

# RESEARCH BRIEF

Department of Research Services

Vol. 0201  
October 2002

Mr. Dale Romanik, Director  
Dr. Terry Froman, Sr. Research Analyst

## The Miami-Dade Educational Environment: Special Circumstances, Special Challenges

Not all classrooms are equal, nor are all schools or school districts. At some locations, children start school prepared for the social and academic demands of the classroom. They can get along in large groups, sit still and pay attention. They are interested in learning and possess knowledge and skills far superior to less fortunate students their same age. In such circumstances, the children and the schools they attend enjoy vast and long-lasting advantages.

At other locations, the social and environmental context in which children live may adversely affect their ability to achieve academically. In the article, *A Closer Look at the Minority Achievement Gap*, Joseph D'Amico (2001) provides a list of sociocultural factors that represent "fairly reliable predictors of low levels of school achievement." This list includes

ethnicity, poverty, parent's low level of education, prenatal problems such as low birth weight, child-rearing practices emphasizing punitive discipline practices, weak family support systems, and negative peer perceptions of achieving academically in school.

"Recent studies suggest that early childhood experiences affect learning and development, with children from poor environments generally achieving less than those from more enriching ones." (Bainbridge, 2002)

As mentioned by D'Amico, the health problems of poor children generally begin before they are even born. Since poor mothers are less likely to eat properly and do not receive adequate prenatal care, their babies are more likely than babies of non-poor mothers to be of low birth weight, to be stillborn,

"Our results imply that we could eliminate at least half, and probably more, of the black-white test score gaps at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade by eliminating the differences that exist before children enter the first grade." (Phillips, 2001)

or to die soon after birth. They are more likely than other children to suffer from hearing and vision loss, behavior problems, psychological disturbances, and learning disabilities. (D'Amico, 2001) Moreover, many poor children are even exposed to lead poisoning at levels high enough to interfere with cognitive development and such exposure is associated with sensorimotor deficits, lower IQ, and poor academic achievement.

Poverty can complicate family relationships and disrupt children's development through its impact on parent's emotional state. In one study, unemployed mothers tended to become depressed and as a result of this depression tended to be negative and more punitive with their children. (McLoyd, 1996) Children of these mothers tended to be depressed and to have difficulty achieving in school.

The factors listed in this paper impact the environment in which children grow in Miami-Dade County and therefore their capacity to achieve in school. Socioeconomic conditions in Miami-Dade County are discussed along with other school and non-school related factors that have been shown by educational research to affect student learning. It would be wrong for a teacher or a school to use external factors as an excuse for lack of achievement. We have a right to expect academic progress regardless of the starting point for students. But, it would be equally wrong to ignore the extra burdens environmental conditions can impose. Individual schools, as well as entire school districts, can sometimes face imposing challenges.

**"Teachers can and do make a difference in how much students learn. Yet their job can be made more effective by influencing students' lives before they begin school." (Bainbridge, 2002)**

---

---

## Miami Poorest of All Large U.S. Cities

*A U.S. Census Bureau Survey based on a sample of homes found that, the City of Miami was the poorest of all large U.S. cities. The Miami Herald reported on November 20, 2001 ("Poverty Rate a Distinctive Challenge for Miami") that, Miami had a poverty rate of 32% followed by New Orleans and Atlanta with 28%, Newark (27%), Fresno (26%), Tampa (18%), and Jacksonville (12%). The City of Miami was the 4<sup>th</sup> poorest large city in the U.S. during the 1990 census with a poverty rate of 31%. The same Herald article reported that Miami-Dade County ranked 16<sup>th</sup> among large counties throughout the U.S. in terms of poverty.*

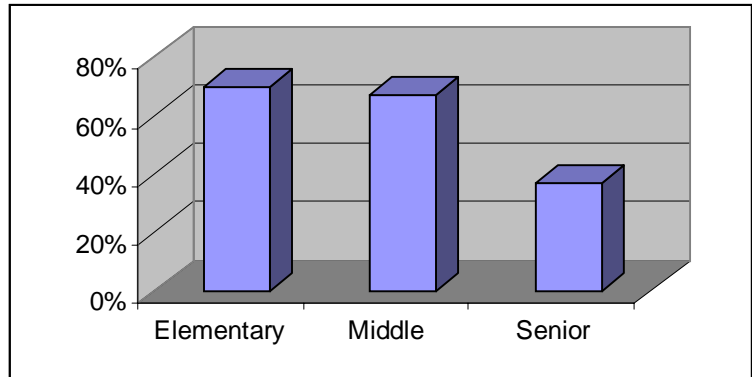
**"If environmental factors are a significant cause of student performance, then all who educate poor children have a special burden." (Bainbridge, 2002)**

