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Community Involvement

The Miami-Dade County School District has developed a comprehensive set of programs designed to support meaningful community involvement across all areas of the education process. Strengthening service efforts will promote even stronger relationships among the schools, families, and other community stakeholders.

Conclusion

Effective community involvement has become recognized as a critical component in improving education outcomes for children. School Districts that employ effective communication and parental involvement strategies typically report improved test scores and stronger student outcomes. The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (the District) has developed and maintains a broad array of programs and activities that support opportunities for parents and other community stakeholders to participate in the education process. Policies and practices focused on supporting volunteer activities promoting strong business and community partnerships, and ensuring effective communications with parents are in place at both the District and school levels. Despite these efforts, participation by some parents and community stakeholders is uneven at the District level and across the various school communities. Representation on advisory and other citizen participation groups by community stakeholders and parents is not always consistent. Community involvement programming efforts at the administrative level are also often not effectively coordinated. Strengthening service efforts and practices and enhancing certain community services will promote even stronger relationships among the District, schools, families and other community stakeholders.

During the course of this review, Berkshire Advisors identified a number of accomplishments relating to community involvement accomplishments, some of which are included in Exhibit 15-1 below.

Exhibit 15-1

The District Has Had a Number of Notable Accomplishments in Community Involvement in the Last Three Years

- The District has developed strong business-school partnerships through its Dade Partners program.
 - The District offers a variety of programming that actively promotes parent involvement.
 - The District maintains a large volunteer program and regularly supports and recognizes the efforts of volunteers and community partners.
 - The District employs a number of strategies to communicate with families.
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Source: Miami-Dade County School District.

Overview of Chapter Findings

Berkshire Advisors reviewed the District's community involvement process using the Best Financial Management Practices adopted by the Commissioner of Education and associated indicators. The consulting team employed several methodologies to develop chapter conclusions and action plans. Following an extensive review of District

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policies and procedures relating to community involvement, a number of on site interviews were conducted with District level managers, school administrators, teachers, members of parent organizations, parents, and other community stakeholders. Information collected focused on the District's community involvement programming, as well as specific communications strategies. Moreover, four community forums were held at locations throughout the District where community members could provide input on the District. Likewise, an e-mail address and a 1-800 telephone number were established so District stakeholders could provide input to the study process. A survey was also administered to a representative sample of employees from throughout the District. (Approximately 13,000 surveys were sent to employees of which 3,919 were returned.)

An overview of chapter findings is presented below.

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1. The District has developed a meaningful community involvement mission statement and maintains ongoing community involvement activities in its strategic plan. (Page 15-3)
2. Periodic reports and improvement plans regarding community involvement are routinely submitted; however, the District does not use these reports to ensure performance, efficiency, and effectiveness. (Page 15-5)
3. Parental and community involvement are strongly encouraged by the District; however, certain policies and practices hinder participation by a broad cross-section of the community. (Page 15-6)
4. A variety of strategies are used to communicate with parents and community. (15-9)
5. The Community Services Bureau routinely conducts periodic staff and organizational reviews. (15-10)
6. The District has active Parent Teacher Associations/Parent Faculty Organizations (PTA/PFO). (15-10)
7. Parents and community members are involved in schools; however, participation across the District is uneven. (Page 15-11)
8. Community-based programs that strengthen schools, families, and student learning are in place. (Page 15-14)
9. The business community actively supports the educational process. (Page 15-15)
10. District schools maintain active and effective programs to involve volunteers in the education process. However, participation could be improved. (Page 15-15)
11. Local school Foundations provide economic support for District schools. (Page 15-16)

Fiscal Impact of Recommendations ---

None of the recommendations included in this chapter have fiscal implications.

Background ---

The Miami-Dade County School District has a history of recognizing the importance of community involvement in their efforts to effectively educate children. During the early 1970's, with the aid of federal and state dollars, administrative staff created volunteer and parent involvement programs and provided technical assistance to other school Districts across the country that hoped to do the same. Since that time, District personnel, parents and other community stakeholders have worked with the School Board to develop and maintain goals and objectives to guide the implementation of efforts to communicate effectively with key community stakeholders and implement effective community involvement programs.

