



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

Category: Campaign Leadership

Miami-Dade County, 2.5 million strong, is taking action to ensure that by the year 2020 all of its children will be reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade.

The county's new Read to Learn initiative is spearheading this effort. Members of this public-private partnership include the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the county government and its library system, the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, the Miami-Dade Family Learning Partnership, United Way of Miami-Dade and The Children's Movement of Florida.

Its early days for the initiative, but the organizations have already formed a top-level steering committee, and the members are hard at work. Meanwhile, work groups have submitted strong and ambitious action plans that are doable, sustainable and full of promise. Two countywide summits have been held, with more planning sessions scheduled.

The centerpiece of the initiative is the newly launched Read to Learn Book Club. This effort provides a book per month to every Miami-Dade 3-year-old, fostering early literacy. Parents can enroll their children online or by mail. The first mailing was in March, prompting rave reviews ever since. Now, 30,000 children have access to new, free books every month — that's nearly 360,000 books moving into Miami-Dade households every year.

The county plans to enlist volunteers from local neighborhoods to serve as reading coaches for preschool and elementary-aged children, so that by the year 2015, every child, classroom or program that requests a reading mentor will have one. Miami-Dade also plans public awareness campaigns focused on the importance of early literacy and is seeking to implement programs such as myOn reader to provide children with cost-effective computer access to a website that offers more than 2,000 digital books.

To combat chronic absence in schools, the county plans to benchmark and increase attendance rates by means of educational outreach efforts and to specify attendance maintenance standards for subsidized child care recipients. The county also plans to make dual-language programs more accessible for English language learners prior to entry into kindergarten in order to increase school readiness.

STRATEGIES

- Read to Learn Book Club delivers books to as many as 30,000 Miami-Dade 3-year-olds every month
- Enlist volunteers to serve as reading coaches
- Use public awareness campaigns to focus on early literacy
- Create and enforce attendance benchmarks
- Increase dual-language programming for pre-K students