



# Shooter Drills, Bad Pot, Uber, Sex Ed & Wage Gaps

Stories and images on the health and wellness of South Florida



Photo by Miami Montage staff

**MIAMI MONTAGE 2019:** (front row, from left) Thomas Morcillo, Abigail Tuschman, Yasmine Mezawi, Chika Ojukwu, Katya Gutierrez, Caroline Wheeler-Hollis, Kaylee Hilyer, Carson Merlo, (back) Benjamin Schiller, David Perez, Daniel Gonzalez III, Joseph Sturgeon, Alexander Someillan, Marcus Callegari, Lukas Guerra, Kevin Reyes.

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Miami Montage is published in perpetual memory of Mupalia Wakhisi



**ON THE COVER:**  
This photo illustration by Yasmine Mezawi shows a bottle of Charlotte's Web, a brand of CBD oil, one of the medicinal treatments featured in this year's coverage.

**STAYING STRONG:** Melissa Oliveira and son Cameron share a special bond in his road to recovery.

Photo by  
Yasmine Mezawi

# A big Hail Mary

## Debilitating illnesses pushing patients and doctors to alternative treatments like CBD

BY KEVIN REYES

Christopher Columbus High School

Six years ago, 9-year-old Cameron Walter had a routine tonsillectomy. Unexpectedly, Cameron suffered a stroke during the surgery, leaving him brain damaged.

Then, at age 11, the seizures started.

“Every time it happens it’s a very helpless feeling,” Melissa Oliveira, his mother, said. “Our normal is not the average normal, and I had to adjust to a new style of life and a new Cameron.”

Oliveira, sitting in a small classroom at High Point Academy, where her son is a student, became emotional when she described all the obstacles he has overcome: a two-month coma, a feeding tube, hundreds of seizures, relearning basic things and adjusting to life with a permanent disability.

In the years of intense caregiving for her son, one treatment that gives her the most hope is cannabidiol (CBD), a derivative of the hemp plant.

“I’m hopeful and I think that it has been the best thing that we could have done for him,” Oliveira said. “My dream is to get him off of pills altogether and just have him on CBD. I’m hoping that I can do that one day.”

Only a couple years ago, CBD wasn’t available by prescription. Oliveira was desperate for something to help her son. The epilepsy medicines he was taking were nearly maxed out, and the side effects – aggression and depression – were terrible. Cameron’s doctor told her about CBD, which was only available as an over-the-counter product at the time.

“I couldn’t get them [seizures] under control, so I figured I had nothing to lose,” she said.

In the early stages, Cameron’s seizures would last two to three minutes and it would take Melissa about two hours to help him recover his memory, she said. After beginning CBD, she noticed his seizures shortened to 20 to 30 seconds and he regained memory in 10 to 15 minutes.

Dr. Roberto Lopez-Alberola, the chief of the Division of Child Neurology at the University of Miami’s Miller School of Medicine, said the drug helps many of his patients.

“I’ve been prescribing CBD for a number of years now, primarily for chronic refractory epilepsy in children,” he said. “I’m also using it [CBD], off-label, in autistic children.”

Currently, the only FDA-approved cannabidiol drug is Epidiolex, which is approved for treatment of Linux Gusto syndrome, a specific type of epilepsy.

Lopez-Alberola prefers prescribing federally approved medicine, but he said he is open to the use of over-the-counter products.

“There is no doubt the cannabidiol is having both direct and indirect effects through the endocannabinoid system,” he said. “So it is not surprising that there is some modulation in mood and effect as reported by individuals who are attempting to use it for other indications.”

While doctors familiarize themselves with CBD, it remains a confusing topic in the United States, with many questioning its use, legality and side effects.

Ian Ruos, a manager at Smokers Goods, said he and his staff are more than willing to educate people on the common misconceptions and health benefits of CBD at their Miami-based store.

At a glance, Smokers Goods may look like the typical smoke shop. On the left, shelves are lined with bongs, rolling papers and lighters.

On the right, the tone of the display changes from getting high to getting healthy. The sterile white shelves, educational pamphlets and rows of CBD bottles give off the look of a clinic.

“We like to educate the community,” Ruos said. “I’d do your own research, but if you want to come in, we could definitely teach people.”

Ruos believes that CBD is a lifestyle.

From his day-to-day struggle with anxiety to his mother’s battle with multiple sclerosis, the usage of CBD has personally made him an advocate.

“Everybody here has gotten into this because they have a family member who has been impacted,” Ruos said, “whether it’s somebody close to them, if not themselves.”


And while Lopez-Alberola is a believer in the therapeutic value of CBD in some cases, he acknowledges that the general public still needs to be educated.


“There is no evidence that there is any risk or that there’s any impact on the developing brain with CBD, but we still don’t know for sure,” he said.


For Oliveira, it was a Hail Mary that, so far, has paid off. She hopes to help others by using the wisdom she’s gained from her experience.


“If it helps talking about my story, if someone hears it, or if someone wants to know the benefits of CBD or how this changed our lives, I wanna share it.”

### CBD Facts

 CBD is not marijuana.

 It is not a psychoactive drug.

 CBD is derived from the hemp plant.

 CBD containing .3% of THC is legal in the US. Anything above is subject to individual state and federal laws.

Source:  
Peter Grinspoon, MD

Credit: Kevin Reyes

# Bad pot

## Marijuana can pose risks of harmful effects to a user's mental health

BY LUKAS GUERRA

Christopher Columbus High School

At age 25, Gabe Howard spent four days in a psychiatric ward. He was diagnosed as bipolar.

When released, Howard began experimenting with marijuana. For the next four years, marijuana served as his self-medication of choice.

"I abused marijuana and I did a lot of other drugs as well. I pretty much did whatever I could get my hands on to feel better," Howard said.

Now 42, Howard's informal treatment plan has become more accepted. Eleven states have now fully legalized marijuana and 34 states have legalized it for medicinal use.

While marijuana has legitimate medical uses, there is growing evidence that some users are at risk of developing mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and psychosis due to ingestion of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive agent in pot.

The potential hazards are substantial. The Drug Abuse Warning Network found that of 1.25 million illicit-drug-related emergency

department visits in 2011, 455,668 were marijuana related.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that about 1.7 million Floridians were regular recreational users in 2017, a number that has increased in recent years.

A study published in Biological Psychiatry found that marijuana users who carry the AKT1 gene, which affects dopamine signaling in the brain, are seven times more likely to develop psychosis than an infrequent user or someone who does not smoke at all. Those with a genetic predisposition for mental illness risk triggering a condition's onset as a result of extended cannabis use.

Alex Berenson, author of "Tell Your Children: The Truth About Marijuana, Mental Illness, And Violence", explains that the development of mental illnesses in relation to cannabis is also more common in people whose relatives were previously affected.

"People with a family history of psychosis or schizophrenia are clearly at greater risk," Berenson said. "The closer the relative, the greater the risk."

Gayle Giese chairs the Advocacy Group for the National Alliance on Mental Illness in Broward County. The mother of a schizophrenic son, she saw firsthand how marijuana can affect a young mind. Her son used marijuana to deal with social anxiety in high school, and eventually had a psychotic episode.

"We didn't know what had caused it and maybe the pot had been laced with something more dangerous and that maybe his psychosis was drug related," Giese said. "But, it turns out it was the beginning of schizophrenia and

our lives became very traumatic because we didn't know what was happening."

Giese explained how the lack of timely treatment can worsen psychotic symptoms and lead to serious long-term problems.

"Once somebody has a bad psychotic break, if it's not treated immediately with a good first episode psychosis program, it can lead to more psychotic breaks and a more serious illness and a poor prognosis for recovery," Giese said.

She said the potential problems associated with cannabis use outweigh the benefits.

"[Psychosis and schizophrenia occur in the] late teens and early adulthood, specifically in males," Giese said.

"For females, schizophrenia often occurs a little later, mid-twenties to early thirties, so I wouldn't take any chances of smoking pot. Why take the risk?"

Many people use cannabis to ease the difficult symptoms these mental conditions cause.

They are aware of the dangers that cannabis could present and are careful not to use marijuana in conjunction with their anti-psychotic medicine to prevent harmful side effects.

