Executive Summary

Dr. Carlos Finlay Elementary

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

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Introduction

Every school has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the school makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a school stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the school, and the kinds of programs and services that a school implements to support student learning. The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide a school with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the school community will have a more complete picture of how the school perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the school to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.
Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary was built in the year 2000. It is located on eight acres on the west side of Florida International University’s (FIU) Maidique Campus. Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary is a bilingual school in which a dual language program is implemented. Students receive instruction in English for 60% of the school day and Spanish for 40% of the day. The school has a professional development relationship with FIU, which is mutually beneficial to students at both campuses. As such, we receive various field experience students, student interns, and America Reads tutors which provide assistance and volunteer hours. These additional human resources assist our teachers by providing supplementary academic support to our students. This partnership motivates staff to serve as an example for these pre-service teachers, as well as provides the school with extra support to increase student achievement.

Our school services the students from the neighboring city of Sweetwater, Florida. Our total student enrollment is 518 students. During the 2012-2013 school year, our school received two Head Start units, one for three-year-olds and one for four-year-olds. In addition, we are a Title I school, with 78% of our students receiving free or reduced lunch. Our entire student population qualifies for free transportation to and from school originating at designated stops. Ninety-eight percent of the students enrolled in our school are Hispanic, and of those students 49% are English Language Learners. As a Title I school, many of our parents face economic challenges. These challenges preclude them from taking a personally active role within the school, and in providing academic assistance at home. In addition, due to transportation issues and conflicts with work schedules, it is difficult for their children to participate in any extended day services.

During the past three years, Dr. Carlos J. Finlay has received an influx of students from Central/South America and the Caribbean Islands who have demonstrated a lack of school preparedness regardless of their age. Moreover, the school continues to incur a reduction in non-instructional staff members due to budget constraints. This adversely affects the availability of human resources that aid teachers in attending to the academic needs of our students in the lowest 25 percentile, those not making adequate learning gains, and students that do make Annual Measurable Objectives.
School's Purpose

Provide the school's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the school embodies its purpose through its program offerings and expectations for students.

Our school's purpose is to have our students become bilingual and biliterate; responsible and productive citizens in a global society. Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary will accomplish this by collaborating with students, parents, teachers, Florida International University, and our entire community, as we strive to provide a high quality, child-centered, bilingual education that will empower our students to become responsible and productive citizens in a global society.

A variety of instructional programs are offered at Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary. Eligible students participate in a part-time Gifted Program in grades first through fifth. Students with Disabilities are serviced in an inclusion or resource setting based on individual needs. Students who are in need of academic intervention participate in our tutorial programs. Our school's computer lab is available before and after school to provide students with the opportunity to use instructional technology programs. Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary also fosters high academic achievement through student involvement in school sponsored programs such as Chorus, Art Club, The Green Team, Closed Circuit Television Crew and School Safety Patrols. School musical and theatrical performances are coordinated by the Music Department twice a year for all students, parents, and community members to enjoy. In addition, our school plants and harvests eight vegetable, herbal and fruit beds through the "Plant a Thousand Gardens Collaborative Initiative." School sponsored field trips make learning authentic and meaningful.

Although our students face many economic challenges and language barriers, the administration and instructional staff continue to maintain high expectations for our students. Students are motivated and expected to perform regardless of their obstacles. The climate of the school reflects an attitude of equitable treatment for all students with one goal in mind, and that is that all students, regardless of their personal circumstances, can achieve academic and personal success.
Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the school's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the school is striving to achieve in the next three years.

Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary has enjoyed many notable achievements within the last three years. Despite the many academic and/or economic challenges, plus language barriers that our students face, one of our school's most notable achievements was that during the 2011-2012 school year, we were ranked in the top ten percent of elementary schools within the state of Florida. In addition, in the area of Reading, the subgroup of Students Making Learning Gains continues to steadily increase. Furthermore, students in the lowest 25 percent subgroup have also demonstrated continuous growth and improvement. In the area of Mathematics, Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary continues to show academic improvement in the Students Making Learning Gains subgroup.

