



Miami-Dade County Public Schools

giving our students the world

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January 31, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

As we approach the midway point of the 2010-2011 school year, it is appropriate for us to take stock of where we are, to look ahead, and to reflect on all that we have accomplished. Our students are learning more than ever, school grades continue to improve, and our graduation rates have reached new heights. These accomplishments are the result of the dedication of our teachers and school support personnel. I am proud to be both an educator and Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, Recruitment, Performance Management and Labor Relations and I can say, without reservation, that the education professionals who make up Miami-Dade County Public Schools are among the best in the world.

Reasonably, these types of accomplishments would typically result in well deserved workforce rewards. Regrettably, these are not typical times.

You are all aware that public education has become an integral part of the political dialogue on both the state and national levels over the past year. Accountability, class size, charter schools, vouchers, and educational technology have all come to the forefront. Unfortunately, adequate funding continues to be a challenge, particularly as we face the loss of dollars from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) at the conclusion of this fiscal year. While the prospect of the loss of this funding is daunting, we have faced similar circumstances and have risen to the challenge.

In recent years we have seen our capital and operating budgets reduced by nearly \$2 billion, but we regained our financial footing through honest communication and shared sacrifice. We realigned or eliminated central administration functions resulting in cuts of nearly 50 percent. We found a way to preserve jobs and hold down health insurance costs while maintaining a free option for employees and affordable coverage for dependents, something which I know is critically important to each of us. It was with this in mind that the administration came to the bargaining table with the United Teachers of Dade (UTD) this past fall.

I believe that clear communication is essential to any effective relationship, especially in times that pose a challenge. We are living in those times, and so I wanted to share with you our position as it relates to the ongoing negotiations with UTD. I attended these negotiations as part of the District's negotiating team. Collective bargaining began on September 21, 2010, with hopes of reaching an agreement on a total comprehensive package inclusive of health insurance and salary. Although there has been a \$25 million dollar increase in healthcare costs, the District's proposal was to have the Board absorb the increase while maintaining the same plan design and the same level of service in 2011 as provided in 2010. Simply put, not one penny of the increased costs would be passed on to employees for healthcare. Additionally, a one-time salary incentive was proposed equal to 1 percent of each employee's base salary.

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This District's ability to put forward such a proposal is rooted in the fiscal responsibility with which we have managed our budget and improved our reserve funds; funds which have been designated to protect our District and workforce from the perils associated with financial instability. These funds have been designated as follows:

- \$29.4M has been designated as the Program & Personnel Protection Plan. These funds were reserved to guard against mid-year reductions from the state which could have impacted personnel. It is from these funds that the 1 percent salary incentive would be paid. Once used, these funds are not available next year;
- \$13.6M has been designated as the Health Premium Stabilization Fund. It is from these funds that the District would off-set any increases in insurance premiums for employees;
- \$12M has been designated as protection against a projected 1 percent shortfall in the collection of property taxes; and
- \$79.6M has been held as an unreserved operating contingency fund. This amount is roughly equal to 3 percent of FEFP revenue, the amount we are required to hold in reserve by the State of Florida.

We have shared this information with the UTD representatives. We have also shared our concerns for what the future may hold if the state or federal governments do not provide funds to replace the \$121M hole which will be left when the ARRA funds sunset at the end of this year.

On December 6, 2010, the UTD declared "impasse," which means that the union has determined that a dispute exists between the parties and no further progress can be made toward reaching an agreement. At all times the District has been willing to continue the bargaining process on all issues. The bargaining process has worked in the past, and I am optimistic that it can continue to work successfully. However, we cannot rush into quick, short-term solutions that may bankrupt the District and compromise the viability of our programs and services. It is my sincere hope that we will return to bargaining to address all issues as soon as possible.

Please know that your work is truly valued and that I have the deepest respect for what you do in the classrooms of our schools every day. There is no price that could reflect the true worth of your work and service.

Sincerely,



Enid Weisman
Assistant Superintendent

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cc: Mr. Alberto M. Carvalho