One schizophrenic cannabis user, who asked to remain anonymous, smokes marijuana to deal with stress.

"It's my life. I take medication, that's it. It relaxes me. I used to be really stressed out," the source said. "Before I didn't know what to do and I just needed to chill out, so I started smoking weed with my friends."

Since the research is relatively new there have not been any significant guidelines created to address the issue of cannabis-induced mental illnesses.

# Even cats are doing CBD

## Local barber joins growing number of pet owners treating illness in furry friends

BY KEVIN REYES

Christopher Columbus High School

From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Ronald "Ron" Nahmod is clipping, styling and grooming hair at his Coral Gables barbershop, Hot Heads.

But when he gets home, his focus goes from hair to fur.

As he sits on his bed, Nahmod is surrounded by three cats. While gently petting Lilly, he reaches under the bed to invite Phoebe to come out and calls to Bella from afar.

"Feeble Phoebe is a total nut," said Nahmod, using her nickname. "When I first got her, she attacked me."

Nahmod adopted all of his cats in November 2018, after the passing of his former cat.

What was supposed to be a two-cat adoption turned into three, he said, because he didn't want to split up sisters. Then pet ownership got even more complicated when Nahmod realized two of his cats had health issues.

Lilly, a pillow-sized white cat, was nearly a goner, he said. Turns out she had diabetes.

"She was never treated and was close to death," he said. "She had to lean over to eat her food. She lived on my bed and I had to put everything on my bed, including the litter box."

Nahmod asked his friend, another owner of a diabetic cat, for some advice. His friend told him that CBD oil had been a miracle for his own cat.

"They told him they had to put his cat to sleep," Nahmod said.

"He went home and gave the cat CBD oil and the cat is totally back to normal. It doesn't need no insulin anymore."

Nahmod decided to give it a try and began gradually adding CBD oil to Lilly's meals.

He takes extra precaution by basing it off of her blood sugar levels and measuring exact doses.

Timothy Brooks, a veterinarian at Bartow

Animal Clinic, said CBD can be therapeutic for pets, especially for behavior issues.

"I've used it for a couple cases of just inflammation, but for the most part, I've used it mostly for anxiety," Brooks said.

In the past six months, Brooks said the number of customers using it to treat their pets has increased substantially, with nearly all of them coming back for refills.

Whenever possible, Brooks tries to use CBD as a primary treatment, he said. But it can also be helpful in combination with other medications.

Nahmod said CBD has also helped "feeble" Phoebe, the second sister, who had behavioral issues.

"Phoebe is a totally different cat," he said. "Her personality has totally changed. She's not as aggressive as she was."

"She's still Feeble Phoebe, but a kinder, gentler version."

Although there are pet specific CBD products, Nahmod wants only the best for his cats. He buys pure CBD oil and mixes it himself.

"You know where it's coming from," he said. "Because when it comes to your cats you want to be on top of that."

# Just. Don't.

When it comes to teaching kids about sex, nobody's talking much about sex

BY CAROLINE WHEELER-HOLLIS

Creekside High School

Phoenix Alexis-Pierre has gone to public school in Miami-Dade County all his life. He took sex education in fourth grade, middle school and high school. But now he's concerned that his sexual instruction is inadequate.

"Honestly, I don't have a lot of knowledge about sex," Alexis-Pierre said.

Alexis-Pierre is not alone in his concerns. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System reports that 40.8% of teens aged 15 to 19 in Miami-Dade County are sexually active. Meanwhile, 36% of students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools receive one or no days of sex education, according to the Miami Workers' Center.

Florida law mandates that abstinence and the consequences of teen pregnancy be taught as the basis of sex education. But many question how well that methodology prepares students for life.

"A lot of it didn't really apply to what you see in the real world," Christopher Gomez, a Catholic student, said in regards to abstinence education.

Alana Gissen, a social worker and sex therapist, said abstinence-based sex education is unrealistic and does not provide complete, accurate health information.

"They [teens] might try to be abstinent but it eventually doesn't work," she said, "and if they are not educated properly then they don't understand their bodies, sexuality, STDs and the various types of contraception."

Besides abstinence, the sex education programs in Miami-Dade emphasize anatomy.

"It's not as in-depth as they make it seem," Alexis-Pierre said. "It's like, 'oh sex is something that exists you should probably not do it', and then they move on to the actual scientific thing. It's more scientific than it is social."

An abstinence-only focus may instead lead to more teen sex.

"The moment we're told not to do something, that's what makes us want to do it more," Alexis-Pierre said. "Instead of that, just tell us to be safe while doing it."

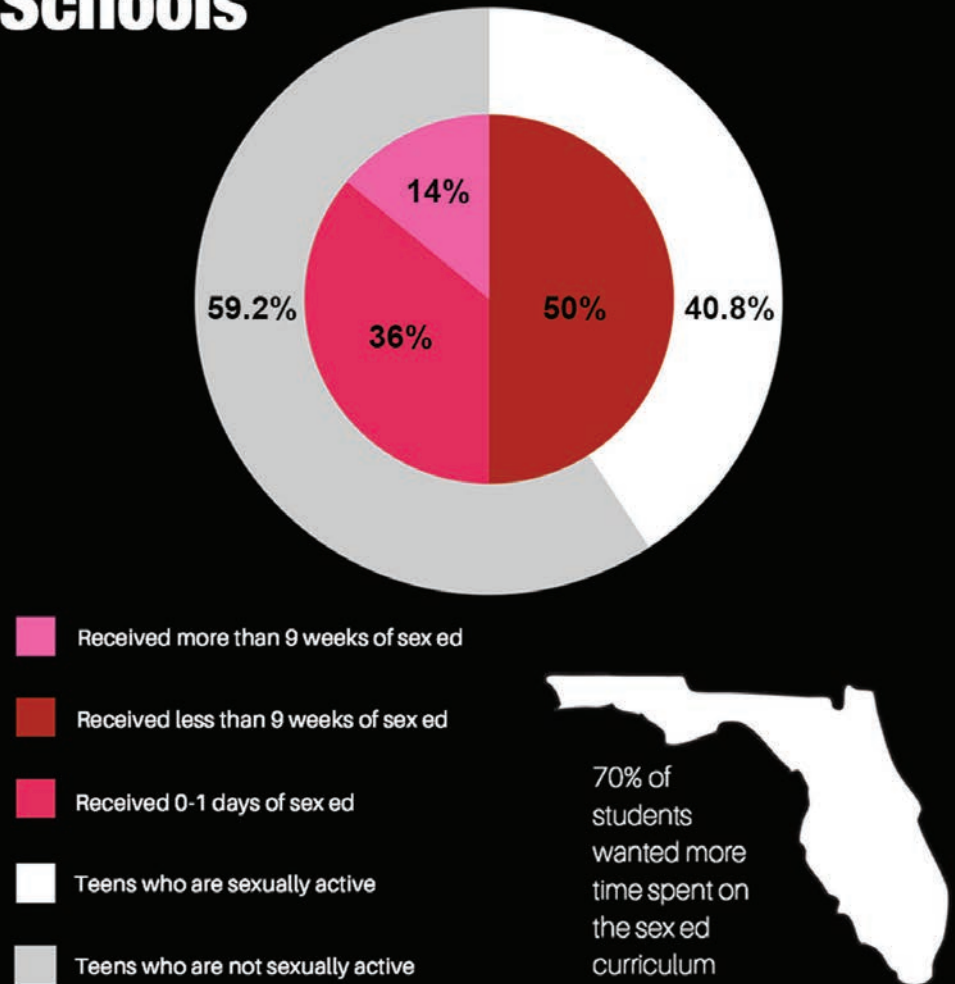
Students in Miami-Dade want to learn more about sex. Miami Workers' Center reports that 70% of students in Miami-Dade requested that more time be spent on sex education.

Although MDCPS provides information about protection on its website, little of that makes its way into the classroom.

In addition to safe-sex practices, students want to know more about the social implications of sex.

"Knowing how you may be treated after sex or knowing how it's going to affect you later

## A Look Into Sex Education In Miami-Dade County Public Schools



Source: Miami-Dade Workers' Center and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

Credit: Caroline Wheeler-Hollis

should be the focus of a course or a focus on at least a section of a course," Alexis-Pierre said.

