. Pagan that a Zone administrator had also observed the 7<sup>th</sup> grade Awards Ceremony. At 2:30 p.m., while the 7<sup>th</sup> graders were still receiving their awards in the auditorium a message was transmitted over the intercom announcing that the student exhibits should be taken down. Because preparations were being made for the following day luncheon honoring retiring and transferring teachers and school administrators, the Student Exposition was dismantled by 3:30 p.m.

### **Miami Edison Senior High School**

Edison's musical band was in full swing for the pleasure of prospective parents, community members, and guests. They were positioned against the wall opposite the check-in table at the main entrance of the school. The band of approximately fourteen students had horn players, drummers, and clarinet players. They were led by the music teacher, and were performing a medley of Caribbean tunes and Bob Marley tributes.

A festive atmosphere greeted any who ventured inside the Media Center, where the Student Exposition was being orchestrated. The whole library was filled with the works of students and arranged according to the theme, "Taste of the Islands". Haiti, the Taino (the native Indian population of Haiti), Aruba, the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Jamaica were the islands of the Caribbean represented with student exhibits. Music emanated from various points within the room, from cassette players and power point presentations. The entire Media Center was full of students and teachers. Students were positioned behind their respective tables passing out food and drinks and negotiating a one-cup-rule of juice distribution. The students moved in packs from table to table, looking at the works of fellow students and sampling the drinks and food. The climate was very upbeat and a shared enthusiasm indicated the extent to which all were enjoying themselves.

The first island to be represented was Haiti, and its products were located to the immediate right of the main doorway. There were tables covered with transcribed interviews of fellow Haitian



students and family members. Hanging off the front of these tables were Haitian proverbs that the students had written or typed out with the proverb's English translations below them and hand-drawn illustrations depicting the main thrust of the lesson that the proverb aimed to impart. One of them read, "Fanm pou youtan Manman pou tout tan" with its related English translation "wife for a time, mother for all time". Another one read "whoac nan dlo pa konnen doule woch nan soley," which translates to "the rock in the water does not know the pain of the rock in the sun". Each of the proverbs allowed the observer to see the particularity of Haitian norms relative to mainstream American values.

One poster provided information on Haiti's revolutionary war and the country's demographic statistics. Next to that, was a poster on Haiti's contemporary personalities, like popular R&B artists Usher Raymond and Hip Hop Artist and producer, Wyclef Jean. Further along the table were typed descriptions of Haitian foods and recipes. Some of these were probably cut and pasted from Haitian web sites, while others were hand written and probably retrieved from family members and friends. Another poster, *Haitian Diaspora and Flags*, featured Canada, France and the U.S. Under each of the flags, the students had pasted the real currency of the respective nations. Another poster depicted Haiti's revolution and featured a large illustration of Toussaint L' Overture. It also had illustrations of Haitians revolting on slave ships and fearless Haitian fighters in battle with the French on Haitian shores. Next to this poster was a Haitian time line.

Other posters featured information on Haiti's schools, and the most notable products of these institutions. They were men and women who have contributed to the arts, sciences, medicine, and business. On a poster titled "Haiti's Good and Bad" were newspaper clippings, articles, and illustrations of events and circumstances both problematic and beneficial to Haiti's people. Celebratory festivals and events were featured on one side, while social and political tragedies and images of those struck by famine were featured on the other side. Next to this poster were biographies of Haitian celebrities such as Garcelle Beauvias, and a poster with famous Haitian writers. There were also posters of Haitian religion and culture.

On one tabletop were student-made brochures, maps and flags of Haiti. Also placed on the table were Haitian poetry books, and composition projects entitled "Human rights in Haiti" and "The Haitian Revolution." The Haitian display was the only one to take up an entire wall of the media center. The other Caribbean islands shared the other two walls.

The Aruba presentation featured a map of the island painted on Styrofoam. Student made brochures, as well as posters, were decorated with Aruba's currency and sports personalities. Various foods and punch, and peach and mango salsa with crackers were served at the Aruba table.

