
UNITED WAY TRAININGS: SCHOOLS SERVING COMMUNITIES

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Miami, Florida

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) employees and students raise more in their annual United Way campaign than any other school district in the nation. This community partnership has been developing for more than 30 years. Currently, United Way of Miami-Dade works through the district office of M-DCPS to train almost 500 Ambassadors on fundraising strategies and community resources. Ambassadors have included assistant principals, school secretaries, teachers, activity directors, and many others. These Ambassadors go beyond the role of fundraisers to often serve as the work location's contact when staff and families need their assistance.

We have emphasized the importance of the United Way Ambassador trainings because we recognize that our employees are community builders in their schools, but may not understand the process and best practices of a fundraising campaign. Through the trainings, employees learn about the beneficiaries of their fundraising efforts and about the countless resources available for schools, students parents, and teachers.

The training is held at an agency that is funded by United Way. Employees have an opportunity to tour and ask questions. At the trainings, employees also receive information to use in their work locations, such as a list of community speaker topics that include how to

choose a daycare, free financial planning seminars for families, and how to access the *Help Pages Online*, an internet link to over 5500 community resources. Employees learn that their efforts in fundraising make services more readily available to the community; and by learning how to access these resources, they are strengthening their ability to serve their school community.

United Way of Miami-Dade hosts these trainings at their agencies at no cost to the district. M-DCPS creates the manuals, forms, and financial procedures to guide the Ambassadors. United Way of Miami-Dade organizes the tour and the training. Both representatives facilitate the training and answer employee questions.

Ambassadors have stated that the training and guidelines give them confidence to present to fellow staff members and to support the campaign at their school sites. Ambassadors, particularly teachers, have appreciated the campaign's opportunity to take on an important leadership role.

Once Ambassadors are trained, they go back to their work locations and kick off their individual campaign by presenting the importance of giving as a school system. They have their manual and all materials they need to better educate their staff and students. According to one assistant principal, "I never had to look for forms; everything was in one

place.” For a period of four weeks, the Ambassadors run a fundraising campaign implementing creative individual and team activities that involve their staff, students, and community. As a culminating activity, there is an awards ceremony to acknowledge their time and commitment to assisting the community.

At the district level, a supervisor is assigned to coordinate the campaign for all work locations. Each region of the school system appoints a representative to serve on the district’s United Way Cabinet, which brainstorms ideas to make the campaign successful and serves as a support to schools and non-school site locations. One of their charges is to assist in the revision of the Ambassador manual and present at the trainings.

The biggest challenge stems from being the fourth largest school district in the nation. The district must hold many large trainings to serve the school staff. Scheduling these trainings in one month can be tricky. Also, making sure that people have the opportunity to attend is a challenge. Due to the great support of the school board members, superintendent, and head administrators, coverage for staff that attends this important training is coordinated. To make attending even easier still, ten trainings are scheduled at five various locations in Miami-Dade County. Locations range from North Miami to Homestead to lessen the time it takes staff to travel to trainings. One make-up session is scheduled either in the district office or at United Way’s office. The community assists by providing space, tours, and most importantly ar-

anging parking for such a large number of people. Support is the key!

The United Way campaign has benefited students in many ways. One of the district goals is to teach the whole child, and this goal is addressed by instilling the idea of community service early on in the students. Through the campaign, students understand that there are people less fortunate than they are no matter their situation. They learn that they can make a difference at any age. Students also learn the power and impact of partnership. This campaign gives students and staff an opportunity to work together on a common cause. To connect with the classrooms, lesson plans of giving and philanthropy are given to teachers to use during the campaign.

As an enhancement, future trainings will include previous Ambassadors and the 2003 M-DCPS Campaign Cabinet and Leadership Team to help facilitate. They will take part in a summer training of the trainer and learn how to facilitate breakout sessions with Ambassadors, how to answer tough questions, and will prepare a section of the overall presentation. This involvement of others will help to make the trainings more interesting to staff and much more hands-on and interactive.

Dr. Linda Brown, District Director

(305) 995-1215

Lbrown@sbab.dade.k12.fl.us