### Additional Facts About Poverty:

- Among Miami-Dade County municipalities Florida City ranks 1<sup>st</sup>, Opa-Locka 2<sup>nd</sup>, Medley 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the City of Miami 4<sup>th</sup> as the having the lowest median family income. (Table 1; page 7)
- The City of Miami has a greater percentage of families living in poverty (23.5%) than does Miami-Dade County in general (14.5%), Broward County (8.7%), Palm Beach County (6.9%), and Monroe County (6.8%). (Table 2; page 8)
- In fact, 36% of the families residing in the City of Miami with children under 5 years of age and 33% of families with children under 18 live in poverty compared to only 17% and 14%, respectively statewide. (Table 2; page 8)

- The percentage of families receiving public assistance and living in the City of Miami (9.9%) is three and one-half times the rate across the state of Florida (2.8%). (Table 2; page 8)
- The proportion of families living in the City of Miami earning less than \$10,000 per year is more than two and one-half times as high (15.9%) as the statewide average (5.8%). (Table 2; page 8)

A total of 59 percent of M-DCPS students participate in the free and reduced-price lunch program (i.e., elementary 70%; middle 67%; and senior high 34%). (Source: *District and School Profiles: 2000-01*; M-DCPS)




---



---

## Home Language Other Than English in 75% of Miami

“The educational plight of the many non-English-speaking immigrants entering the United States is not much different [from poor Black families]. Their parents often have little formal education and cannot provide academic stimulation or appropriate diets. Hispanic children are twice as likely as white ones to live in poverty.” (Bainbridge, 2002)

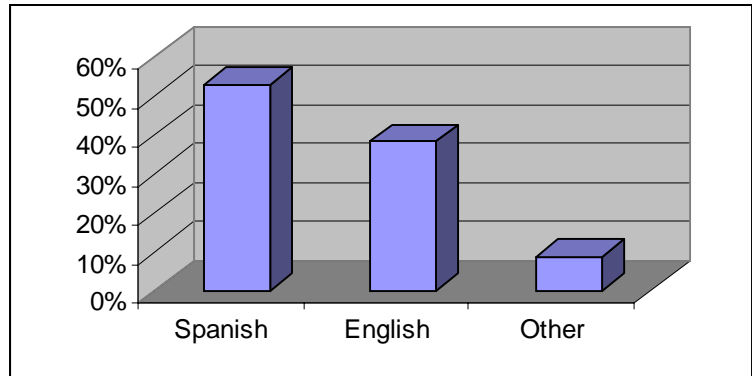
*Over 87,200 or 23% of M-DCPS students report being born in a country other than the U.S. (Table 3; page 9). English is the only language spoken at home in 32% of the homes in Miami-Dade County and in 25% of the homes in the City of Miami compared to 77% in homes statewide. Approximately 60% of the City of Miami residents including all ages report being born in a country other than the U.S. compared to 51% of the Miami-Dade County residents and 17% of residents statewide. (Table 5; page 10)*

### Additional Facts About Language:

- During the 2001-02 administration of the *School Climate Survey*, Miami Edison Senior High requested a total of approximately 2,000 Haitian Creole Parent Survey Forms from the Research Services Department. In October 2001, school membership was 2,341. A request for such a large volume of Creole forms suggests that some 80% of the parents at this school speak predominately Haitian Creole.

- Approximately 18 percent of all students enrolled in M-DCPS are characterized as Limited English Proficient (LEP). About 25% of the students enrolled in elementary and 11 % of the students enrolled in both middle and senior high schools are so characterized. (M-DCPS District and School profiles: 2000-2001.)

Approximately 231,000 or 62% of M-DCPS students report a home language other than English (Table 3; page 9). Over 198,500 of these students report Spanish as their home language. (Table 4; page 9)




---



---

## Mobility Index Averages 52 for Double “F” Schools

“Society often unfairly expects effective teachers to get the same results from students who come from widely varying households. What students have experienced before they enter school will differ dramatically and will influence their performance.” (Bainbridge, 2002)

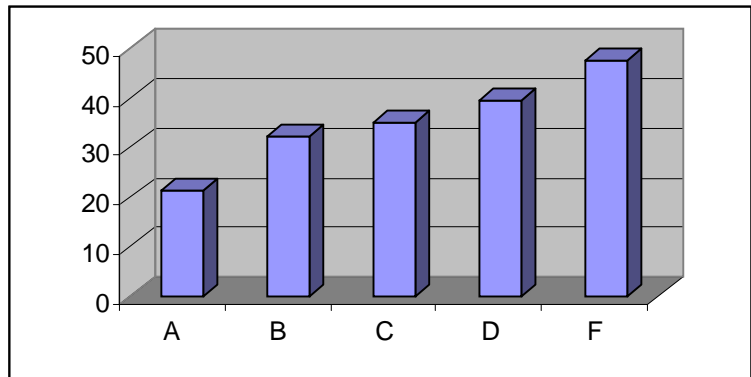
*Student mobility from one school to another can negatively affect student achievement. This is particularly true of students from low income, less educated families (Straits, 1987). Mobility causes problems for schools as well. Research shows that schools with high mobility rates do not succeed even with those students with stable residences (Neuman, 1988).*