The Trinidad and Tobago exhibit focused on the geography and natural habitat of the islands including a remarkable student-made painting of the Buccoo reef. Posters featured the "Bats of Trinidad" located in Tamana Hill, and the "Birds of Trinidad" such as the Blue Crowned Mot Mot. Still other posters featured "Trinidad's Butterflies," "The Armadillo," "Wild Pigs" and "Humming Birds." Located on the wall behind the table was a poster of the "Folktales of Trinidad". Much like the Haitian proverbs, these related the values and norms of the Trinidadian culture. Included on this poster was "Papa Bois" who is said to reside in the forest and take care of the vegetation and animals, and "La Diabliesse," who is said to be the envy of women, and roams the night luring men from social events or their homes, leading them to the forest or a precipice, where she ultimately causes them to be confused and lost and left to die. The Trinidad and Tobago exhibit, like the one for Haiti, also had a historical timeline and tourism posters.

The exhibit for the Dominican Republic had foods as well as student products. A punch made from orange juice, condensed milk, vanilla, and sugar was served as was a traditional

pudding. Some of the Dominican posters were of the island's history, culture, and geography. One of the posters had holidays, and the circumstances of the island's independence. Still another poster had information on religion, and yet another had recipes on it. Other products were student-made oak tag posters featuring the music of the Dominican Republic and images of its Carnival under the words "Morir Sonando".

The exhibit on Cuba had posters and flyers on its table. The posters depicted Fidel Castro, Cuba's Birds, The Zapata Peninsula, and a cut and paste of Cuba's information, taken from the CIA World Fact Book website. There was also a poster of "Life in Cuba". On this poster were pictures of the infirmed under a caption that read "Bad Health Conditions", pictures of athletes playing sports, Cuban homes, and illustrations relating the economics and culture of the Island. On another poster were pictures of the streets of Cuba, Musicians, and a picture of the young Elian Gonzales under a caption that read "Young Cuban Legend." On the table were pamphlets of Cuban Hotels, and brochures describing the "10 ways to be a local in Cuba".

The exhibit for Jamaica displayed foods such as spiced bun, jerk seasoning, and DG's pineapple and cream Kolas provided by both students and teachers. Students and teachers were bopping to the rhythms of Bob Marley emanating from a lap top computer. The display included a massive Bob Marley poster, and a table filled with Jamaican poetry and Bob Marley drawings. Jamaican Newspapers, such as the "Gleaner" and "South Florida Extra," were also placed on the table. There were pamphlets of Jamaican history, its land, and its culture, while others showed recipes, and weather and climate information. There was also a T-Shirt with the Jamaican flag on the front of it, and a map of the Caribbean Sea. The posters included one entitled "Common Jamaican Traditions", while others presented information on demographics and geography. The students also made a poster with proverbs, legends, and fables, as well as a large poster entitled "Music on the World Scene".

In the center of the media center the exhibit featuring the Bahamas was a table decorated with masks, varied baskets filled with mangos and coconuts, and flowers and straw hats. The Bahamas had a model map of the island made from clay. Another model featured a net slung over a piece of oak tag with fish drawn on it. Sand was sprinkled among the drawings of the fish and shells were pasted onto it.

Also in the center of the room the Taino presentation had information regarding the history of these indigenous Haitians. A poster depicted Taino culture and customs, and Taino jewelry was placed in a pit among sand and shells. On the poster provided by the students were varied definitions of the term Taino, such as "Men of God" and "High Ground Mountainous land".

The organization and coordination of the student exposition at Miami Edison Senior High was done by the Assistant Principal who was primarily responsible for coming up with the theme and personally overseeing the preparation for the event. According to several teachers, the students were happily engaged in all the work leading up to the student exhibits, not because they were required to present their own work (which they were), but because they were culturally connected to the exposition's theme. Students were given time in class to work on their projects, which allowed students to work on their reference and research skills, a skill these students characteristically score low on the FCAT. In spite of almost no outside visitors, the pride stemming from students during the student exposition was palpable and evident in the student presence and excitement.

### **Homestead Senior High School**

The student exposition at Homestead Senior High was impressively done with an array of displays; a lot of work had gone into these exhibits. Particularly, the art and photography exhibit was outstanding. However, despite receiving a visit from a Zone administrator, hardly any students, parents, or community members showed up to admire the student work. On Tuesday, amidst the void within the Media Center, a student assisted Ms. Valerie Smith, the Math Department Chair, with a geometry exhibit "Geometry in the Zone." Mr. Feucht, a Reading teacher, was also present in order to set up some Read 180 and Reading Plus displays. On Wednesday, the student absenteeism mirrored the lack of people at the student exposition.