Most community involvement programming is operated under the general direction of the Deputy Superintendent for Management and Accountability. The Community Services Bureau (which is led by an Administrator and reports directly to the Deputy Superintendent) and the Community Education Division maintain these programs and

services. Community Services is responsible for supporting volunteers, District level advisory committees, and business partnerships. The Community Education Division also coordinates opportunities for community participation in learning activities.

The other major program that includes a significant community involvement component is Title I. This federally supported program aimed at improving outcomes for children who are either defined as “at-risk “ and/or who fall within certain income ranges, requires that a minimum of one-percent of program funding be used to support community and parent involvement activities. The number of students within the school who qualify for these resources determines the amount of funding available to schools under this program. Most District schools that are eligible for Title I funding use these dollars to employ a Title I or community liaison whose sole responsibility is to conduct outreach activities with parents and other community stakeholders. The District Supervisor for Title I Parent Outreach/Community Resources, who is assigned to the Office of Federal Programs and Grants, has overall responsibility for overseeing and implementing community involvement activities for designated Title I schools.

The District also employs a variety of strategies aimed at effective communication and outreach to parents and the community. Marketing and public relations offices support these activities across the District. Most divisions and schools also maintain resources to support their own marketing and communications efforts.

1 The District has developed a meaningful community involvement mission statement and maintains ongoing community involvement activities in its strategic plan

The Community Services Bureau has a well-defined mission and specific program goals

The mission of the Community Services Bureau is “to serve as a vehicle to provide meaningful community involvement efforts and programs which support the goals of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools.” During a retreat in October 1999, parents, teachers and community stakeholders worked with District board members and administrators to develop this mission, along with a community involvement plan to guide the work. Specific program goals established during this process include:

- increasing student academic achievement;
- providing curriculum enhancement with emphasis on core courses;
- strengthening school/community relations;
- reducing the number of dropouts;
- strengthening the school to career transition; and
- increasing public confidence through a better understanding and through personal commitment to educational programs

The District’s overall strategic plan includes a number of specific objectives relating to community involvement

The District’s Strategic Plan: 2000-2005 includes three specific objectives relating to community involvement.

- Expand opportunities for students to participate in cultural and physical fitness experiences.
- Increase opportunities for parents and guardians to become active partners in achieving educational success for all students.

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- Promote the community focus of schools as neighborhood learning and cultural centers for both students and other members of the community.

For each of these objectives, specific action plan steps have been established along with expectations for how to evaluate whether the action plan step has been completed.

Significant community input was solicited in the development of the District's strategic plan

The District employed a variety of strategies to include parents and community in the development of the 2000-2005 strategic plan. These strategies included:

- Parents, community members, teachers, District staff and Board members participated in a retreat to develop the strategic plan in October 1999.
- The District conducted a telephone survey of 800 residents in October 1999.
- The District conducted a stakeholders survey of 500 public school stakeholders including community-based organizations, businesses, parent/citizen groups, students, public school unions, and school personnel.
- The District conducted a School Board Climate Survey of 200 school administrators, managers, directors, and deputy superintendents which focused on perceptions of District administrators toward the School Board.
- The District conducted a school climate surveys of parents, students and staff to gather perspectives regarding the performance of individual schools.

Community involvement activities across the District are not effectively coordinated

In addition to the Community Services and Community Education units, which lead most District community involvement activities, a range of other units and programs also play a role in supporting community involvement efforts. Chief among these is the Office of Federal Programs and Grants where the District Supervisor for Title I Parent Outreach/Community Resources coordinates community outreach efforts related to the Title I program. Other community involvement programming offered by the District includes the Parent and Family Education Program, the Haitian Parent Outreach Program, and the Migrant Workers Program. The managers and supervisors who oversee these units and programs work together informally to coordinate their efforts. While these efforts are laudable, no mechanisms currently exist to ensure that coordination and communications among programs and units is consistent and productive. A more formal approach to coordinating these programs should result in more effective communication, improved utilization of resources, cross-fertilization of ideas, and improved service delivery.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that Bureau directors or staff review the functions of the various community involvement programs during their planning processes and create opportunities for intentional collaboration and coordination across the programs.*

Action Plan 15-1 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 15-1

Strengthen And Formalize Collaboration Among Community Involvement Programs	
Strategy	Bureau directors and/or staff review the functions of the various community involvement programs during their planning processes and create opportunities for intentional collaboration and coordination strategies across the programs.
Action Needed	Step 1: Establish a staff committee to review program components (June 2002) Step 2: Identify opportunities for collaboration and coordination (July 2002). Step 3: Present recommendations for approval (September 2002). Step 4: Implement coordination strategies (October 2002).
Who Is Responsible	Bureau/Division/Program Directors and/or staff.
Time Frame	June – October, 2002
Fiscal Impact	None

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

2 Periodic reports and improvement plans regarding community involvement are routinely submitted; however, the District does not use these reports to ensure performance, efficiency, and effectiveness.