Alexis-Pierre said he learned about STDs during his sophomore year at MDCPS. Alexis-Pierre detailed the information that the guidance counselors provided.

"They didn't teach me to prevent; they just kind of said there are condoms and there's just abstaining from sex, period. It was more the abstinence route than the protection route."

In contrast, the Broward County Public Schools system teaches comprehensive sex education. Melissa Sherman, a parent and 18-year BCPS educator, said Broward's program better informs students about consent.

Sherman recalls a teenage boy refusing to put mics up the back of girls' shirts for a theatre production.

"Ten years ago a 16-year-old boy would never have known enough about consent or body limits to have even the thought to say, 'I'm not going to touch a 12-year-old girl and put a microphone on her shirt', but this 16-year-old boy knew clearly in his mind that he wasn't going there."

Although the consent education appears to be working in Broward County, parents in Florida can choose for their children to skip sex education.

"What I noticed happened at my daughter's school was a lot of parents simply opted-out," Sherman said.

The absence of in-home sex education from parents leaves kids to eventually educate themselves via the internet, Sherman said.

"I have known children who . . . had never had any sexual contact on their own, and their first exposure to it was pornography at 11 or 12," Sherman said. "That's really dangerous because that is not at all what healthy sexuality looks like."

Parents who opt out are not seeing what happens in school when there is no consent education in sex education.

When she taught middle school, Sherman discovered that some girls had to give three blowjobs in the boys bathroom with a witness to be accepted into the "popular club." Educators are aware of similar situations, but many parents are not.

"I feel like as teachers we want to do more than parents are comfortable with us doing," Sherman said.

"As teachers, we'd be happy to step in and fill that role but we face a lot of pushback from parents who still believe that it's their job.

"Well if it's your job, then do it, but they don't."

# It's a man's world

Wage gaps are closing but there are still wide disparities in what some groups get paid

BY DAVID A. PEREZ

Christopher Columbus High School

Maruta Mang, a 48-year veteran finance executive in the banking industry, is accustomed to receiving a smaller paycheck than her male colleagues.

Mang, 84, is a triple minority because she is a woman, an octogenarian and Asian. She also is emblematic of a recent study that says minority women make 60 cents on the dollar compared to their male counterparts.

"The expectations seem to be higher for women. It is a matter of building credibility," said Mang, who is a firm believer that the wage gap has affected her, especially in the finance industry.

The study released this year on the wage gap showed that women overall earned 80% of their male counterparts for all industries.

The wage gap was especially acute in the finance industry, said Maria Ilcheva, assistant director of planning and operations for Florida International University's Metropolitan Center and author of the study.

However, there also is a significant disparity among races and age when it comes to salary.

While many are unaware of how prevalent the gap actually is, others are feeling its drastic effects.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women in Florida earn 87 cents for each dollar earned by a man. While this might not seem like a substantial difference, it results in a loss of \$5,515 per year per female worker.

"If you read our report you'll see that we tried to break down the data by industries and occupations, and it is precisely to show that the wage gap exists," Ilcheva said, adding that businesses need to change their salary structures.

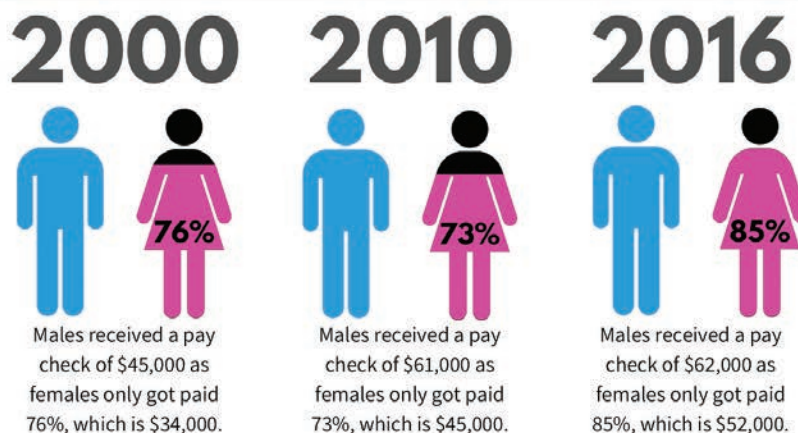
"Unfortunately, business is mostly focused on profit," she said. "For the majority of them, something needs to be regulated either from the federal government or at the local level in order for them to start making equality a priority."

Luis de la Aguilera, CEO and president of U.S. Century Bank, says he is trying to improve his company's equality profile, but admits there's work to be done at the higher end of the scale.

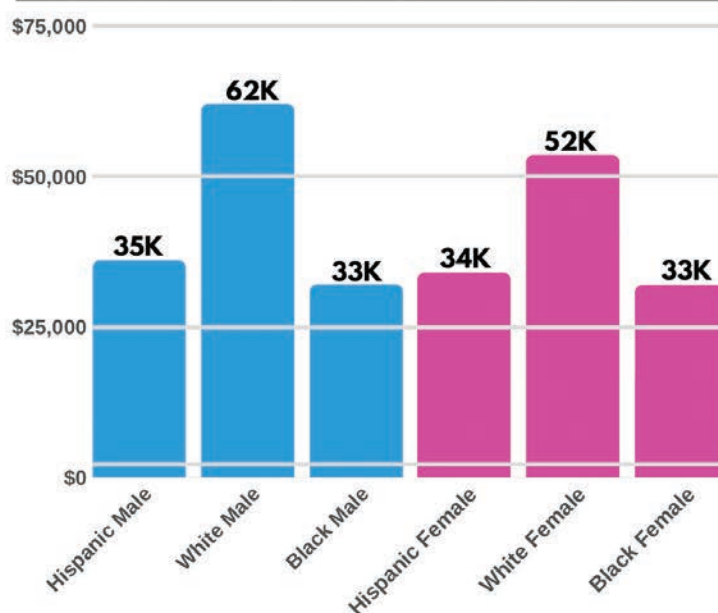
"I have been in this industry for 38 years and yes there is a wage gap to be addressed. When I started in banking in 1982, there simply were few females in management or senior and executive roles," de la Aguilera said.

Since being hired as CEO in 2015, de la Aguilera said he has been providing equal opportunities to all employees causing "a

## MEDIAN EARNINGS FOR FEMALE AND MALE WORKERS



## MEDIAN EARNINGS FOR FULL TIME WORKERS (2016)



Source: The Status of Women in Miami-Dade County (2019)

Credit: David A. Perez

very good balance of female and male in all positions including executive senior officers."

U.S. Century Bank has 181 employees, 62 men and 119 women. Women make up 65% of the workforce.

Ilcheva's report also shows that race and age are prime factors in income inequality. About 25% of women of color earn less than \$25,000 yearly, nearly 17% less than men. Hispanics and blacks are heavily affected by the wage gap as both groups have the largest poverty rate in Miami-Dade.

"A black female needs to work seven or eight months more to make as much as a white male," Ilcheva said, noting that people are working later and delaying retirement in order to maintain their lifestyle.

"It's not an option, it's not a luxury, it's not a matter of choice. It's a matter of survival," Ilcheva said.

About 50% of workers in their mid- and upper-60s do not retire because they need to keep working.

At U.S. Century Bank, workers are offered a "robust series of benefits including an employer match for a 401-K plan, health, dental, and life insurance."

De la Aguilera believes that the industry is evolving everyday.

Mang, a member of City National Bank's human resources team, is nearing 50 years in the finance industry.

"I am choosing to keep working as I find my work to be meaningful and satisfying," she said.

Pressure on corporate executives has narrowed the average wage gap by about 19%.

"It is beautiful to see impact and to see these issues being solved," Ilcheva said.

"However, there is still work to be done."

# A tale of two sacrifices

## These moms gave up everything to care for chronically ill children

BY CHIKA OJUKWU

Barbara Goleman Senior High School

It was just like any other night.

Judy Feldman and her 15-year-old son were at their home in Palmetto Bay. Andrew was playing video games and Feldman was cleaning up after dinner. Not a single thing was out of place.

Dinner...check.

Laundry...check.

Son...alive.

Just like any other night, Feldman went to Andrew's room to say good night. Rubbing his back like she always did, she felt a lump about the size of a golf ball, but, paying no mind, went to bed.

