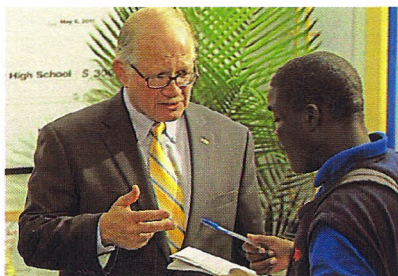


MIAMI-DADE SCHOOLS

Liberty City high school gets \$1 million investment

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A new project of the Miami-Dade school district, Florida International University and J.P. Morgan Chase, seeks to create a college-going culture at Miami Northwestern Senior High in Liberty City.



Florida International University President Mark Rosenberg, left, is interviewed for the Northwestern High student newspaper by Bryton LeGree, 16. MARICE COHN BAND / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

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BY LAURA ISENSEE

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Miami Northwestern fans will hear a special announcement this month when the Bulls football team plays Carol City Senior.

Not the score. A \$1 million project to expand rigorous courses, build a new lab, improve graduation rates and create a college-going culture at the Liberty City school, which has much pride, but also many struggles.

"This allows our kids to see there is a life beyond graduating from Miami Northwestern Senior High," Principal Wallace Aristide said.

Beyond high school: a college degree. "That opens their minds and gets them to dream," he said.

The three-year program, dubbed the Education Effect, was unveiled Wednesday. It involves Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Florida International

University and J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation, which donated \$1 million.

One of every four Miami Northwestern students typically does not graduate from high school. Fewer than half of those who do graduate go on to college. In Liberty City, about 47 percent of residents have a high school education; 3 percent have a bachelor's degree.

The program seeks to transform the school and the community — so that the high school Class of 2012 thinks about their college graduation in 2016.

Senior Miracle Taylor, 17, plans to study nursing at FIU. She said the new program will give her classmates an advantage: "They'll be able to survive the college environment and they'll strive."

The new program builds on the Miami-Dade school district's overall plan for Miami Northwestern and other struggling schools. "This was an opportunity to go deeper with what we're already doing," said Nikolai Vitti, assistant superintendent.

Among the program's initiatives:

- a new \$150,000 aquaponics lab where students can grow fish, use them as fertilizer in gardening and create a sustainable food system
- increasing the number of dual enrollment courses from four to eight this fall, so more students can take college-level classes at Miami Northwestern or at FIU and earn college credit

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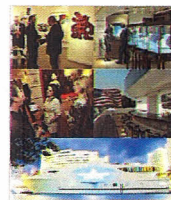
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The program will also work with the elementary and middle schools, such as Holmes Elementary and Charles R. Drew Middle School, that send students to Northwestern.

"This is a promise we're making," said Cecilia Gutierrez-Abety, FIU's project director who will work from the high school. "FIU is making a promise through our support of this school and administrators that students will be better prepared for college."

While Miami Northwestern has struggled, it has improved its academics and graduation rates. Its 2010-2011 school grade is expected to rise to a C from a D, Vitti said. In the past three years, the graduation rate has jumped 12 percent to 79 percent projected for last school year. Over the past decade, reading and math proficiency has improved.

"We want to build upon the successes that have already been had here. We want to see them grow even more," said Mel Martinez, former U.S. Senator and now a chairman at J.P. Morgan Chase.

The school has a rich history and its colors — old gold and royal blue — are steeped in pride. In 2007, the Bulls won a national high school football championship. Alumni from its first graduating class of 1956 and many other classes head to football games and tutor students.

"Everybody is on board," said Larry Williams, who leads the alumni association.

"These are the type of programs we need, rather than politicians talking about what they want to happen," he said. "It's too late when the dog is out the yard, down the street barking and you're trying to close the fence."

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