

Village of Key Biscayne

Initiative for the Improvement of Public Education

Excerpt of presentation to Council on January 29, 2008

Public education options available to Key Biscayne residents have reached the pinnacle of inefficiency at the cost of our kids. It is now high time we take a step as a community and seek ways to, A: Work with M-DCPS to fix the conditions of the original elementary school buildings at our Key Biscayne K-8 Center and improving overall learning conditions through a compact between the Village of Key Biscayne and M-DCPS; B: Establish a high quality, community-focused municipal charter high school within our community.

In 2007, the Village of Key Biscayne contributed \$51.8 million dollars in taxes to the Miami-Dade Public Schools (M-DCPS) Our existing Key Biscayne K-8 Center operates under significant constraints with the \$5.1 M budget it receives to educate 1,100 students, an equivalent of \$4,700 per student in contrast to the \$10,272 per student allocated in the general operating fund of M-DCPS. Expressed in another form, our school gets back just about 10% of what we pay in taxes to the school district, and half of the average amount of what other students get in Miami-Dade County. We are a blessed and privileged community, and very much willing to help other less fortunate ones. However, our community cannot continue to be left behind and discriminated by M-DCPS. Key Biscayne residents need to have their fair share of public education funds.

We not only operate our K-8 Center under the constraints of an unjustifiably low budget, that does not even include the most basic teaching supplies as copying paper, but we do so inside 55 years-old poorly maintained buildings, unsuitable for education and perhaps even hazardous to the health of our youngest kids and teachers. We are also being forced to ship out around the County our 640 kids in high school-age to attend secondary education. The great majority of these high school students, estimated at around 500, end up attending private schools, as real choices to continue public secondary education do not exist. That is in reality a double taxation we have to pay for living in Key Biscayne.

The severity of the disconnect between our School District and the education needs of Key Biscayne residents reaches its plateau as M-DCPS's Five, Ten and Twenty Years Work Plan specifies our elementary and middle school age capacity will decline from an actual of 1,030 in 2007 – 2008 to a total of 835 students in the school year 2010-2011; to 800 in 2015 – 2016; and to 796 students in 2025 – 2026. That is simply not true.

Our 2000 census estimates the number of kids in the 5 – 13 years old range to be 1,344 and our 2020 Vision Plan drafted in 2005 recognized "Children under the age of 18 grew by almost 55% to 2,547 children between 1990 and 2000, representing 24.2% of the total population. This trend has burdened the capacity of local school". This growth has continued since the 2000 census, estimating at 3,030 the number of children under the age of 18 residing in our Village as of the end of 2007.

Private secondary education is also becoming a significant challenge for our residents. Capacity constraints at most of the private high schools results in the need to move our children graduating from elementary to a private middle school so we can secure a spot at the same school once they reach high school age. It is our understanding that for the 2007 – 2008 school year Ransom Everglades only accepted one (1) new student from outside their school into the 9th grade. Priority in the private high schools is given to students graduating from their middle school, and most of these schools also give preference to siblings of kids enrolled in the school. The chances for a middle schooler graduating from KB K-8 Center to be accepted at a high-quality high school are minimum, and the majority of these graduates have to settle for 2nd and 3rd category private high schools. In other words, those of us who opt to educate our children in their elementary and middle school years inside our community are left at a considerable—and unfair—disadvantage.

The insufficiency of public high school options will soon have a significant impact on our community, as our kids continue to move away from the public elementary school to attend private middle schools. Empty seats at KB

K-8 Center get filled by students of Miami-Dade County, and in a short time our school will become a school for kids of other communities. We recognize the advantages of having kids from other communities attending our school and welcome the social enrichment provided by the diversity. However, when the community school becomes dominated by students from neighboring areas our school loses the community spirit.

For how much longer do we need to wait for M-DCPS to fix a broken public education system? For how much longer can we continue to be discriminated against just because we may be perceived as an affluent community that can afford to send their kids to private schools? How many kids will continue to miss out the opportunity of attending a high-quality public education for which we already spend a fortune through taxation?

HS4KB Proposal

We cannot continue taking a passive stand and to expect M-DCPS will one day solve the public education needs of our community. We must:

- A) Actively engage M-DCPS in our planning discussions and work with them, as a united community, to fix the issues we experience with the operating budget and old elementary buildings, while seeking ways to improve overall teaching and learning conditions for Elementary and Middle school children and teachers.
- B) Establish a municipal charter high school within Key Biscayne that will build upon the success of a better equipped Key Biscayne K-8 Center. This school should have a community focus

We will not be pioneers in the endeavor of forming education compacts with M-DCPS, or in obtaining certain freedom from the school district by assuming responsibility for the public education of our kids. Many municipalities have already understood the importance of having a say in the quality of education they obtain for their tax dollars and implemented municipal charter schools to serve the needs of their own communities. Florida cities like Cape Coral, Pembroke Pines, Aventura, Oakland, Miami Shores and Coral Springs are already there, at the helm of their public education. The City of Hialeah was very recently authorized to sponsor charter schools within their municipality, with plans to implement the model throughout the City of Hialeah. These municipalities understand small governments can be more efficient in the use of resources than large multi-billion public institutions can, while being more responsive to the changing needs of a community.

Our vision for a community high school differs substantially from a typical school. A community school is not just another program being imposed on a monolithic building and run by obsolete and cookie-cutter buildings based on obsolete standards, or curriculums focusing on teaching our children how to pass a test and then to claim excellence. It embodies a way of thinking and acting that recognizes the historical central role of schools in our communities – and the power of working together for a common good. Educating our children, yes, but also strengthening our families and community so that, in turn, they can help make our school even stronger and our children even more successful. Our vision of a community school recognizes the relationship between all members of the community, youth leadership development, civic activism, and positive youth development.

As a municipal charter high school we, as a community, design the facilities and curriculum insuring these components will address the particular education needs of our youth while promoting better use of mix-use facilities for the benefit of our entire community, from kindergartners to our elderly. In short, our residents would enjoy these physical resources, additional amenities and programs relevant to their ages and interests, a heightened community pride and a more efficient use of the tax dollars we already pay to our School District.

By working with and supporting our existing K-8 Center, we would have a community focused K – 12 with a stellar education, right here on the Village, for the kids of our community. Our goal will provide us with the missing link to truly being a community. Our kids will have a safe and stellar educational opportunity in their own neighborhood from kindergarten through high school graduation. We as parents, businesses leaders,

government officials, educators and residents of the Village will have a core group of kids to mentor and encourage as they transition from child to adult. We can also challenge these young adults to set an example worthy of being looked up to by their younger peers through their presence in the community.

As we go forward, our Village Council and community must commit to assigning our highest priority to resolving education deficiencies in our community. We need to place our best efforts in involving M-DCPS to resolve the budgetary and elementary buildings issues of our Key Biscayne K-8 Center, and by establishing a high-quality and community-focused municipal charter high school., where Key Biscayne residents will send their children to receive a high quality education.