

Activists, ministers demand FCAT overhaul

'Tee' Holloway: Enough is enough

By Sandra J. Charite
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School Performance Grades released on Aug. 6 brought good news to Miami-Dade County as the district received a B. But the Black community did not receive such pleasing news as many Black schools failed to improve or remained with the same grades which are determined by students' performance on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

A group of activists, elected officials and members of the clergy are upset with the FCAT and believe the test should be overhauled because it is hindering young people from progressing in life.

"We're dealing with high-stakes testing and we're hiding behind the niceties of accountability," said Victor T. Curry, president of the local chapter of the NAACP, in front of the Miami-Dade County School Board building on Aug. 11. "Somebody is gaining from the fail-

ures of our children."

The FCAT is a primary cause for the youth violence that has spiraled out of control in recent weeks, organizers said.

According to State Sen. Frederica Wilson, the test hinders thousands of teenagers from earning their diplomas. With no diploma and unable to find a job, the students often resort to lives of crime and drugs.

"So they take drugs to numb their pain," Wilson said. "And after they take drugs, they're in the fuzz, they don't even know where they are. They join a gang, they pick up an AK-47, they sell drugs, they turn to crime, they're jobless, they're fearless and they're godless."

Wilson added that the stress related to taking the test puts an additional strain on students — many who are well-aware that they simply are far from ready to successfully pass the exam.

"There's too much resting on one test," said Wilson, who wants the state to initiate more vocational programs that assist



—Miami Times photo/Sandra J. Charite

Miami-Dade NAACP chapter president Victor T. Curry, local activists and elected officials demand an overhaul of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) on Aug. 11 in front of the Miami-Dade County School Board building.

students in earning industry certification without having to pass the FCAT.

The FCAT is administered statewide to monitor students'

improvement and schools' compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind act. Third graders must pass the reading test to be promoted to the

fourth grade, while high school students must pass the 10th grade reading and math tests to receive their diploma.

Miami-Dade School Board

member Wilbert "Tee" Holloway said, "It's time to let this community know that enough is enough," because the students are the ones who are suffering.

For the past several weeks throughout the state, educators have criticized test anomalies in learning gains data, which may have negatively impacted school performance grades, according to Miami-Dade Schools. The district has joined a host of districts statewide urging a state review of those anomalies.

The School Performance Grading System includes student learning gains in reading and mathematics and student learning gains in the lowest 25 percent in reading and mathematics. Student gains represent 50 percent of the total points earned on the School Performance Grades and as such, any irregularities with this data may have serious consequences for the School Performance Grade and AYP designation of a school.

Student gains motivate decisions on the reassignment of principals and instructional staff, according to Miami-Dade Schools.



—Photo/ Lucy David

In a water splash, kids have fun in the sun.

Little Haiti prepares kids for school

Special to the Times

The City of Miami, Little Haiti Net, Green Family Foundation, Little Haiti Optimist Club, A+ Educational Mapping, Humana and United For Haiti, Inc. collaborated to host Little Haiti's Net seventh annual Back-to-School event on Aug. 13.

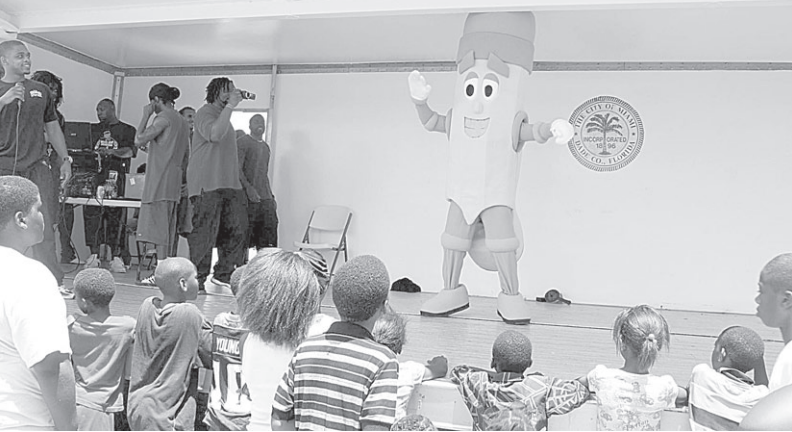
Over 1,000 backpacks were given away, along with notebooks and an array of prizes for the parents. The City of Miami Fire Department displayed their fire truck and provided a time of water fun for the kids.

Bounce houses were donated by CJ & Big Smile Party Rental to the event to entertain the youth in the Little Haiti community. Little Haiti Optimist, an organization dedicated to serving the youth through service programs geared towards education, athletics, mentorship and life skills, joined forces with United For Haiti, Inc. to produce a mini concert dedicated to the children of Haiti. Performers included "Smoky" with his hit

single "I Know What Them Girls Like" Feat. Flo-Rida and special Haiti tribute song "Somehow Someway" featuring Astar.

Miss Black Florida USA 2010 made a special appearance in which she encouraged the youth to stay in school and to dream big because "knowledge is power."

With the new school year a week away, students were prepared for the first day of class. The kids walked away with free tutoring information provided by A+ Educational Mapping and parents were given health services information from Humana and much more.



—Photo/ Lucy David

Dozens of students who attended the back-to-school event get advice about their education from Mr. Pencil.

Obama signs border bill to increase surveillance

By Julia Preston

President Obama signed into law a \$600 million bill on Friday to pay for 1,500 new border agents, additional unmanned surveillance drones and new Border Patrol stations along the southwest border.

The measure sailed through Congress in little more than a week with broad bipartisan support, demonstrating the pressure on politicians to look strong on border enforcement. Introduced on Aug. 5, the bill

was approved the same day by the Senate by unanimous consent, and passed again by the Senate on Thursday in a special session during the Congressional recess. The House had passed the bill in a special session on Tuesday.

Obama requested the funds in June, after he announced he would send 1,200 National Guard troops to support agents along the border.

The administration has been under pressure to strengthen border enforcement since Ari-

zona adopted a tough law in April to crack down on illegal immigration, saying the federal government was failing to do its job. After the administration sued Arizona, a federal court stayed important parts of that law.

The two senators from Arizona, John McCain and Jon Kyl, both Republicans who have criticized the administration's border measures as weak, surprised Democrats by signing on as sponsors of the spending bill.



Obama to visit Miami today

The Miami Times Staff Report

President Barack Obama will visit Miami on Wednesday, Aug. 18 to attend a fundraiser for state Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink, who is running for governor. Obama is scheduled to arrive at the Miami International Airport at 4:45 p.m. then travel to Miami Beach's Fontainebleau Hotel on Collins Avenue for the fundraiser.

Guests for the fundraiser are asked to arrive by 4 p.m. Tickets for the event are estimated at \$250 general admission to \$10,000 which allows the individual to have his or her picture taken with the president.

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