Everything was normal until it wasn't. After several weeks, the lump had grown to the size of a grapefruit. Andrew was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma, a rare cancer that targets the soft tissue and bones.

Feldman now had a child with a chronic illness.

"When you see him that weak and that sick, yeah . . . that's scary," Feldman said.

In the U.S., about 20% of children suffer from a chronic illness, a number that is rising every year. And for each chronically ill child, there is a parent or other caregiver making sacrifices to their own lives. About 66% of caregivers are female, according to the National Center on Caregiving.

Feldman, 52, has been with Andrew for every chemotherapy and radiation appointment in his year of treatment.

She had to give up her career as a preschool teacher at Bet Shira Early Childhood Center where she had worked for 15 years. She left her job the day her son was diagnosed.

"I just picked up my things and left. Taking care of Andrew was a 24-hour job," Feldman said.

She received support from friends who did what they could to help. In the end, it was her duty to take care of her son.

Making matters worse, Feldman had been in the process of a divorce when her son was diagnosed and now she was a single parent. As the year progressed, Feldman had to give up her social life, and, at times, her sanity.

"It's been a year of not really going anywhere or doing anything, except for going to the cancer institute and doctor's appointments. There was never a time that I wasn't here taking care of him," Feldman said.

While Feldman had a year of sacrifice, Deni Quinn will be taking care of her son for a lifetime. Quinn, 61, adopted a child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, a condition that affects his behavior and physical development.



Photo by Daniel Gonzalez III

**HELPING HANDS:** Deni Quinn assists son Danny with loading his car after his daily visit home.

Unlike Feldman, Quinn continued working. But as time went on and Danny's behavior worsened, she made the decision to work from home.

"Previously, I was so focused on my career, and now I have this other person to worry about," Quinn said.

Nothing could extinguish the worries that ran through her head 24/7.

This is true for most mothers dealing with chronic illness.

"It's a stressor that no one is really prepared for," said Whitney Goodman, a licensed psychotherapist at the Collaborative Counseling Center.

Mothers with chronically ill children go through a roller coaster of emotions. Both Feldman and Quinn often wished that they could bear the pain for their kids.

"As a parent, you don't want your child to suffer," Feldman said. "You'd rather go through it all instead of them."

They also both lost sight of their own well-being. Their role as caretaker affected their mental health.

"At first I was angry and trying to hide it from him. And I was going through the divorce at the same time. I was a wreck," Feldman said.

And taking care of a sick child can cause parents to get sick themselves.

Goodman has seen it many times in her practice.

"When you have a parent of a chronically ill child, you definitely are going to see stress manifesting in certain types of medical conditions," she said.

"Caregivers are notoriously bad about speaking up. They might not even want to notice it."

But both mothers have hope for the future. Feldman's son is awaiting his last surgery at the Miami Cancer Institute. He is in remission and taking a few classes online.

"Things are good. It's been a fun year," Feldman said, chuckling a little. "I need to make more money now. As soon as Andrew is done with his surgeries, I'll start a new career."

Quinn's son has moved out of the house and works a few hours a week as a gymnastics trainer, both achievements that his therapists thought he could never do successfully.

The advice Feldman has for other mothers that are going through the same experience is to not be too hard on themselves.

Quinn agrees.

"Just hang in there. See the glass half full. Don't look at the downside because once you look at the downsides, you never get through it," she said.

"Remember to always have hope."

**TAKING STOCK:** The headquarters of Take Stock in Children operates out of this structure.



Photo by Benjamin Schiller

# Finding hope in kids

## Model schools reshape the unfortunate and disadvantaged youth

**BY YASMINE MEZAWI**

Miami Lakes Educational Center

Growing up as a low-income student, Wilnic Gideon struggled to stay focused in school with no real support at home. With the help of Take Stock in Children, a model school program, he turned his life around and is giving back to his community to help students overcome battles similar to the ones he faced.

Model school programs, which take place when an outside organization provides support to low-income students in public schools, are becoming prevalent in South Florida in an effort to help underprivileged students succeed in school.

Gideon said these types of programs helped him become successful.

A Florida State University graduate, he earned a master's degree and doctorate in educational leadership from Lynn University in Boca Raton. He started working in public education eight years ago, and is now vice principal of Santaluces Community High School in Lantana, Florida.

However, in his youth, Gideon did not know what he wanted to be and often found himself getting into trouble. Coming from a low-income household, he said he lacked stability and guidance and was headed in the wrong

direction.

His world changed when he found a mentor.

"In sixth grade, I had an English teacher who believed in me," Gideon said. She "told me to apply to the [Take Stock in Children] program and when I got in, things changed."

Take Stock in Children is a non-profit organization that supports low-income students by providing them with college coaches, personal mentors and scholarships for those who want to earn their high school diploma and become first-generation college graduates while they remain drug- and crime-free.

As vice principal, Gideon's own experience has made him familiar with the "high-risk" labels many low-income students are given and how difficult it can be to overcome these stereotypes. He believes that mentorship and support through model school programs can make all the difference.

"In order to help, you have to establish a relationship where the students begin to trust you," he said.

After being shown examples of people who never made a success of themselves, Gideon serves as a reminder to students that succeeding is possible. Students are eager to confide in Gideon because they can identify with him.

"They don't know they can do it, 'til they see it themselves," Gideon said.

Partnered with the Big Brothers Big Sisters Association of Miami, Take Stock in Children serves more than 20,000 students and operates in 67 Florida counties. The organization's mission is to break the cycle of

poverty.

Other South Florida organizations are working to do the same. In Miami-Dade County alone, several school districts are starting to implement similar model school programs within their curricula.

City Year Miami focuses on supporting students and teachers. The organization helps Title I schools by providing low-income students with economic support and teachers with methods to help.

Serving middle and high schools, City Year Miami prepares students to become "the next generation of leaders," according to their online impact statement. With programs in 11 high schools and seven middle schools in the Miami-Dade area, the City Year Miami program is impacting nearly 6,500 students.

The SEED School of Miami, another model school program, opened in 2014 and serves as a college preparatory boarding school for 6th and 7th grade students.

The program emulates a college experience by providing classes and housing for all students. To make SEED Miami possible, the organization converted a Florida Memorial University Residential hall into the boarding school.

This is so students can learn to "thrive in a rigorous academic environment, be ready for college, and develop essential character traits for lifelong success," according to their website.

With 90% of SEED 9th-graders graduating from high school and 93% of SEED graduates enrolling in college, this program is helping address the dropout crisis in Miami.

Like Gideon, many low-income students are feeling the positive effects of these programs. By offering shelter, mentorship, support and more, model school programs are clearly making an impact in the Miami-Dade area.

# Beating all the odds

## Low-income kids alter their futures by overcoming hardship

BY YASMINE MEZAWI

Miami Lakes Educational Center

Shaika Surprise is one of six siblings who grew up without a father and spent years in the foster care system. She attends the University of Central Florida after overcoming much adversity.

"Coming into college I found myself at a disadvantage," she said. "I didn't apply for certain scholarships or opportunities due to the fact that I didn't know what I didn't know."

No one coached her on important life lessons. Starting from not being able to attend regular school field trips, to not finding a place to call "home," she deals with the difficulties of an unstable economic background.

According to cityyear.org, nearly 75% of the students in the Miami-Dade school district – the fifth largest nationwide – come from a low-income household.

"I noticed between me and my peers the different levels of stability and support," Surprise said.

Students in these homes struggle through levels of poverty and academic obstacles that create a division among students due to her disadvantage.

Surprise realized the lines of division at

a young age. While her friends prepared for the next class trip, she never dared to ask her parents.

Their disadvantage became even more pronounced as Surprise got older. Without a safety net to rely upon, she entered the foster care system with four of her siblings in 2012, she said.

Her brother, Jefferson, took custody of their twin brother and sister, then 14, when he was 20.

Jefferson took them in because he "felt like if they were around family, it would be best." They still live with him.

Taking care of his siblings during the day and attending classes at night, Jefferson earned a bachelor's degree in Information Technology from Miami-Dade College when he was 24 years old.

Unlike her youngest siblings, Surprise lacked a strong support system and she began to see how years of neglect affected her well being. Her background correlates with her mental health issues, she said.