The Community Services Bureau uses a number of approaches to evaluate, monitor, and report on community involvement activities.

- Progress against objectives included in the District’s strategic plan are reported to the Board.
- Schools use measures incorporated into their individual school improvement plans to assess progress.
- Program managers responsible for volunteers, business partnerships and community involvement use benchmarks to assess program efficiency and effectiveness.
- Program managers conduct periodic surveys among parents and school personnel to assess program progress.

While the District is to be commended for monitoring community involvement programs, it should also be noted that little use is made of this information to improve programs and services. In particular, there is no evidence that this information is used to assess potential cost savings or to develop alternative strategies that might result in improved services or reductions in cost.

Recommendations

- *We recommend that Bureau directors and staff establish a mechanism to regularly compare data included in the reports and plans with community involvement goals and objectives to assess progress and identify needed program improvements and cost saving.*

Action Plan 15-2 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 15-2

Use data included in reports to assess progress and identify improvements and cost savings	
Strategy	Bureau directors or staff regularly compare data included in reports and plans to community involvement goals and objectives to assess program progress and identify specific opportunities for program improvements and potential cost savings.
Action Needed	<p>Step 1: Program managers compare data to related program goals and objectives for their area of work and develop recommendations for program improvements and cost savings (June 2002).</p> <p>Step 2: Program managers present recommendations for approval (July 2002).</p> <p>Step 3: Implement changes (August 2002).</p>
Who Is Responsible	Bureau/Division/Program Directors and or staff.
Time Frame	June – August 2002
Fiscal Impact	None

Source: Berkshire Advisors, Inc.

3 Parental and community involvement are strongly encouraged by the District; however, certain policies and practices hinder participation by a broad cross section of the community.

The School Climate Survey is conducted annually to evaluate community perceptions

Each year, the District conducts a School Climate Survey to determine community perceptions about each school. The instrument is anonymously distributed to a sample of randomly selected parents, teachers and other key community stakeholders. Department of Research and Planning staff then electronically compiles responses and feedback is provided to the schools. Schools use the survey results to inform the development of their school improvement plans.

The District does not always employ effective strategies with regard to membership and participation on various advisory groups and committees.

The Miami-Dade County School Board recognizes the consistent involvement of parents and other community stakeholders as essential elements in effective education. Board rule 6Gx13-1B-1.011 delineates a variety of strategies to promote home-school partnership in schools. The rule identifies six categories of parental involvement

- home—school communication;
- parents as supporters;
- parents as learners;
- parents as teachers;
- parents as resources; and
- parents as advisors, advocates, and participants in decision-making.

Consistent with these strategies, the District maintains and supports approximately 100 opportunities for parents and community stakeholders to participate in decision-making at the school, District and regional levels through

membership on advisory groups, task forces, support groups, councils, coalitions and other groups. A description of specific opportunities for input at the District and school levels follows.

School level community involvement opportunities. In 1991, the State of Florida created the Educational Excellence School Advisory Council (EESAC) as a part of the Blueprint 2000 plan for education reform and accountability. Initially, these school-based advisory councils were charged with developing School Improvement Plans at each campus. Since that time the role of the EESAC's have expanded to the point where they are now the "sole body responsible for final decision-making in guiding school improvement and maintaining accountability" at the schools. By statute, membership on these bodies must include the principal and other school administrators, teachers, parents and students. This group often serves as the primary community decision-making, advisory body on each campus.

In addition to the EESAC there are numerous other opportunities for community stakeholders and parents to support individual schools. For example, at some schools, volunteers work in offices, assist in classrooms, and coordinate fund-raisers and other similar activities. In addition, each school implementing a Title I program must organize and maintain a Title I Parent Advisory Council (PAC). The entity may be a separate group or combined with the PTA, Educational Excellence School Advisory Committee, or other school-based advisory organization.

