
FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS BUILDING BRIDGES TO SUCCESS

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Miami, Florida

Families and Schools Building Bridges to Success is a district parent workshop held annually for the past five years to assist parents with navigating the school system. They learn ways to help their children, how to access information, and ways to become involved in the school system. Over 60 breakout workshops are available in multiple languages, as well as individual meetings within regional administrative areas, called ACCESS centers.

This practice addresses *No Child Left Behind* family involvement requirements by addressing issues in cultural and linguistic terms, providing access to information and support systems, and providing skill-building opportunities for parents. The conference addresses the school system strategic Goal II—Effective Learning Environment by providing greater opportunities for parent involvement that supports children’s learning.

Parents and staff involved in the Family and Community Involvement Advisory Committee generated the idea for this collaborative learning event. This workshop was created by parents, for parents, and with parents. It is the single largest annual district activity that parents undertake. Going beyond a PTA, Title I, or Limited English Proficient workshop, this conference reaches out to *all* parents to help them find something of importance to them in helping their child.

This year the workshop was held from 7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on a Saturday. The workshop took place at a high school, and in the past has been held at three locations due to the size of the county. Childcare was provided, along with accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Multi-language workshops, particularly Spanish and Creole, enabled more parents to participate in meaningful ways.

The program included workshops conducted by the Community Involvement Council, Title I, Bilingual and World Languages, Early Childhood Education, Magnet Programs/Schools of Choice, and many others. Sample workshop topics included:

- Brain Development;
- Conflict Resolution and Anger Management;
- Success in Reading/Math/Science;
- Technology Resources;
- Homeland Security; and
- Parenting in a Culturally Diverse Society.

Whether it was learning how to get involved, or learning how to access the system or how to help children with homework, something was available for everyone.

The conference’s success came from a team approach to planning. The conference organizing team was open to any interested parent. The team divided into task subcommittees to fulfill its roles and responsibilities

in a timely and effective manner. Parent volunteers chaired the team. In addition, specific district offices had representation to ensure appropriate follow-through was provided for parents. This included such areas as childcare, security, teachers union, testing, evaluation, attendance services and registration, athletics, school activities, and parent involvement. Teachers helped design the workshops.

The school system provided district publicity through media outlets, such as local community newspapers. Fliers in all three major languages, English, Spanish, and Creole, were sent to all schools. Additionally, the conference was posted on the bureau's website *community@dadeschools.net*. Participants could register online, or by faxing in the registration form.

Funding continues to be a challenge. Vendors, including Coca-Cola and Papa John's Pizza, and private sector dollars covered the direct costs of approximately \$4000 for the conference. Additional in-kind was provided by the school for the facility, childcare, and security. The district provided printing and materials. The conference continues to be very successful; therefore the support to insure that it happens is there. It takes hard work and relationship building to continue.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools looks forward to exploring ways to enhance the conference to reach all families. Future improvements will include more online access, more hands-on workshops, and year-long mini-sessions. According to the Vice President of the Parent-Teacher Association:

"This is one of the best opportunities for parents in such a large district to get the complete picture." A secondary principal agreed: "This is a must for my parents. It helps connect the dots!" With support from parents, the school system, and the community, Miami-Dade is truly building bridges to student success.

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