

Friday, November 2, 2012

SENT ON BEHALF OF JOHN SCHUSTER, CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER,
OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

THE MIAMI HERALD | EDITORIAL

Vote Yes for Miami-Dade schools

OUR OPINION: Accountability, integrity key to the 21st century schools initiative's success

Those who recall the broken promises of the last bond issue voters approved for Miami-Dade Public Schools in 1988 might be tempted to think that a history of neglect or worse will repeat.

But that would ignore what this School Board and Superintendent Alberto Carvalho have accomplished the past four years under the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression. And it would ignore the steps the board and the superintendent have taken to ensure transparency, accountability and integrity in bidding \$1.2 billion worth of work to update 260 schools slated for repairs under the proposed bond issue. They are focused on staying on schedule and on budget with quality work.

The proposed bond issue enjoys popular support, polls show, precisely because the district has managed to weather the economic storm without hurting classrooms. It has not laid off teachers en masse as some districts (Broward, for instance) have done.

Instead, Miami-Dade's district showed the door to those principals and teachers who were not up to the task to turn around failing schools. Educators set a high bar and students delivered, with rising scores on national tests, and just last week the district won the prestigious Broad Prize, after making finalist five times, for helping minority children succeed.

ON TIME, UNDER BUDGET

Even in the toughest financial times, the district managed to update and expand one of the county's oldest schools, Miami Senior High, on time and under budget. And even as the district lost millions of dollars in property tax revenue, exacerbated by draconian budget cuts the Florida Legislature approved two years ago in Gov. Rick Scott's first year on the job, it has managed to perform miracles in schools that had been failing, improving graduation and test scores.

LESSONS TAKEN SERIOUSLY

The lessons of the last bond issue were taken seriously by Mr. Carvalho, who has focused on creating the 21st Century schools initiative on a list of priorities that clearly names each school that would get new roofs, technology, air conditioning, classrooms or whatever else might be needed for schools that are mostly 40 or 50-plus years old. The 1988 program focused on the growth in the suburbs, building new schools and promising fixes to older ones that either never materialized or were bogged down by shoddy work.

This time, Mr. Carvalho has put together an advisory board of community leaders with expertise in construction, financing and technology to keep tabs on the work and to report back directly to the community several times a year. He has pushed back when some school board members wanted to have some representatives on that advisory board who might also qualify to bid for work. That would not be in the best interest of the taxpayers. We need independent community-minded individuals, not those who would have a financial stake in projects.

TRANSPARENCY KEY

He also worked with local minority business leaders to ensure they, too, have a way to compete for these projects so that out-of-state bidders don't gobble up the work, but only if they have the experience to do so. And he brought in the independent Miami-Dade Inspector General to ensure priorities aren't switched midstream and the money is spent wisely. There's transparency throughout so that schools with the greatest needs, like Norland and Hialeah high schools, are first in line.

After our two-month series of editorials on our crumbling schools, readers should know the need for this bond issue is clear. For little more than \$5 the first year for a typical home and an average of \$27 for every \$100,000 of assessed value, over the life of the bonds, Miami-Dade homeowners would set the stage for the county to attract new businesses with topnotch schools.

The initiative sets an ambitious timetable to complete most of the projects within six years, at a time when interest rates are low and construction costs are affordable. Whether Mr. Carvalho is superintendent six years from now or six months from now, the school board has set out a plan that's transparent and accountable and can be maintained because it will have the community watching over it.

THE READERS' FORUM

Looking to the past, going forward

With election season in full swing and the rhetoric that comes with partisan politics reaching fever pitch, it's easy to lose sight of the importance of respecting our neighbors' opinions. We are fortunate to live in a country where no matter which candidate you choose or what policy you stand behind, you can voice your views openly and vote to effect change. That freedom forms the foundation of our nation.

The Adrienne Arsht Center has been at the helm of a three-month initiative that has not only been educating the community about universal acceptance, but also gone beyond to create public dialogue for protection of human rights and against bigotry.

Called Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project, the program has brought together several community organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League and Miami-Dade County Public Schools, to create a countywide calendar of performances and events.

At the Community Relations Board of Miami-Dade County, while we work to relieve community tensions when they arise, we also strive to proactively foster understanding, communication and mutual respect. The work of the Arsht Center and all of its partners has gone a long way toward this mission.

The Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project will culminate with a moving performance by Ballet Austin on Nov. 3 and 4, inspired by the poignant story of a Holocaust survivor. Also on Nov. 3, the Arsht Center will host a free Family Fest that will feature, among other activities, spoken-word performances by children of Miami-Dade public schools under the theme of No Place for Hate.

On the weekend before Election Day, I urge the community to attend these performances to remember the lessons learned from the tragic events of the Holocaust and reflect upon how we can become a better city and nation by applying those lessons to our lives every day. You can find more information on Light / The Holocaust & Humanity Project, at arshtcenter.org/light.

— The **Rev. Walter T. Richardson**, chair, **Miami-Dade County Community Relations Board, Miami**



TONY SPIELBERG/

A scene from Ballet Austin's performance at the Arsht Center.

Betting suspects in a league of their own

Eight of the nine men charged with gambling on youth and pro games were affiliated with a group separate from the South Florida Youth Football League.

BY LINDA TRISCHITTA *Sun Sentinel*

Nine men charged with illegal gambling this week — some on professional sports, others on children's football games — were described in investigators' reports as members of the South Florida Youth Football League.

But the league's leader says eight of the arrestees are not affiliated with the South Florida Youth Football League (SFYFL).

"Most of the men charged in this case formed their own league, the Florida Youth Football League, in February 2012," said Michael Spivey, SFYFL's president. "They said they wanted to go in another direction." Broward Sheriff's Office arrest warrants and other documents mention only SFYFL.

Five of the arrestees were affiliated with the Fort Lauderdale Hurricanes, according to BSO, and two of the men were with the Northwest Broward Raiders. Both the Hurricanes and the Raiders are part of Florida Youth Football League, its website says.

On Thursday, BSO spokeswoman Veda Cole-man-Wright confirmed the Hurricanes and Raiders were with the Florida Youth Football League.

Spivey said that since the initial reports about problems at SFYFL games, "We've done everything possible to make the league a safe haven for our kids."

He said the scandal has not dampened support of the league by parents of the nearly 10,000 kids who play or cheer.

"The parents know those coaches were not a part of our organization this year," Spivey said.

But Debbie Jones, president of SFYFL's cheerleading activities, said being named in connection with the illegal gambling probe harmed the group's image and morale.

"We're hurting," Jones said. "We're working hard. And this is going straight to heck."

Spivey said one of the men charged in the case was still a coach with SFYFL. Dave Small, 41, of the Lauderhill Lions was suspended by his club pending the outcome of his case, according to Spivey.

Small was charged with bookmaking, and bond was set at \$15,000. He had no prior criminal convictions, BSO said.

Another arrestee charged with bookmaking, Darron Bostic, is listed by BSO as a coach of the Deerfield Packer Rattlers. But Spivey says that's also incorrect, and that Bostic was a coach with the Boca Braves, part of the Pop Warner program in Boca Raton.

A volunteer with the Boca Braves declined to comment.

Bostic also did not have a criminal record, BSO said.

The arrests came after prosecutors said they ran an 18-month investigation that began after a May 2011 ESPN report about gambling at games where players are as young as kindergartners, up to age 15.

Investigators said bets were taken at a Lauderhill barber shop called Red Carpet Kutz, which BSO said fronted the illegal activity.

Two coaches are accused of betting on point spreads before kids' games.

The nine arrestees' common bond was their roles as youth football coaches and assistants, investigators said.

BSO conducted "Operation Dirty Play" with Fort Lauderdale and Lauderhill police, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office and the U.S. Marshals Service.

Fort Lauderdale police began surveillance in 2011 to end the betting and drinking, drug use and fighting that a police spokesman said was happening at pee wee games at the time.

A Florida Youth Football League representative could not be reached for comment Thursday.

FLORIDA BRIEFS

·EMPLOYMENT

Three ATI schools warn of 184 job cuts

A chain of for-profit vocational schools disclosed significant job cuts Thursday.

ATI Career Training Centers in Oakland Park, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami notified 184 workers that their positions could be eliminated by the end of the year, according to a state labor website. No details were provided about the job cuts. ATI offers training in business, electronics, nursing, and other programs.

The Texas-based company has been working through challenges. Last year, ATI announced it had hired a restructuring specialist to run ATI, and in March, executives said they were closing four schools in Texas. Company executives could not be reached for comments Thursday afternoon.