For the 2012-2013 school year, when comparing our scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) 2.0 with those of other elementary schools within our district, we performed in the top four percent. In our district, Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary was the only Title I school ranked in the top five percent. Based on the points earned to determine school grades, our school preformed in the top 13% of all Miami-Dade County elementary schools. Consequently, the school continues to score above the district and state in relation to the students achieving proficiency levels 3-5 in all areas tested on the FCAT 2.0 in grades three through five.

Our school and its students have also been recognized for numerous awards over the last three years. Most notably, our school received the "Dispelling the Myth Award" from The Education Trust. This is a very prestigious award that is given to schools whose students' academic achievements surpassed what is expected of them due to their economic difficulties, cultural backgrounds, and language barriers. In addition, during the last two years, our school's Spelling Bee champion competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. During the 2011-2012 school year, our school's spelling bee champion placed among the top five students from all the students in Miami-Dade County. During the 2012-2013 school year, our school's spelling bee champion placed among the top twenty-five students from all the students in Miami-Dade County. Our students have also received numerous accolades for projects and artwork submitted to different art exhibitions. In the Fairchild Challenge, two of our students received 2nd place awards. During Black History Month, in 2012-2013, two students' artworks were honored by being chosen to be enlarged into banners for the School Board auditorium stage. In the "Taste of the Tropic" art contest in 2012-2013, one of our students received the Award of Distinction for his artwork. Nine of our students that participated in the "Herencia Cultural" contest received First, Second, and Third Place honors in different categories.

In addition to our students' accomplishments, our school has also received the Golden Apple Award from Miami-Dade County Public Schools for consistently increasing the number of school volunteers. During the 2011-2012 school year, one of our volunteers was honored with the Youth Volunteer of the Year Award for the district of Miami-Dade County.

Although our school and students make great academic strides each year, and are recognized for both their intellectual and artistic talents, in the next three years, a significant emphasis will be made to continue to promote instructional rigor within the classrooms to ensure an increase in the amount of students meeting high standards on the FCAT assessments. This will be achieved by analyzing and monitoring student performance data from assessment to assessment and year to year. Students identified as needing improvement will have adjustments made to their instructional program in order to continue increasing our students' learning gains and overall academic progress.
Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

The students of Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary receive an exceptional education from a superb instructional staff. All of our teachers are highly qualified in their field. Sixty-four percent of our instructional staff have fifteen or more years of experience in the teaching profession. Fifty percent of our staff have advanced degrees, and twenty-two percent are Nationally Board Certified Teachers. As educational providers to a community with a large percentage of English Language Learners (ELL), our staff is prepared to deliver the best instruction possible to this student population. Eighty-three percent of our staff is ESOL endorsed.

In addition, the educational leaders and instructional staff of Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary believe that education is a life-long journey. As such, Dr. Carlos J. Finlay Elementary has created and developed opportunities for Professional Development through Professional Learning Communities in collaboration with Ready Schools Miami and the University of Florida Lastinger Center For Learning. Ready Schools Miami is a multi-partner, multi-year effort to improve the quality of early childhood education and services. The goal of Ready Schools Miami is to create a system that promotes early learning and child well-being from birth through elementary school. Through this program, teachers at the school have been trained as coaches and role-models on how to become more effective and productive teachers and colleagues. Ready Schools Miami has also enhanced the school's climate and has unified the teachers in a positive way. Teachers are encouraged to develop inquiry-based instruction which leads to higher student achievement. Teachers conducting research-based inquiries participate in a yearly showcase in which they present their findings to colleagues. This showcase promotes best research-based practices and develops opportunities for teachers to learn from one another as a networking community.

Our school continues to participate in the Plant a Thousand Gardens Collaborative Initiative that is sponsored through The Education Fund. In collaboration with FIU, our garden has grown to include eight vegetable, herb and fruit garden beds. The garden is utilized to promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) activities and the scientific process in a way that aids students in applying the knowledge gained to real-world applications. The garden encourages and educates students on healthy eating habits and facilitates individual exploration of their environment while learning about plants and their role in our environment.