After being in the foster care system, Surprise was diagnosed with depressive disorder in March 2018, and attends therapy on a weekly basis.

She was forced to learn how to live on a tight budget, keeping her from participating in extracurricular activities such as traveling.

She can be found on campus while her classmates go home for the holidays. She struggles to find a sense of belonging, she said.

Low-income students face a common enemy. They must often navigate through life alone and fight the stigma of poverty.

Rebecca Shearer, a child psychologist, studies the behavior of at-risk students and has worked with Miami-Dade county to implement programs to help them.

"The child is the center of the system and then there are concentric circles that go around the child," Shearer said. "The first system that touches the child is the family and the parents, the neighborhood, as well as the school setting."

The relationships between students and their peers are important, Shearer said.

Yet, low-income students try to find the will to continue moving forward.

Sabrina Cerquera, 21, a Miami Lakes Educational Center graduate, attends Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Ore., and is struggling to provide for herself away from home.

Reared by her Colombian mother and grandmother, she is a first-generation high school graduate among her three siblings. When applying to colleges Cerquera knew she might have to leave home, but took the chance anyway.

"Emotionally it's really hard because I don't get to see my family that often," Cerquera said. "It plays a big role on my mental health because I feel really alone at times and I don't think it's something we talk about often enough as Latinos."

Cerquera realizes she has risen above the low expectations set for her and other low-income students.

"I own my story and that this is where I come from and look at how far I've come," she said. "And I want other people to see that and understand."

## In Miami-Dade County Schools

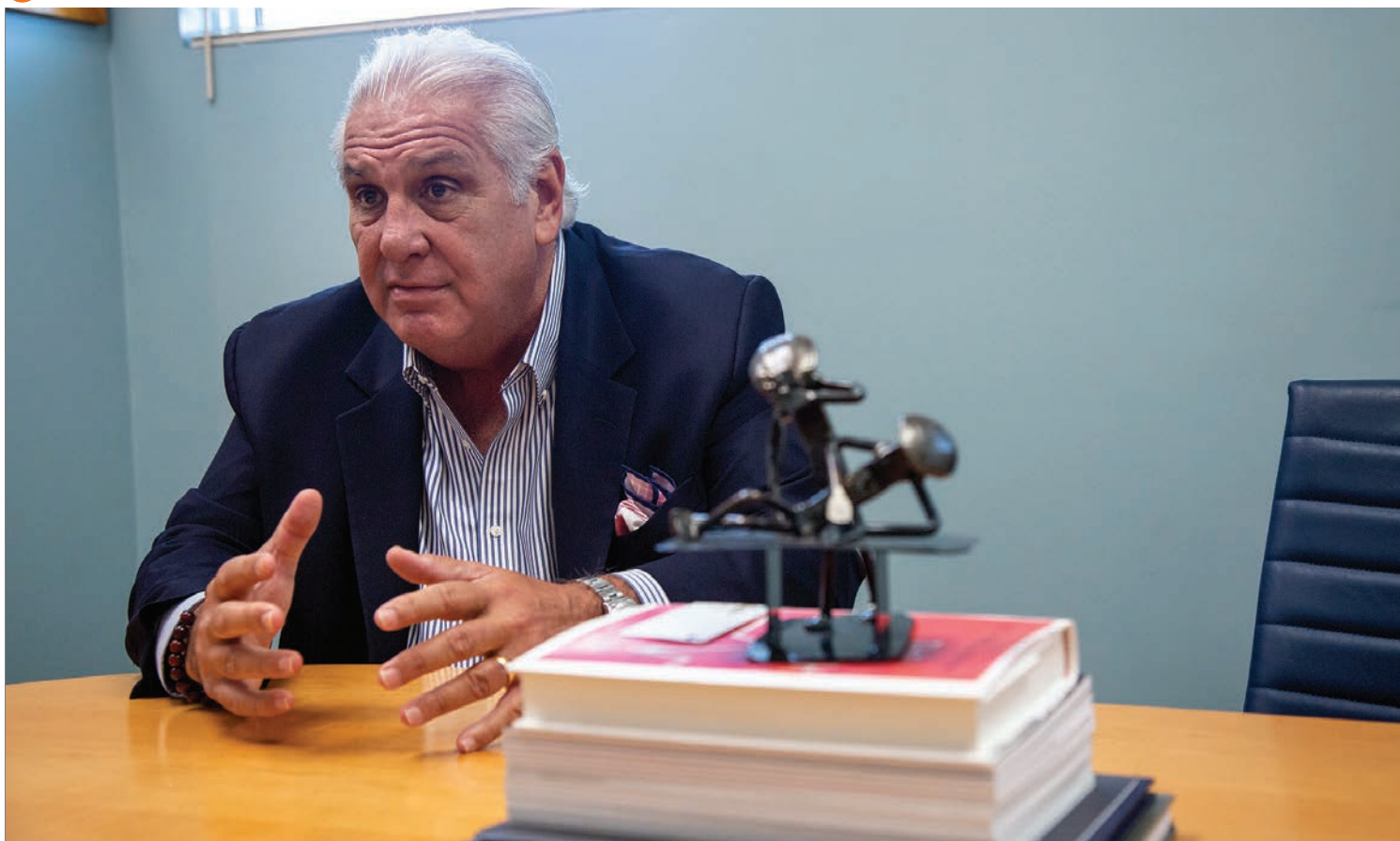


**329**  
out of 392  
schools are  
Title I

**74%** of  
students are  
low-income



**255,000**  
out of  
**345,000**  
students are  
low income  
in Miami  
Dade



**DOCTOR IS IN:** Dr. Joe Greer explains why it's necessary to expand health care nationwide.

Photo by  
Yasmine Mezawi

# Serving the underserved

## FIU departments join in providing care to needy neighborhoods

BY JOSEPH STURGEON

Cooper City High School

Hundreds of thousands of working-class Americans cannot afford a hospital visit and about 530,000 families go bankrupt each year because of unexpected medical emergencies, according to CNBC.

Florida International University's NeighborhoodHELP initiative is aimed at combating that issue in Miami-Dade communities. The program, based at the Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine, specializes in researching the social determinants that cause certain illnesses in underserved communities, and works to provide free treatment and services to the uninsured in these areas.

The South Florida Business Journal reports that Miami-Dade has one of the highest uninsured rates in South Florida.

Approximately 20% of county residents had no form of health insurance in 2017. The county's current uninsured rate is about half of what it was in 2013 but with a population of nearly 2.8 million people, the number of people without health coverage is still about 550,000.

"If you're working two or three jobs just to make ends meet and you don't have health insurance, it means you don't have benefits at work," said Dr. Pedro José Greer, chair of FIU's Department of Humanities.

"For you to go see a doctor, it means you'd have to take a full day off of work, which means your family [with] very little is going to make 20% less that week. This financial burden that we put on people [makes them] wait until they're really sick, so their family doesn't suffer."

FIU's medical, social work, law and education students work under the NeighborhoodHELP program, pooling their skills to help meet the needs of the community.

Launched in 2009, the program provided support to 436 households from July 2017 to June 2018, amounting to 1,277 patients cared for. The patients are treated by trained HWCOW students who travel from the college to their patients' homes to tend to their needs.

Disparity in access to adequate healthcare between low-income and middle-class families isn't unfamiliar to many communities across the country.

In 2017, researchers with The Milbank Quarterly, a peer-reviewed journal, found that nationally, those with an annual income of \$25,000 or less reported receiving average or poor medical care, 30% more than those who make \$100,000 or more.

In addition, a report compiled by the Miami Urban Future Initiative at FIU found that Miami has one of the highest economic inequality gaps in the nation, second only to New York City and followed by New Orleans.

"If you're in Overtown versus Brickell Key, there's a 15-year difference in your survival. Ninety percent of these diseases are caused by social determinants of health and [other] non-biological causes," Greer said.

"The most important factor for survival in America is not your genetic code; it's actually

your zip code."

NeighborhoodHELP pinpoints a community's needs through the use of social determinants, the social and economic aspects of a person's life that can affect their health. In addition to medical help, the program provides counseling, social support and legal services.

"I remember going into a household, and there was [this] young man, [he was] an immigrant and a student of Miami-Dade. His mother was dealing with mental health issues," said project manager Sophia Lacroix.