District level community involvement opportunities. Almost 100 opportunities exist for parents and community stakeholders to participate in the education process at the District level including ¹

- ad hoc task forces;
- District advisory committees;
- independent advisory panels;
- independent parent/citizen groups; and
- vocational and craft advisory committees.

Board and State rule mandate the composition of some groups while the membership of other groups is strictly voluntary. Appointment to and participation on these bodies varies and is dependent upon the purpose and by-laws that govern their operation. Although most groups require "lay citizen" involvement, the membership of the entities typically includes persons who represent community agencies, systems and businesses. For example, the Family and Community Involvement Advisory Committee that is supported by the volunteer program manager, provides advice and input to the Superintendent. While lay citizens are invited and encouraged to serve on this committee, a review of the membership roster revealed that a majority of the membership are individuals who represent organizations. The PTA president fills the one parent representative slot. Although two-thirds of these individuals are parents or were parents of children in the District, again, their participation on this committee is associated with their organizational affiliation. Other committee members typically recommend individuals who serve on such groups for appointment to the committee or because they hold leadership positions and/or participate on other District level committees. Exhibit 15-2 summarizes the membership of this committee.

¹ Citizen Participation Groups in Miami-Dade Public Schools, Office of the Superintendent of Schools, November 1998.

Exhibit 15-2

A Range Of Stakeholders Are Represented On The Family And Community Involvement Advisory Committee

- PTA President
 - ESSAC Representative
 - Bilingual Education Representative
 - The Education Fund
 - Superintendent’s District Advisory Panel
 - Title I
 - PTA Representative
 - Florida Coca-Cola Bottling (Dade Partner)
 - FDLRS
 - Community Doctor
 - Teachers (7)
 - Administrators (8)
 - PTA Representative
-

Source: Community Services Bureau: Family and Community Involvement Advisory Committee Roster-2001.

Another example of an advisory group is the Title I District Advisory Council (DAC), which consults with the District in planning and implementing Title I program activities. Two parent/community representatives and an alternate from each school participate on the DAC.

Schools have office hours scheduled before and after school for parental conferences

Teachers and administrators are available to meet with parents before and after school by appointment.² By contract, the United Teachers of Dade agree to hold conferences at times that are convenient for the community. Each school also distributes a school handbook that explains conference times and procedures that parents should follow to access teachers and school personnel at the beginning of the school year. In addition, schools also send home regular calendars that include this information.

Recommendations

- *Recruit and train more “lay citizens” parents of students who have children attending the schools to participate on advisory groups such as the Community Services Advisory Committee. Access PTA, ESSAC, PAC and other rosters for potential volunteers.*

Action Plan 15-3 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

² This finding is supported by the results of the employee survey. Almost two thirds of the survey respondents (64.7%) “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “At my school, office hours for parents are scheduled before and after school.”

Action Plan 15-3

Improve community participation on advisory groups	
Strategy	Recruit and train more lay persons to participate in advisory and leadership activity at the District and school levels.
Action Needed	<p>Step 1: Program staff responsible for coordinating advisory and other groups review rosters to determine participation by lay citizens (August 2002).</p> <p>Step 2: Request names of lay citizen participants from schools, ESSAC, PTA's community-based organizations and businesses (October 2002).</p> <p>Step 3: Ensure that community meeting times are always conducive to community involvement (December 2002).</p>
Who is Responsible	Program staff responsible for coordinating advisory groups.
Time Frame	August – December 2002
Fiscal Impact	No specific impact

4 A variety of strategies are used to communicate with parents and community.

Schools use a variety of approaches to communicate with parents

District schools employ a number of methods to communicate with families. Typical communications strategies such as newsletters, flyers and word-of-mouth are used to share pertinent information with parents and the community. The Community Services Bureau provides a number of attractive print materials such as brochures, handbooks, training manuals, and program descriptions to promote their programs. Most are printed in English, Haitian Creole and Spanish. Schools also produce a monthly calendar that is sent home with students (although some principals report that this is generally an unreliable source of communication). Moreover, liaisons or outreach workers at Title I schools often share information with parents door-to-door and work with local neighborhood businesses to post flyers and “get the word out” about meetings. Each year, parents also receive a student handbook which delineates school policy, parent and school roles and expectations, important dates and an annual calendar. These documents are typically shared during open house activities offered at the beginning of the school year. School staff interviewed report strong parent/community participation in this annual event.