### **Miami Norland Senior High School**

Upon asking to observe the student expositions, Dr. Linda Spears-Bunton received confused expressions from the front office personnel at Miami Norland Senior High. Shortly after, the Principal emerged and charged the chair of the English department with the responsibility of escorting Dr. Spears-Bunton to classrooms where student exhibits were displayed. Dr. Spears-Bunton arrived first at a 10<sup>th</sup> grade intensive reading class, where two students happily shared their poster board projects of a utopia they created called "4 Star City". The six students present in the classroom pointed to the incredible rates of student absenteeism during the student exposition. Regardless, the students indicated that they had read the *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. One boy, with long dreadlocks, was especially comfortable in explaining the project; the other boy, although a bit more quiet and apprehensive, demonstrated pride in talking about their invention. They explained, that, in groups, the students collaboratively designed a city. One student was responsible for governance, another health, another transportation, etc. Under governance, there were rules, such as no child under 8 can be outside alone; no cursing, gambling or fighting, no spending money inappropriately. Under health, the students explained that the city was very concerned about everyone's good health and knew what kind of condition everyone was in. Their teacher indicated that these projects and others on display had been done during the school term and displayed at the Student Exposition for any parents who came, although none did.

Original poetry about community exhibiting vocabulary terms from Read 180, were displayed in another classroom. All of the stanzas of the poems started with acronyms of COMMUNITY. Other students had created book displays on some of the books they had read in the Read 180 program. The displays were made out of what appeared to be shoeboxes and decorated to look like book covers with titles, pictures, authors, and brief book reviews on the back. Some of the books were *The Skin I'm In* and *Until We Meet Again*. In other projects in which students were to create their ideas of a utopian society after reading *The Giver* and *Animal Farm*. In their utopian projects, the students were divided into groups in which they designated a president/leader, an accountant, and a city planner. The students then set up a government, schools, hospitals, financial structure, and nutrition system. These projects were displayed on posters. Some of these projects looked really sophisticated with typed text and photographs of their utopian cities. Some of the other students hand-wrote and drew their projects. On the window shades across the back of the room, there were displays of research on Maya Angelou. These were mostly biographical sketches and photographs.

An English teacher did not have any student work displayed because she did not want to be left clearing the room by herself. However, she pulled out some student work that was stored in a

file cabinet to show to Dr. Spears-Bunton. In one project, the students, who had read *Romeo and Juliet*, created newspapers that were to represent Verona, Italy, in the days of *Romeo and Juliet*. The teacher explained that she had been adamant that their projects be typed and bound, and the students were very creative in accomplishing this task. As an example, one group of students typed the text on white paper, stained the paper with coffee to give it an old, antique look, then bound it to give it the appearance of being folded like an actual newspaper. The newspapers were required to have headline stories, local news, world news, obituaries, announcements, and classifieds, just as a real newspaper. The students were required to do their own research on Verona, Italy and the rest of the world during the years the story was to have taken place. Fictional stories still had to be created in such a way that they would have been relevant to the times. In another project, students were to re-cast *Romeo and Juliet* using modern actors and celebrities. The students had to justify why they chose those actors to play the characters they assigned; actors chosen were Morris Chestnut, Eve, Vivica Fox, and Jamie Foxx. While these were group projects, the teacher explained that she did allow some students to do independent projects because she understands that some students prefer to work alone. The projects were very impressive even if they were displayed for the Student Exposition.

Dr. Spears-Bunton managed to visit another English class, where poster boards of student work completed over the course of the year were being exhibited. These posters were of famous people, all of them African American, whom the students researched. The chalkboard had a hand written sign, "Welcome Parents," although parents were visibly absent throughout the observation period at the school. The English teacher showed Dr. Spears-Bunton two t-shirts decorated by the students with literary terms from a novel. She could only show two items from this t-shirt project, since she already had packed away the student exhibits in anticipation of summer.

While visiting classrooms, Dr. Spears-Bunton was stopped by Science teachers eager to show her a 90-foot whale. The whale was dragged out of one of the classrooms, and a fan was inserted to blow it up with air. It filled the corridor. One teacher remarked that it seemed to pulsate. The whale was made of plastic sheeting by students, and designed so that a person could actually go inside. Despite the fact that the majority of the student exhibits had been stored away during the scheduled time of the Student Exposition, and despite notably high absenteeism and the lack of parental and community response, the FIU researchers were able to document a high level of creativity among students.