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SENT ON BEHALF OF JOHN SCHUSTER, CHIEF COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER,
OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

THE READERS' FORUM

Vote for Miami-Dade Schools bond issue

In less than 60 days, voters throughout the country will be heading to the polls to elect the president of this great nation. Taxpayers in Miami-Dade County also will be voting whether to approve a \$1.2-billion general obligation bond referendum that will chart the future of education in our community.

One of the cornerstones of our democracy is to have an educated and involved citizenry that can make intelligent choices on critical issues. This cannot be achieved without having a high-quality public education system.

For years now the Legislature has placed funding of public education on the back burner, particularly when it comes to the capital outlay. In fact, the state has provided zero dollars for capital needs during the past two years. In the meantime, our schools continue to age and deteriorate as the needs continue to grow.

As the fourth-largest school district in the nation we operate 400 school campuses encompassing 45 million square feet of space. Nearly one half of the district's school buildings are over 40 years old, and more than one-third are at least 50 years old.

Educating today's students is far more complex than it was in the past. Rapidly evolving technologies, coupled with the need to repair leaky roofs and update antiquated electrical, plumbing and air-conditioning systems pose a major challenge that we must address.

It has been 24 years since Miami-Dade voters approved a bond referendum for public schools, and much has been learned from mistakes made in the past. To provide transparency, a citizen's advisory and oversight committee will be established, as well as numerous checks and balances through every step of the construction process.

This committee will also ensure the timely and equitable distribution of projects to all of the communities. Furthermore, the current School Board and the superintendent and his administration have a proven track record of transparency and fiduciary responsibility.

With interest rates and construction costs at historic lows, the projected cost to the average homeowner is minimal. It's estimated that in the first year, a homeowner with a taxable value of \$100,000 will pay \$28 additional dollars for school debt service. Our local economy will benefit greatly from the creation of much-needed construction jobs, and the ripple effect will go a long way to ease unemployment.

As a community we can ill afford to sit by and have our students fall behind their counterparts. The stakes are too high.

— ***Delio G. Diaz, executive director, Dade Association of School Administrators, Miami***