Employee survey results also indicate that a number of effective communication practices are in place in schools. In particular, employee survey results indicate that annual conferences between parents and teachers are scheduled at most schools. More than two-thirds of the survey respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “Annual conferences between parents and teachers are scheduled at my school” while only 8.8% of the survey respondents “strongly disagree” with this statement. Moreover, almost three-fourths of the survey respondents (74.9%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that language translators are available to assist non-English speaking parents at schools. In addition, there is a consensus among most employees that schools use the Internet effectively as a communications vehicle. Three out of five survey respondents (61.9%) “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “My school uses the Internet as a medium for communicating information to interested parties.” Only 6.9% of the survey respondents “strongly disagree” with this statement. Use of parent telephone hotlines; on the other hand, appear to be less consistently in place in District schools. While 44.8% of the survey respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “My school maintains a parent telephone hotline” about a third of the survey respondents (32.4%) “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with this statement.

District level marketing staff support communications efforts for the District as a whole

The District's communication functions (public relations and marketing) were combined in February 2001 at which time a public information officer was hired to serve as spokesperson for the District and direct the overall communications strategy. A District marketing director position was also added to lead marketing efforts although the school District also operates a television station (WLRN), it operates under a separate umbrella.

At the District level, the marketing unit is primarily responsible for carrying out the goals and objectives related to marketing. Specific responsibilities include message development to promote the District and communicate with the community. Press releases, Dade Net and other advertising strategies are also used to accomplish these goals. All products are produced in English, Spanish and Haitian Creole. The District also develops and writes statements to be used by the Superintendent and Board members.

The public information function is also responsible for message development and delivery. This office responds directly to inquiries from the community. All materials and services provided by this office are produced in the three dominant languages spoken by the community at-large. Each year, the District also develops a community school calendar to inform parents and community regarding upcoming events and important dates. The information is sent to parents through the schools and can also be accessed on Dade Net.

5 The Community Services Bureau routinely conducts staff performance and organizational structure reviews.

The Community Services Bureau engages in periodic assessments of program goals and objectives, as well as planning throughout the school year. Monthly staff meetings are used to discuss needed administrative and program improvements, budget issues and other operational issues. A review of the department's organizational chart revealed a relatively flat structure. For example, when the former administrator recently retired, the executive director assumed his position. The executive director position was eliminated and program managers now report to the administrator. The span of control for these programs appears to be reasonable. When compared with the Broward County Public Schools' Community Relations Department (responsible for similar programs and functions), the Community Services Bureau's organizational structure includes more staff. The difference in size, however, seems appropriate given the range and number of programs implemented by the Bureau.

The Executive Director of the Community Services Bureau conducts annual performance reviews with all staff within the department. Each staff member prepares a written summary of his or her accomplishments for the year that is reviewed along with a Performance Planning and Assessment System Progress form that is partially completed by the Executive Director. The review process involves a discussion of the assessee or staff member's progress over the year, and includes opportunities for staff feedback. Together, the Executive Director and staff set goals and benchmarks for work to be accomplished during the coming year.

6 The District has active Parent Teacher Associations/Parent Faculty Organizations.

The District recognizes the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) as one of the primary sources of parent involvement, leadership and advocacy within the school community. The PTA president is also recognized as the primary parent representative and is a member of most District level advisory groups. Ninety-two percent of all District schools have operating PTA councils. PTA bylaws require each school to hold at least two meeting per year; however, some campuses meet more frequently. Meetings are advertised in school newsletters, flyers, Dade Net (the District's

public information website), and local media. At most schools, the first PTA meeting is conducted in conjunction with Open House which is usually held shortly after the school year opens. In some schools, Title I parent liaisons go door-to-door inviting parents to attend. Schools typically report record attendance at these meetings.

A County PTA, which meets monthly, also exists. The Superintendent serves as a member of the executive committee. The County PTA President represents the District at the state and national level and serves as a member of most District level decision-making and advisory groups. The group is also organized into committees that provide opportunities for parents to develop and exercise leadership skills.

