



For Immediate Release
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NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOLS WEEK -- MAY 3-9 -- CELEBRATES INNOVATION & EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

State charter school association launches program to recognize exemplary charter schools

Florida – Public charter schools around the country will celebrate National Charter Schools Week, May 3 - 9, 2009, with various activities and in-school events. In Florida, public charter schools students, parents, faculty and supporters will celebrate the rise of charter schools which have grown from a five school in 1996 to more 390 now that serve close to 117,000 students statewide.

Additionally that week, state charter schools leaders and advocates will travel to Washington to meet with Members of Congress, where they will advocate on behalf of public charter schools, including voicing support for the President's budget which increases funding for the federal charter school programs.

Also, in celebration of National Charter Schools week, the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools -- the state's premier charter school association -- announced an initiative to recognize quality charter schools. The program, entitled Gold Seal of Excellence, recognizes only those charter schools that have achieved exemplary standards of operation and student academic achievement. The program puts charter schools through an extensive quality standards review process that requires them to meet rigorous and comprehensive criteria that are specific to charter school operations – including parent involvement, staff retention, compliance, financial management and governing board performance. As an incentive to share best practices, any charter school that receives a Gold Seal Award will be expected to act as a mentor to other charter schools who seek its assistance as part of maintaining its Gold Seal status.

“Public charter schools have been a vital part of the public education system in Florida for over a decade, and in that time have helped raise student achievement and narrow the achievement gap – particularly with minority students and underserved populations,” explains Robert Haag, President, Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools. “The freedom to implement innovative curriculum and ability to engage parents in the education process has helped charter schools grow and succeed in their mission to improve education options for the youth in our state. I expect charter schools to continue to be innovative and accountable for results for decades to come.”

Charter schools are independent public schools that are free to be more innovative and are held accountable for improved student achievement. They foster a partnership between parents, teachers and students to create an environment in which parents can be more involved, teachers are given freedom to innovate and students are provided the structure they need to learn.

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National Charter Schools Week Activities:

Broward County

Monday, May 4th at 9:30 a.m.

Ben Gamla Charter School -- 2620 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood

Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz will speak with 7th & 8th graders at Ben Gamla Charter School, the first English/Hebrew language charter school in the country.

Escambia County

Friday, May 8th at 11:30 a.m.

Escambia Charter School -- 399 Ranch Road in Cantoment

Open house, art exhibition, student awards ceremony

Leon County

Friday, May 8th at 12:45 p.m.

School of Arts and Sciences -- 3208 Thomasville Road, Tallahassee

Community invited to attend the school's "Friday Sing!" event

Miami-Dade County

Tuesday, May 5th at 11:30 a.m.

Doral Academy Charter High School -- 11100 NW 27 Street, Doral

City of Miami Dade County Mayor's Office will present National Charter Schools Week proclamation. The Mayor's Chief of Staff, Dennis Morales, will speak with AP American Government students.

Orange County

May 4 – 8, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Orange County Educational Leadership Center

5th Floor -- Orange County School Board

445 West Amelia Street, Orlando

A number of the Orange County charter schools are displaying information in the lobby of the Orange County Educational Leadership Center all week (including posting representatives) in order to have the opportunity to answer questions and promote all that we do at our schools. This will reach district employees, parents, students and visitors to the facility.

Fast Facts:

- * There are more than 4,600 public charter schools serving 1.4 million students in 40 states and the District of Columbia. Charter school enrollment in Florida has grown to more than 116,000.
- * 42 of Florida's 67 counties now have charter schools.
- * 91% of graded charter schools received a state grade of A, B or C.
- * 31 charter schools were among the top performing schools in 24 out of the 42 districts that have charter schools.
- * According to the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress Report, Florida's 4th grade charter school students outperformed their peers at traditional public schools in both reading and math; 8th grader charter school students scored higher in reading; and African-American charter school students scored three points higher than their peers in district-run schools.
- * Charter schools must, by Florida statute, meet certain financial and academic benchmarks.
- * Charter schools are funded by public tax dollars. However, charter schools receive only 60%-80% of what school districts actually spend on each public school student.