MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

Miami is often referred to as the capital of Latin America and its huge school district has long welcomed immigrants from the Caribbean and points south. Of the district’s 370,000 students, 58% are of Hispanic heritage. Students of Haitian background, whose home language is typically Creole, comprise a significant language minority. African American students make up 30 percent of the school population, and white students have make up 10%. In addition, Miami-Dade County is one of the poorest urban centers in the country with approximately 30% of its population living in poor conditions. Due to its diverse ethnic population and socioeconomic challenges, there is a huge need in Miami-Dade County Public Schools for a program that is innovative and concrete to combat the problems associated with high levels of poverty in schools.

Since 2001, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, in partnership with the Center for Civic Education, has used the School Violence Prevention Demonstration Program in elementary and middle schools throughout the district. In the first year of the program, the major focus was on training seventh-grade civics teachers in the use of We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution, Foundations of Democracy, and We the People: Project Citizen. The program began with teachers from 15 school sites affecting approximately 850 students. The program has since expanded to serve not only middle school teachers but also elementary teachers, and annually trains approximately 35 teachers affecting an approximate 1,225 students per academic year.

**PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS AND ANECDOTES**

- **Culminating Activity**

  Annually, over 250 students participate in a Project Citizen Mayoral Youth Conference. At this conference, teachers who have been trained in the School Violence Prevention Demonstration Program prepare students to present their Project Citizen portfolios to a group of county commissioners and mayors from local municipalities. In addition, the students receive feedback on their action plans from a panel of experts related specifically to each project’s topic. The best portfolios presented at the Mayoral Youth Conference then proceed to the state competition.

- **Specific Effects of the Program**

  - At Hialeah Middle School, student-proposed legislation was signed into law by Governor Jeb Bush. State representatives annually reserve space in their agenda for student-proposed legislation as a result of program success.

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**MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PROGRAM IMPACT**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>131</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>1,290</td>
<td>8,705</td>
<td>9,995</td>
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<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>279</td>
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*Total number refers to participating school sites involved, some of which have continued for more than one year.*
Several schools have developed long-lasting relationships with municipal governments, thus creating an alliance with which to solve community problems.

Many students have been more actively engaged in the legislative process and thus feel more connected to their local governments and more likely to work towards positive solutions to community problems and concerns.

Parents have seen the positive attitudinal and academic effects on their children from participation in SVPDP.

- Improved student civic knowledge, skills, attitudes, rights, and responsibilities
  - Results from an attitudinal survey have been consistently positive.
  - Teachers and students gain a renewed sense of empowerment for solving problems as a result of the program.