"He said he'd applied for Medicaid, and had been denied, thinking that he was applying for the correct resource. We advised him of what to do, which was to go to the Social Security office. As a result, he was able to get what he needed for his mom."

Miami-Dade County has 19 cities, six towns and nine villages. This amounts to 34 municipalities, each with their own distinct characteristics.

"Our medical schools and the health profession school can't pretend to serve everyone," said Frederick Anderson, medical director of HWCOW.

"That's why we in the program have partnered with a lot of community organizations in several communities. They include Hialeah, North Miami Beach, Little Haiti, any community with longstanding health disparities."

Greer said that access to healthcare should not be a privilege, but rather a right.

"There's a moral obligation that we have as individuals in this position if we take it," Greer said.

"We're supposed to take care of people without prejudice.

# A new route to the hospital



Photo by Alexander Someillan

**WHO YOU GONNA CALL:** Stephanie Perez, 21, saved hundreds of dollars by taking an Uber to the emergency room at Doctors Hospital in Coral Gables.

## More and more people are taking ride shares instead of ambulances

**BY BENJAMIN SCHILLER**

Saint Andrews School

When University of Miami junior Stephanie Perez thought she was about to faint on campus, she was advised to take the ride-sharing service Uber to save hundreds of dollars to get to a nearby hospital.

"I didn't want to be transported by an ambulance, but the medical staff at the wellness center wanted me to go over to get checked out for precautionary reasons," Perez said.

Perez was suffering from dehydration, anxiety, stress and lack of sleep.

Her trip to Doctors Hospital, about a mile away, cost about the same as a meal instead of hundreds of dollars in an ambulance with flashing sirens and blasting horns.

A University of Kansas study released in October 2017 found that the number of ambulance rides per 1,000 people dropped to nine compared to 17 rides per 1,000 in 2009.

Javi Correoso, public affairs manager of Uber in Florida, would not release how many Uber riders use the service to go to the hospital because of competitive reasons. Lyft officials did not respond to calls for comment.

Uber driver Kristina S. of Tampa said she has been transporting patients to medical appointments since she began driving for the company a year ago.

Kristina is unlike most Uber drivers

because she has a medical transportation background.

"I feel that every driver should receive medical training, such as CPR and how to deal with intoxicated passengers," Kristina said.

Like Kristina, Uber driver Alex T. of Hialeah Gardens agrees that ride-share companies should provide basic training on how to respond to medical episodes.

However, the 22-year-old recent college graduate said there could be some backlash if ride-share companies implement basic medical training.

"I work for Uber 25-30 hours a week and I signed up for the job to make a living wage, but I still feel that it is vital for (us), to know what to do if something does happen to the passenger," Alex said.

Alex, like some other Uber drivers, said basic training should be introduced to drivers. However, it could lead to controversy among the organization's drivers and executives.

"Drivers will look for a union and would need more benefits to continue working for the company because we don't want to feel responsible for someone else's life," Alex said.

Ambulance rides can cost up to \$1,200 per mile in Miami, according to health.costhelper.com. Non-Miami residents get slapped with an additional \$100 non-resident fee, the Miami Herald reported.

Due to these extensive costs, people are choosing ride-share companies such as Uber or Lyft to get to their medical appointments and even the emergency room.

Uber recognized the need for medical transportation by creating Uber Health, a product that is a platform for medical providers to schedule transportation for

lower-income patients, eliminating their transportation barrier.

According to a study conducted by Dr. Samina Syed, an endocrinologist in Janesville, Wis., 31 percent of people polled have no or unreliable means of transportation to the emergency room or even doctor appointments.

The study also reported that lower income households are more likely to have diseases and illnesses due to no transportation.

"Uber Health will eliminate this barrier by allowing patients to receive cost-efficient and reliable transportation in only a matter of minutes," Correoso said.

About 3.6 million Americans miss medical appointments every year due to a lack of transportation or due to the costs of being driven by a private service, according to a study conducted by Altarum Institute, a non-profit research consulting firm based in Michigan.

Starting on July 1, people who are insured by Medicare and Medicaid in Florida will have their travel expenses covered, Correoso said. Uber will be considered to be a state option for medical transportation.

Kristina and Alex were unfamiliar with Uber Health because Uber X and Uber Health drivers receive the same calls. Drivers are not told whether it is a health call or a regular call, Correoso said.

If a passenger is in an emergency situation, Uber urges them to call 911 and have an ambulance sent to their location. If it's a minor injury, such as a broken bone, it is safe to call an Uber, Correoso said.

"We recommend that our riders receive medical professional help and (Uber is) never a substitute for an ambulance."



**WORRIED MOM:** A concerned mother of three, Alissa Alfonso says that the issue of violence in schools deserves a more comprehensive solution than active shooter drills. She worries about the effect of these drills on her children. "I just think it's too heavy for them, it's too heavy for a kid to carry that [fear]. I know they need to be prepared, but it's such a hard topic."

# Facing fear in the classroom

## Affected parties talk about the experience of school shooter drills

**PHOTO ESSAY BY THOMAS MORCILLO**

Coral Gables Senior High School

In the aftermath of the Feb. 14, 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the Legislature passed a bill that requires all public schools in Florida to perform drills for active shooter and hostage situations at least as often as drills for other situations like fires and natural disasters. Similar policies have begun to appear across the nation.

Since the 17 deaths at MSD, there have been 31 school shootings and 71 people injured or killed, escalating a national panic over school safety.

Are these drills effective? Do they do enough for students and school staff? Or do they cause more harm than good?

We reached out to parents, students and teachers in the Miami area to report on the experiences and perspectives of those affected.

For more portraits, please go to [miamimontage.org](http://miamimontage.org).



**NORMALIZED STUDENT:** As a rising third grader, Lucia Puig has experienced active shooter drills for most of her years as an elementary school student. "I'm not nervous because I usually every day mostly ask my teacher if there's going to be a lockdown. If she's says 'no, we never heard that there was a lockdown' and there is, that's probably just a surprise or it's a real thing. So I'm not really nervous."



**CONCERNED GRAD:** Laura Mazo, who graduated in May, says that the traumatic nature of these drills is unfair to students who are susceptible to anxiety and stress. "We just heard on the PA that we have a code red and then a lot of kids were running and trying to get into the classrooms as fast as they can. The classroom I went to was really dark and crowded... Everyone was just quiet and kind of anxious because [we didn't] know what was happening."



**MSD SURVIVOR:** Eric Garner, broadcasting teacher at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, continues to teach at the school, and acknowledges the need for active shooter drills in spite of their triggering nature. "We need to be safe, and we need to know that we're safe, but that can't be the overriding factor in our lives. We need to still live."



**STRESSED TEACHER:** A mother and teacher at True North Classical Academy, Gisel Zapata says that the issue of violence has created a new atmosphere of stress and worry in her school. "In one of the drills, we had to be in an active role, and we had to combat the person who was coming in... We all went to my partner's room, and somebody came in, jiggled the door, and the two teachers were supposed to fight and stop him. [My teaching partner] had to pin him up against the wall while the kids were watching... And I'm supposed to herd these children out. And it was awful, not something you ever want to do. And I don't think it was realistic. I don't think that the two of us could have fought against a man with a gun who's losing his mind."

# Fresh food from farm to table

## Movement pushes to bypass middleman with direct delivery

BY ALEXANDER SOMEILLAN

Christopher Columbus High School

When it comes to food, Manny Wong believes that the origin of every single bite should be transparent.

Fullei Fresh is Wong's hydroponic farm, which grows plants using mineral nutrient solutions in a water solvent instead of soil.

The farm specializes in delivering produce directly to retailers, bypassing many steps in distribution that can be detrimental to the freshness or quality of the food. This is especially important because it retains the vitamins that determine the level of nutritional content in the food.

"We have a full traceability program. So if you look at our products, you'll be able to trace it all the way back to who grew the product, the date of when it was harvested and more," Wong said.

Farm-to-table is generally defined as a social movement that advocates for serving local food at restaurants. Not only must the food be local, but also directly acquired from the producer.

The movement has gained traction because of its major health benefits.