### Additional Facts About School Mobility:

- The Mobility Index measures the frequency of students entering and leaving a school throughout the year. The overall average of 52 for double F schools was found. Mobility rates for the seven lowest performing M-DCPS elementary schools averaged 46 with a districtwide average for elementary schools of 30. Such rates among the three lowest performing senior high schools averaged 55 compared to a districtwide average for senior high schools of 32. (Calculated by the Research Services Department)

- The State DOE reports a related statistic, stability rate. As defined by the state, stability refers to the percentage of students who are enrolled in the same school during the October and February membership counts. The 2000-01 statewide average for elementary schools was 93.7% and for senior high schools it was 91.8%. For the ten highest performing M-DCPS schools, based on the A+ Plan and composed of eight elementary and two senior high schools, the average stability rate was 96.8%. For the ten lowest performing M-DCPS schools, composed of seven elementary schools and three senior high schools the average stability rate was 89.5. (Calculated by the Research Services Department)
- The stability statistic calculated by the State DOE considers the stability of the student population only between October and February. To get a perspective closer to the actual school year, we have recalculated the stability statistic from the longer span of October to June (170 days). This statistic tends to lower the stability rate by approximately two percentage points for high performing schools and by approximately eight percentage points for low performing schools. The stability rate for high performing schools decreased to 94.6% and for low performing schools the stability rate decreased to 81.2% using this method of calculation. (Calculated by the Research Services Department)

The mobility index for M-DCPS schools was highly correlated with the Performance Grade the schools received in 2002. The mobility index ranged from approximately 21 for “A” schools to over 47 for “F” schools.




---



---

## Why Should We Care About Environmental Factors?

A number of educational research studies have examined the relationship between family income, parental involvement in learning, and the extent to which children are successful in school. These studies have addressed areas such as the frequency and quality of parental involvement in children’s behaviors that have been shown to promote children’s learning. For example, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (1999) examined the frequency with which parents read to their children on a daily basis. Results indicated that, 62 percent of parents with high socioeconomic status read to their children every day compared to only 36 percent of parents with a low socioeconomic status.

Carey, Lewis, and Farris (1998) reviewed a 1997 National Survey of American Families which studied the extent to which children were read to or told stories. Results showed that 24 percent of children living below the poverty level (compared to 10 percent of children living above the poverty level) engaged in such parent-child interaction less than three times per week. Additionally, 24 percent of children living in one-parent families (compared to 15 percent of children living in two-parent families) were either read to or told stories less than three times per week. This finding is important because children who were read to at least three times a week as they entered kindergarten were twice as likely to score in the top 25 percent in reading than children who were read to less.

**“Educators and reformers who focus on systems or teacher quality without giving attention to social and environmental factors will continue to be frustrated by more failure than successes.” (Bainbridge, 2002)**

The NAEP 2000 national reading assessment of fourth-grade students studied the quantity of different types of reading material available in a child’s home and its effect on reading skills. This study found that children who had multiple types of reading material at home performed the highest. Sixty-eight percent of children who had three or more types of reading material at home performed at the Proficient level while students who had two or fewer types of reading material at home performed at the Basic level.

Thirty years of research supports that a parent’s involvement in their child’s education contributes to their child’s perception of school and to improved academic achievement. The National Household Education Survey found a strong relationship between parent education level and involvement in their child’s education. This study found:

Parents reporting they served as a volunteer on a school committee:

	Less than High School Education	High School Diploma or GED	Four-year College Degree	Graduate or Professional Degree
Yes	13.5%	26.7%	50.4%	54.6%
No	86.5%	73.3%	49.6%	45.4%

Parents reporting attending a scheduled school meeting with a teacher:

	Less than High School Education	High School Diploma or GED	Four-year College Degree	Graduate or Professional Degree
Yes	61.6%	69.6%	79.1%	75.3%
No	38.4%	30.4%	20.9%	24.7%

The evidence is almost overwhelming. Adverse environmental and social factors external to the classroom can have devastating effects on students both while they are in school and after they leave. Such factors can have devastating effects on schools and entire school districts as well. Of course, almost equally overwhelming is the evidence that there are causes and correlates we as education professionals can have an impact on, and thus we can influence the degree of achievement. But we will not be successful unless we acknowledge the role of outside influences, make reasonable achievement goals a major educational priority, and marshal all our efforts and collective resources to succeed.