The Florida PTA recognizes the contributions of teachers, administrators and other key community stakeholders throughout the year at the state and local level. For example, the County PTA celebrates the accomplishments of individual teachers, volunteers, schools, PTA councils and other groups who support the education process through activities such as award luncheons and dinners, cash awards and other incentives.

7 Parents and community members are involved in schools in a variety of ways; however, participation across the District is uneven.

Volunteers play an important role in supporting the educational process in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools; however participation in schools is uneven

Volunteer programs in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools were established as a formal part of the education process during the early 1970's. Despite cuts in program funds for these activities at the state and federal level, the District has maintained a commitment to supporting this work. The Community Services Bureau, which oversees this function, provides a number of structured opportunities for volunteers to participate at the District and school level. Approximately 13,000 individuals participate in schools and related activities annually. The activities and supports these individuals provide ranges from assistance in school offices to participation in formal programs such as

- Listeners – caring adults spend time “listening” and chatting with children;³
- Take Stock in Children – mentoring and scholarship support program for middle and high school students;
- Intergenerational Programs – programs that promote elder involvement in schools;
- Grammy Music mentors – local music companies mentor children interested in music;
- Governor’s Mentoring Program – mentoring program; and
- I’m Thumbody – a self-esteem program using volunteers for elementary school children.⁴

Programming also includes an intergenerational program focused on the involving senior citizens in the schools.

Schools and the Community Services Bureau share coordination of volunteer programs

Both individual schools and the Community Services Bureau have well defined roles in supporting the District’s volunteer programs. Schools are responsible for most of the direct communication and contact with parents and community representatives. Flyers, newsletters, public service announcements, Dade Net and other methods are used to publicize volunteer opportunities. In addition, each campus is required to select a staff person to serve as

³ The local Mental Health Association supports this program.

⁴ This program is a partnership between the District, the Mental Health Association, and the United Way.

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volunteer liaison. This individual coordinates activities at the school and also serves as the liaison to the Community Services Bureau.

Schools are also responsible for tracking information on volunteer hours. Parents and other volunteers are required to sign in and out on tracking forms. Each spring, the school's volunteer liaison summarizes this information and reports to the Community Services Bureau.

The Community Services Bureau is responsible for coordinating the volunteer program on a District wide level. In particular, the Community Services Bureau prepares the detailed volunteer training manuals that are given to each volunteer. The Bureau also ensures that all volunteers receive training and that background checks are performed for all individuals who are involved in programs that require direct one-to-one contact with students.⁵ In addition, the Bureau compiles and submits reports on volunteer activity each year to the Florida Department of Education. Schools with high levels of volunteer service receive the Golden School Award from the State DOE. The Community Services Bureau also recognizes volunteer service at the county level through annual recognition ceremonies. Moreover, for the past three years, the District has also conducted a citywide parent involvement conference. The Family and Community Involvement Advisory Committee plan this annual event with support from Community Services Bureau. Approximately 1,500 parents and community members attend the conference each year.

The process for compiling information from the annual self-assessment process is cumbersome and unnecessarily time consuming

Each school also completes a self-assessment checklist each year to monitor the success of their volunteer efforts. The information from each school is then compiled and used by the Community Services Bureau to develop program improvements. The Office of Information and Technology (OIT) developed a relational database to support this function as well as the Dade Partners business program, however sharing information across the District continues to be difficult. As a result, most schools continue to use a manual process to report self-assessment findings. Once the database is completed, school staff will handle volunteer registration electronically, and the information will be shared with the District online. Self-assessments for both programs are sent to the schools for their use. The results are not shared with the District.

Active parental involvement in high performing schools is the standard across the District. During a visit to an "A" performing school, a number of parents were observed participating at almost every level within the school structure including the ESSAC, in the classroom and even in the beautification of the grounds. There was clear evidence of a partnership between school, home, and community. Conversely, a visit to a low performing middle school revealed limited, rather inconsistent participation among parents in school activities. In addition, less than two-thirds of the employee survey respondents (64.3%) "agree" or "strongly agree" that their schools have "active and effective" volunteer programs. These data suggest that lack of parental participation in school activities does not result from the fact that schools do not encourage participation. On the contrary, almost three-fourths of the survey respondents (73.2%) "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement "My school actively encourage parent participation in programs that provide library, cafeteria, playground, field trip, and tutoring" and only slightly more than one out of twenty survey respondents (5.5%) "strongly disagree" with this statement. Moreover, more than two-thirds of the survey respondents (67.4%) "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement "My school actively involves parents in classroom support activities" while only 4.0% "strongly disagree." Finally, well more than half of the survey respondents (57.3%) "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement, "My school actively seeks out parents with skills (such as carpentry, computer knowledge, cooking, etc.) that could be used for parent-led workshops for students, teachers, and other parents." However, about one-fourth of the survey respondents (24.6%) "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with this statement.