This lifestyle is healthier for the human body and the environment. According to the Automotive Training Center, the average 18-wheel semi-truck travels about 5.6 miles per gallon of diesel fuel. That means about 286 gallons of diesel fuel are needed to transport food 1,500 miles.

Americans who get their food from factory farms are seeing drastic health problems. Some of the biggest concerns include the decreasing nutritional value of food and outbreaks of E.coli and other dangerous bacteria.

"I believe freshness in the food industry is key," said Eileen Andrade, owner of Finka & Amelia's 1931.

"We see a lot of crazy things in the industry right now where everyone is injecting hormones and other dangerous things into the food that their customers end up consuming," Andrade said.

By discarding heavily processed foods, Americans avoid the high calorie intake and switch to all-natural foods. Also, produce that has to make an expedition to the grocers is often picked before it is completely ripe, which lessens its nutritional content.

According to the Center for Food Safety, a non-profit public interest and environmental advocacy organization, "The genetic engineering of plants and animals is looming as one of the greatest and most intractable



Photo by Joseph Sturgeon

**HEALTHY HARVEST:** Rose Vermeille washes sprouts inside Fullei Fresh facilities in Little Haiti.

environmental challenges of the 21st Century."

The center has estimated that upwards of 75% of all processed products on the shelves of supermarkets have some sort of genetically engineered ingredients.

"We actually like to go out and meet the people who are raising our meat so that we know what we are giving in our restaurant is a good product," Andrade said. In doing so, she ensures that all food products remain free of genetically engineered ingredients.

Consuming locally-sourced food is not a new trend. Prior to the mid-1900s, locally sourced food was mainstream as there was no other option due to limitations in transportation. However, the enactment of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 created opportunities for the widespread

transportation of produce.

The passage of this act led to the demise of family farms and the rapid rise of large-scale machine-driven farms. Despite the huge growth in population over the last century, Americans have seen the number of farms in the country drop and the size of surviving farms increase.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the number of farms in the United States since the year 1900 has dropped 63%, while the average farm size has risen by 67%.

So what's next?

"I think people nowadays need to do more homework on where their food items are coming from," Wong said. "Not every grocer is the same."

"Do your homework."

# Big shots dish ads for diet fads

Dietary supplements circulate throughout social media, where influencers rule

BY CARSON MERLO

Saint Thomas Aquinas High School

In an Instagram post shared in January 2019, actress and socialite Kim Kardashian uploaded a mirror selfie with a meal replacement shake in hand and several Flat Tummy Co. dietary products on the counter.

Her caption read, “You guys know I looove @flatummyco shakes. I’ve just restarted them and I’m already feeling so good.” The post received 2.8 million likes and more than 22,000 comments in a matter of hours.

Like the millions who follow Kardashian, many Americans are making health decisions based on their social media feeds, and companies are turning to social media influencers to market their products.

Influencer Marketing Hub, a marketing resource for brands, defines an influencer as “an individual who has the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of his/her authority, knowledge, position or relationship with his/her audience.”

Flat Tummy Co., a dietary supplement company that owes much of its popularity to influencers, is most known for its Flat Tummy Tea, which promises to “cleanse and deloat.”

“Our programs are super safe and gentle and use only USDA certified organic products,” a Flat Tummy representative said. “We primarily market towards older women looking to get back on track. Despite being safe, our programs are not designed for women under the age of 18.”

Even so, many raise concerns about trendy weight loss products like Flat Tummy Tea as they may be putting others at risk.

After model Amber Rose promoted Flat Tummy Co.’s Organic Pregnancy Tea on Instagram, actress Jameela Jamil responded to her post with a series of tweets.

“Flat tummy products for.... pregnant women? Is this FDA approved? Are we... f\*\*\*ing kidding?” tweeted Jamil. “So many women with such big platforms promoting such irresponsible f\*\*ks\*\*t that it blows my mind.”

Nadine Mikati, a lecturer at the University of Miami’s Department of Kinesiology and



Photo by Katya Gutierrez

**BUYER BEWARE:** Nadine Mikati, a college lecturer and registered dietitian, says people should be skeptical of where they get information about diet fads and trends.

Sport Sciences, said that sharing health advice from advertisements that aren’t researched or supported by doctors can have negative effects on those who choose these diets.

“You don’t know if social media models who are promoting these advertisements have had any work done to their body yet,” Mikati said.

“Influencers claim to take this tea because ‘this is how my tummy got flat and slim.’ Unfortunately, [people] are buying these products, which is probably a diuretic that would help them lose very little weight in the beginning because of how much water is being taken out of their body, causing dehydration.”

Mikati, also a registered dietitian, believes that when people following these diet trends don’t get the results they want, it could lead to eating disorders.

In a Teen Vogue article published in March 2019, Iman Harari-Kia, recounts how ‘detox teas’ fueled her eating disorder when she was a teen. At the time, she became an avid user with the hopes of becoming thinner.

“I started to have extreme reactions every time I tried to digest a meal; it would start small, as a cough stuck in my chest or burp caught at the bottom of my throat, but in minutes, I’d projectile vomit all over my clothes,” Harari-Kia wrote in the article. “I was scared to eat a full meal.”

Her long-term use of detox teas resulted

in her being diagnosed with Celiac disease, gastroparesis and a higher risk of heart disease and liver damage, all lifelong conditions.

In a letter to the Federal Trade Commission, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., expressed, “deep concern [about] the growing trend of ‘detox teas’ and their false promotion as shortcuts to healthy weight loss and management.”

Miami-based influencer Meriam Gonzalez, who promoted Flat Tummy Tea to more than 100,000 Instagram followers, said that it’s harmless for influencers to share their preferences.

“There is nothing wrong with promoting different brands that propose to make you slim,” Gonzalez said. “If [social media influencers] have a journey with proven results, they are only sharing their stories and what worked for them.”

However, Mikati advises the opposite. She thinks people should be skeptical of nutritional advice that doesn’t come from professionals and diets that promise quick weight loss without effort.

“Celebrities should be given more scrutiny because they reach so many people,” Mikati said.

“One bad decision or one wrong advertisement that they endorse can potentially ruin lives.”

