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BACK TO SCHOOL

## Students, teachers head back to class

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As some 345,000 students and 20,000-plus teachers transitioned back to school Monday, the Miami Dade County Public Schools started a year of reinvention. One new experiment: district-managed charter schools.

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Teachers can receive one-time stipends, ranging from \$500 to as much as \$28,000 for a handful of teachers.

Among other innovative ideas, the district is adding three more campuses of iPrep, the technology-based magnet, in Kendall, West Kendall and North Dade.

At North Miami Beach High, 25 students joined the inaugural iPrep freshman class. In their neon-painted classroom, one of three smartboards streamed Matrix-like code. Every student received a shiny, silver laptop on the first day.

"I always thought that in the future there would be laptops like notebooks. I guess it's really happening," said Patrice Lizaire, 13.

Under the iPrep model, first launched last year at a downtown campus, students will take classes both online and with iPrep teachers. The school's inspiration: the iPhone with its many apps.

North Miami Beach Principal Raymond Fontana said he wanted an iPrep to keep bright kids at the school and give them an tech-based education. He envisions more than 200 students eventually enrolled.

In Hialeah, the district expanded on its idea of franchises: a new MAST Academy at Jose Marti. It is the third math and science-themed school under

the MAST name. The original MAST — the Maritime and Science Technology Academy — has earned national attention and top state grades since it opened in 1991.

At Jose Marti MAST — that's short for Mathematics and Science Technology — students will take three science classes: a core course, research class and a lab.

The school has spent \$10,000-15,000 in lab equipment, including lab coats with a revamped school logo. In high school, students will delve into research projects. Not projects with Pepsi bottles and Tide soap. But weighty, real-life subjects, like the canker disease crippling the citrus industry.

"They're going to get their hands into science instead of listening to their teacher talk about it or doing an assignment," said Principal Jose Enriquez.

The Hialeah middle school is changing in other ways. It is one of two Miami-Dade schools adding high school levels. The idea: give kids seamless transition and make life easier for parents with hectic schedules.

Enriquez said one challenge in recent years has been shrinking enrollment — from about 1,300 students to less than 800 in five years. A new middle school just minutes away in Hialeah Gardens, new school boundaries and competition from charter schools have drawn kids.

The changes were exciting, but also bittersweet for Enriquez.

His father — Jose Enriquez, Sr. — first opened Jose Marti Middle in Hialeah in 1987.

"Reinventing what we do is to attract and keep the best students in Miami Dade. My dad opened the school. I get to reopen it," he said.

Miami Herald staff writers Kathleen McGrory, Lidia Dinkova, Alysha Khan, Thomas Johnson, Stephanie Parra and Andrea Torres contributed to this report.

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