It appears, therefore, that significant challenges, many of which are cultural, hinder more broad based participation in school activities. A number of school principals, staff and parents suggested, for example, that for some families and certain cultures, the educational system is viewed as an "authority figure." Members of these families, many of

⁵ The actual training volunteers receive is provided by school volunteer liaisons; however, the Community Services Bureau provides training at the region level to support this function.

who may have immigrated from countries governed by totalitarian regimes, are reticent to become involved in school activities. It was also reported the parents and caretakers of many children who live in largely immigrant families have limited education and are not proficient in English. Consequently, many of these individuals feel inadequate to participate in school activities, especially on advisory and other decision-making groups.

The District has taken some steps to overcome the barriers to increased parental participation in school activities. For example, the District’s Adult Education program offers fee-based literacy programs. Participation in such programs serves the dual purpose of involving parents in the school system while also giving them the literacy skills which may make them less hesitant to participate in schools as parents. As a practical matter, however, many families cannot afford these programs and may not have time to do so if their economic status requires them to work more than one job. In addition, the District’s Haitian Parent Outreach program provides services to help remove barriers to parental participation in schools, but the scope of this federally funded program is limited to Haitian Creole families. Individual schools are also taking innovative steps to encourage greater parental participation. For example, one elementary school operates a parent-student training program that involves parents and their children using computer-based learning tools. The lab is open three hours each morning. Parents and students typically work together for an hour. Once their children return to class, the parents continue training. The program is grant funded and opportunities for participation are limited.

Recommendations

- Continue to automate volunteer reporting and monitoring functions to increase efficiency and accuracy.
- Develop and implement outreach strategies designed to increase parental participation in schools.

Action Plan 15-4 provides the steps needed to implement this recommendation.

Action Plan 15-4

Strengthen Automated Reporting Of Self Assessment Information	
Strategy	Continue to automate volunteer reporting and monitoring functions to increase efficiency and accuracy.
Action Needed	Step 1: Assess automation needs (May 2002). Step 2: Identify strategies and resources (June/July 2002). Step 3: Implement changes (August 2002).
Who is Responsible	Volunteer Coordinator and OIT staff
Time Frame	May – August 2002
Fiscal Impact	No specific impact
Develop and Implement Outreach Strategies Designed To Increase Parental Participation In Schools	
Strategy	Utilize culturally appropriate outreach strategies to increase parental participation in schools.
Action Needed	Step 1: Conduct parent focus groups to identify strategies to improve parent participation (March-September 2002). Step 2: Implement appropriate strategies (November 2002).
Who is Responsible	Title I Coordinator and school principals
Time Frame	March – November 2002
Fiscal Impact	None

8 Community-based programs that strengthen schools, families, and student learning are in place.

The District's Community Schools program provide effective community education to the citizens of Miami-Dade County

The Community Schools program is one of the oldest and largest community education programs of its kind in the country. Established in 1961, the program provides afternoon and evening programming at 70 school sites, as well as 65 after-school childcare sites (which are managed by school principals). The Bureau of Community Education manages these programs. The State of Florida provided funding for this program from 1971 to 1992. After that time, the Miami-Dade School Board opted to continue support. Today, the program is funded primarily through fees collected for services from the community.

