

## Shadowlawn Parent Center

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*Shadowlawn Elementary School  
Miami, Florida*

Shadowlawn Elementary School resides in a primarily Haitian Creole neighborhood, where most families are recent immigrants learning a new language, culture, and way of life. The school created the Shadowlawn Parent Center to connect families with community services and learning opportunities that could help them adjust to life in the United States. The belief was that supporting families would also strengthen the school's academic efforts with children. The Shadowlawn Parent Center debuted in 2002 with a Parent Teacher Liaison funded by the principal. The Parent Center, a transformed room and office in a Pre-K building, became home to a parent ESOL/literacy class.

An ESOL/literacy teacher and paraprofessional developed the class, which took place daily Monday through Thursday from 8:00 am to 11:00 am. Parents who were literate in English lent their expertise to help with additional activities.

In addition, the Parent Center hired a bilingual staff and hosted workshops with translation as necessary. Speakers from Dade County Public School's Bilingual Outreach Program and the Legal Aid Society provided speakers, a tax seminar, and immigration law workshops. The Parent Teacher Liaison, school counselor, and Community Involvement Specialist followed up on specific issues with individual families.

The Parent Center runs the Parent Incentive Store where parents "buy" used and new household items and clothing with school-issued coupons. Parents earn the coupons by attending classes, workshops, and meetings or

by volunteering time. The Parent Incentive Store depends entirely on community support, Dade Partners, staff members, and friends for donations.

Since starting the Shadowlawn Parent Center, more parents volunteer to assist teachers and students. Over 2,000 parent visitations have been logged in the Parent Center. More than 100 volunteers have logged 7,733 hours. Volunteer parents help in the cafeteria, run the Student Banking Program, and those who are literate in English help by tutoring and reading with children.

The Parent Center is highly regarded by all those who visit. The center's offerings have expanded to include a well-attended computer class for students and their parents. Shadowlawn Elementary School is excited about the growing program and looks forward to reaching even more families in the future.

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