Table 1

Lowest Household Income by Municipality: Miami-Dade County, 2000

Municipality	Median Family Income	Rank
Florida City	\$14,923	1
Hialeah	29,492	8
Homestead	26,775	5
Medley	23,167	3
Miami (City of)	23,483	4
Miami Beach	27,322	6
North Miami	29,778	9
North Miami Beach	31,377	10
Opa-Locka	19,631	2
Sweetwater	29,333	7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Demographic Profile.

Low ranks reflect lower median family income.

Table 2

Selected Economic Characteristics  
Poverty/Earning Status in 2000

Economic Variable	Percent						
	State of Florida	Miami-Dade County	City of Miami	Broward County	Palm Beach County	Monroe County	
<b>Families in Poverty:</b>							
All Families	9.0	14.5	23.5	8.7	6.9	6.8	
With Related Children Under 18 Yrs.	14.2	19.3	32.8	12.6	11.5	9.9	
With Related Children Under 5 Yrs.	17.4	21.7	35.9	14.5	14.4	11.7	
<b>Individuals in Poverty:</b>							
18 Years and Over	11.0	16.2	25.6	10.2	8.7	9.8	
Children 5 to 17 Years	16.6	22.7	38.3	15.1	13.8	11.5	
Families Earning Less than \$10,000/Yr.	5.8	9.1	15.9	5.5	4.4	4.9	
Per Capita Income	21,557	18,497	15,128	23,170	28,801	26,102	
Median Household Income	38,819	35,966	23,483	41,691	45,062	42,283	
Families Receiving Public Assistance Income	2.8	6.0	9.9	2.1	1.8	1.9	

Source: U.S Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.



Table 3

Foreign-born Students in M-DCPS and Student's  
Whose Primary Language is Other than English  
(As of October 2001)

Category	Number	Percent*
Foreign-born Students	87,203	23.3
Students w/ Home Language Other than English	231,070	61.7

\* Percent of total enrollment.

Table 4

Summary of Top Five Languages Other than English

Language	No. Of Students Using as Primary/Home Language
Spanish	198,510
Haitian Creole	22,532
French	2,440
Portuguese	1,794
Chinese/Zhongwen	759

Source: Student Database System; *Statistical Abstract: 2001-02*.

Table 5

## Selected Social Characteristics:2000

Economic Characteristic	Percent					
	State of Florida	Miami-Dade County	City of Miami	Broward County	Palm Beach County	Monroe County
<b>Educational Attainment:</b>						
Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	6.7	14.7	24.5	5.4	5.5	4.6
High School Graduate or Higher	79.9	67.9	52.7	82.0	83.6	84.9
<b>Caregivers:</b>						
Families with No Husband Present	21.5	28.9	40.0	21.5	22.1	19.8
<b>Place of Birth:</b>						
Born in U.S.	80.7	46.0	37.9	72.2	80.5	83.4
Foreign Born	16.7	50.9	59.5	25.3	17.4	14.7
Not a Citizen	9.2	27.2				
<b>Language Spoken at Home:</b>						
English Only	76.9	32.1	25.4	71.2	78.3	78.6
Language Other than English	23.1	67.9	74.6	28.8	21.7	21.4
<b>Marital Status:</b>						
Separated	2.4	3.6	4.7	2.6	2.0	1.8
Divorced	11.6	11.5	12.8	11.8	10.8	14.9
<b>Residence:</b>						
Lived Elsewhere in 1995	4.3	9.8	11.2	6.1	4.4	4.0

Source: U.S Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.

## References

- Bainbridge, W. L. and Lasley, T. J. Poverty, Not Race, Holds Back Urban Students. *The Effective School Report*, Vol. XX, No. 7, Dynamic Educational Information, Inc., August 2002.
- Carey, N., Lewis, L., Farris, E. et al., Parent Involvement in Children's Education Efforts by Public Elementary Schools, Department of Education, NCES, Washington, DC, 1998.
- D'Amico, J. J., A Closer Look at the Minority Achievement Gap, *ERS Spectrum*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Educational Research Service, Spring 2001.
- Henderson, T., Berla, N., A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement, National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1994.
- McLoyd, V. C., Jayaratne, T., Ceballo, R., & Borquez, J. Unemployment and work interruption among African American single mothers: Effects on parenting and adolescent socioemotional functioning. *Child Development*, 65, 562-589, 1994.
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools, District and School Profiles: 2000-2001, Office of Educational Planning and Quality Enhancement, Department of Data Quality Management, June 2001.
- The Miami Herald, Poverty Rate a Distinctive Challenge for Miami, November 20, 2001.
- Neuman, J. *What Should We Do About the Highly Mobile Student?* A Research Brief, Mount Vernon, WA: Educational Service District, 189, 1988.
- Phillips, M.. Assistant Professor of Policy Studies and Sociology at the University of California-Los Angeles, 2001.
- Straits, B.C. Residence Migration and School Progress, *Sociology of Education*, 60, 34-43, 1987.