Community Schools are primarily located on middle and high school campuses. Each campus offers a rich collection of classes based on consumer demand for a nominal fee. The District receives 25% of all revenue collected to support program administration. All other resources are applied to the implementation of the program (i.e., teachers, supplies, etc.). The centers also offer meeting space and other school resources to the community. Exhibit 15-3 presents a sample of the types of classes that are offered at community schools

Exhibit 15-3

A Variety Of Classes Are Offered At Community Schools

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Tutorial Classes | • Puppeteer |
| • Community/Civic Meetings | • Yoga/Exercise/Jazzercise |
| • Open Media Centers | • Cooking |
| • CPR | • Stained Glasswork |
| • Sports and Recreation | • Dog Training |
| • Gardening | • Sewing |
| • Language Arts | • Music Lessons |
| • Dance | • Scout Clubs |
| • Arts & Crafts | • Test Preparation |
| • Safe Driving | • Health Services |
| • Student Community Service | • Homework Assistance |
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Source: Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

The childcare program is offered after school at all elementary schools. A few schools offer this service during the morning hours before school as well. Parents pay a nominal fee (based on a sliding scale) for care for their children until 6:00 p.m. Families who receive childcare subsidies can apply their benefits toward the fee charged for this care.

Most schools actively participate in community service projects

The District also provides a variety of opportunities for parents and students to participate in activities that benefit the broader community. The Miami-Dade County Public Schools has one of the largest student-specific United Way Campaigns in the country. High schools also conduct periodic blood drives. In addition, several companies that participate in the Dade Partners business partnership effort (described in detail below) provide off campus training opportunities for students and meeting space for school/District related activities.

The extent to which schools participate in community service projects is borne out by the results of the employee survey. More than three-fourths of the survey respondents (75.7%) “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “My school regularly participates in community service projects.” Only 4.1% of the survey respondents “strongly disagree” with this statement.

9 The business community actively participates in the education process.

Dade Partners is the primary vehicle the District uses to encourage business participation in the education process

Dade Partners is the District’s premier business partnership program. Through this program more than 3,400 small and large businesses participate in the education process by providing support to local schools, the District, and community. Services and support including mentoring, tutoring, funding for special programs, sponsorship of school activities, scholarships, and money are donated by local grocers, restaurants, automobile dealers, professional sports teams and athletes, along with local major corporations such as Toyota and American Airlines.

The Community Services Bureau manages the Dade Partners. Each school designates a staff person (usually a non-teaching function) as the Dade Partners school site liaison. While individual schools assess their own needs and negotiate the business partnerships, the Community Services Bureau has developed guidelines for establishing and maintaining partnerships and train school staff annually to ensure their understanding of these guidelines. Feedback from Dade Partners regarding programming and services is obtained through annual surveys. This information is used to enhance training and other programmatic efforts the following year.

Last year, the Bureau instituted an Intranet-based database that allows the District and schools to share a common database of information about the Dade Partners. Each school is responsible for entering and maintaining information about the Dade Partner relationships at their school. The Bureau hopes to expand the capacity of this database to better support management of the program.

Efforts to encourage business participation in school appear to be widespread and successful

The results of the employee survey suggest that the District’s efforts to encourage business participation in local schools have been successful. Close to two-thirds of the survey respondents (63.4%) “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “My school has developed forums for regular communication with local business entities” and only 5.7% of the survey respondents “strongly disagree” with this statement. Likewise, business financial support for local schools appears to be reasonably widespread. Almost three out of five survey respondents (57.4%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that “businesses help to fund educational programs at my school” while only 6.8% of survey respondents “strongly disagree.” Finally, survey results suggest that mentoring programs are in place in a large number of District schools. More than half of the survey respondents (50.5%) “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement, “students at my school participate in mentoring programs provided by area businesses.”

10 District schools maintain active and effective programs to involve volunteers in the education process. However, participation could be improved.

A detailed discussion of the school volunteer program is provided on page 15-11 finding number 7.

11 Local education foundations provide economic support for District schools.

The two primary sources of foundation support for District schools are the Education Fund and the Miami–Dade Coalition for Community Education. These two entities work in partnership with the school District to provide funding for services and programs not provided through the District’s general revenue or from other grant sources. The Education Fund provides grants, school supplies and other resources directly to schools. The focus of the Coalition for Community Education’s work is to support the District’s intergenerational programs.

The District maintains a collaborative relationship with these two entities as they seek to support efforts to provide quality public education in Miami-Dade County. Communication is maintained through key appointments within these organizations. For example, the District superintendent and other key education partners from the community (Teacher of the Year, Teacher’s Union, etc.) serve on the Education Fund’s Board of Directors. Parents also participate as members of the Coalition for Community Education Board of Trustees. Participation in these decision-making processes affords the District opportunities to collaboratively plan and develop resources to address school needs not supported through other sources.