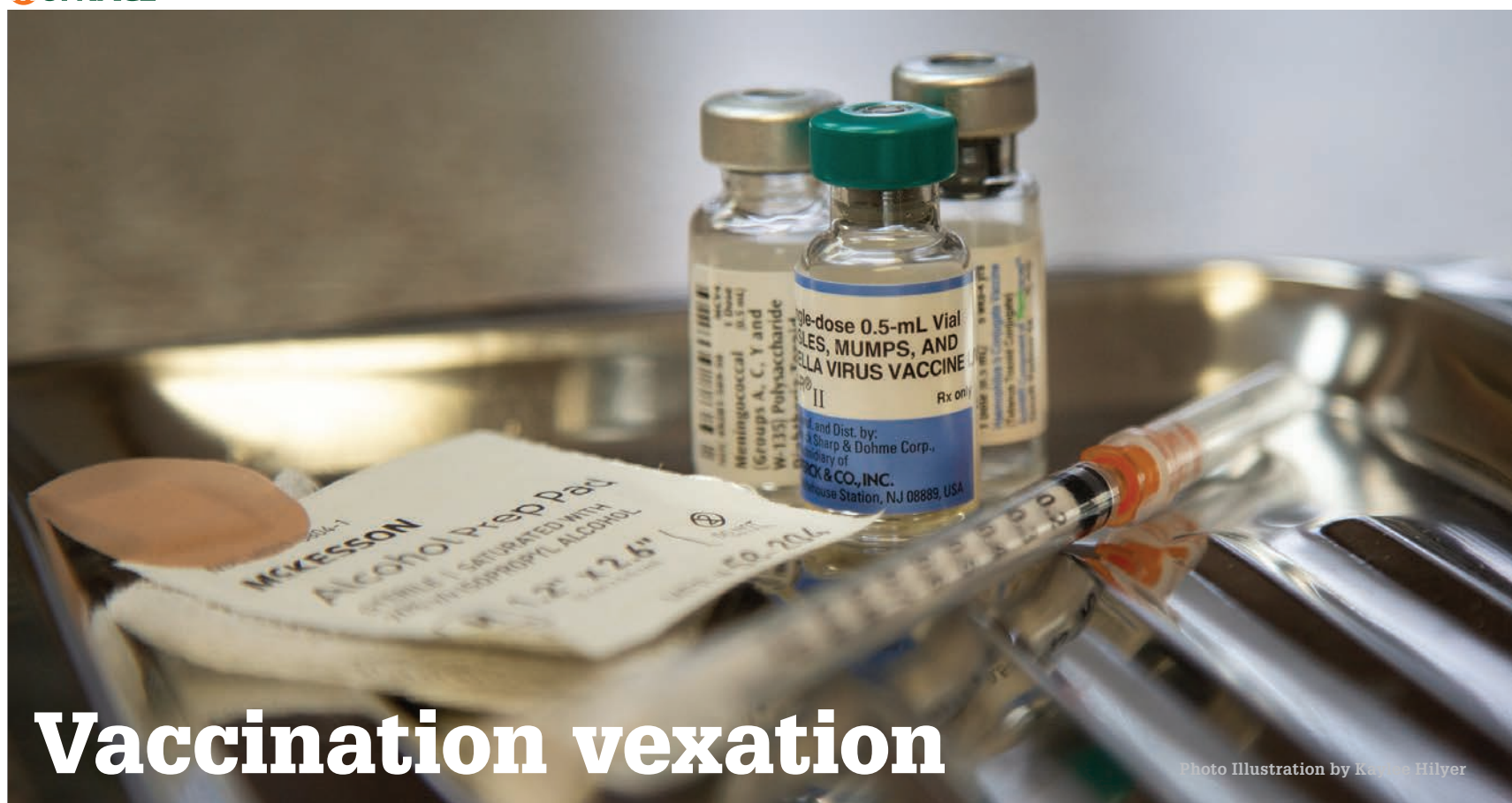


Photo Illustration by Kayla Hilyer

# Vaccination vexation

## Impassioned mothers debate the possible dangers of getting their kids immunized

BY BENJAMIN SCHILLER

Saint Andrew's School

South Florida parents are torn between whether to vaccinate their children as volumes of information come to light from both legitimate and less reputable sources about the effects of injecting their children with supposedly non-lethal amounts of dormant viruses.

Angelique Gerow, the mother of a boy and a girl in Plantation, is a supporter of the anti-vaccination movement because of what she read regarding the ill effects from toxins and stimulants used in vaccinations.

"I think it is too much to inject vaccinations into the tiny bodies of newborn children," Gerow said.

Gerow and her husband are so committed to their beliefs that he followed the hospital's medical staff immediately after she gave birth to assure their new-born son Grayson was not vaccinated.

Grayson needed the mandatory vaccinations before starting preschool, so Gerow formulated a plan in which Grayson would receive one vaccination at a time instead of the cocktail of immunizations all at once.

Isolation would allow the family to see the reactions. Grayson had a negative reaction to the Hepatitis B shot, which supported Gerow's theory.

More than 4,000 students entered kindergarten without being vaccinated due to exemptions at the start of the 2018-2019 school year in Miami-Dade, Broward and

Palm Beach County Public Schools, or 7% of 54,000 pupils, the Sun-Sentinel reported in April. In Florida, 11,500 students entered kindergarten with a vaccination exemption, or about 6% of 200,000 students.

"A request for a religious [or medical] exemption from immunization requirements must be presented to the facility/school on the Department of Health's Exemption from Immunization form," the National Vaccine Information Center said on its website.

Many parents can relate to the Gerow's previous experiences with immunizations.

Jessica M., a mother of two in Miramar, said she almost died when she was an infant. After receiving the EDP vaccination, which is no longer used, Jessica's brain became swollen and her body became red and puffy, she said.

Now, 25 years later, Jessica's 9-year-old son received a series of vaccinations. Jessica says these vaccinations gave her son speech issues, chronic ear infections, motor ticks and depression. Due to privacy concerns, Jessica would not provide Miami Montage with her last name or the names of her children.

Jessica concluded that the aluminum salt in the vaccination lead to a toxic effect in her son's brain. The only way that the aluminum salt could be removed is through detoxification, a medical removal of toxic substances.

The detoxification of the aluminum from the brain needed to be done quickly because the blood brain barrier seals around age four, Jessica said.

Detoxification is a common practice for children who develop severe issues from vaccinations. Lyndsay S., a mother of five from Austin, Texas, said that her son, Jude, also suffered severe complications from vaccinations when he was 2 years old and was detoxed.

After his immunizations, Jude lost 60% of his speech, couldn't walk, and screamed for 12 hours at a time. Also, Jude had black

tar in his bowel, rashes all over his body, and sensitivity to light and movement. Like Jessica's son, Jude developed ticks.

More than \$100,000 later in medical bills, Lyndsay and her husband, Jason, who suffers from Methylenetetrahydrofolate Reductase, realized Jude had the disease. MTHFR is a genetic mutation that could lead to behavioral and physical problems caused by immunizations.

"Parents need to know their child's genetic makeup before allowing them to receive vaccinations," Lyndsay said.

The Marie family from Fort Knox, Ky., is in favor of vaccinations.

Jeannette Marie's three children, Norah, 10; Lilah, 9; and Brenna, 7; receive their flu shots annually and receive all vaccinations when required. The family has followed the same procedure for Jeannette's step-daughter, Mercedes, 12.

The children attend school on a military base, which requires vaccinations. Children on bases can still be exempted under more difficult circumstances. With strict rules and a neighborhood that preaches respect and discipline, Marie said it would be immoral to disobey the school's requirement.

Working with vaccinations is also normal for Carrie Falowski, a mother of two from Fort Lauderdale. Falowski is a nurse in adult care.

Her sons, Keagan, 4, and Aiden, 3 months, are up-to-date with their vaccinations and have not suffered any illnesses or injuries from immunizations.

Falowski said the vaccinations commonly used across the world have been around for more than 50 years.

"If the vaccinations have been tested for decades, then why would they give them to our children if there was something wrong with them?" Falowski said.

"Everyone has a choice and right to what they want to inject into their bodies."

**NO HOPE:**  
A student  
logs on to  
the online PE  
site, called  
"HOPE."

Photo by  
Alexander  
Someillan

# Online oxymoron

## Web PE class allows students to beat the system for two credits

**BY KATYA GUTIERREZ**

Coral Gables Senior High School

Zaira Gonzalez prepared for her first high school PE class in a peculiar way. She left her sneakers and PE shorts in the closet and took out her laptop.

Instead of loosening up with jumping jacks and toe touches, she cracked her knuckles and stretched her mouse finger.

Gonzalez is one of many taking advantage of a Florida law that allows high school students to get physical education credit online. Florida Virtual School, also known as FLVS, has become a means for students to get their credits without having to take up an entire class period.

Though convenient, online PE has a number of critics who contend that a curriculum without accountability for a real workout regimen is not effective.

Although physical education is a graduation requirement for a basic high school diploma in Miami-Dade, students who go online no longer have to engage in the traditional physical activities taught in the classroom.

Only 33.6% of Miami-Dade teens engage in

regular physical activity, according to a 2018 Health Council of South Florida study.

For Gonzalez, it was a matter of convenience.

"I decided to take the class during the summer so that when I started my freshman year I wouldn't have to take it."

Eric Gaines, the instructional leader of personal fitness at FLVS, said the course is "very, very popular, especially with homeschool students and high school seniors."

"It's a way for them to complete their credit and leaves them more room for other courses."

Tania Clow, communications manager of FLVS, said the course allows for customization. Students can choose a sport more suitable for them, rather than having a sport assigned to them.

When choosing classes for high school, students are usually given the option to take either online or traditional PE. Because Florida schools require students to take a physical education course and an online course to graduate, many students use FLVS to fulfill both requirements.

Noelle Sanchez, a rising senior at Coral Gables Senior High, is another student who satisfied both requirements by taking the course.

"I just wanted credit for the class and also because for school you need to pass an online course to graduate so I needed that," said Sanchez. "It was also easier."

Although the online course allows flexibility, there are contrasting opinions on the program's effectiveness. After taking the

online course, Gonzalez said that it is better to take physical education at school.

"There's not a physical teacher there to watch you do the workouts so you can be like, 'Oh I worked out 10 minutes' when you didn't," Gonzalez said.

Alexis Canaves, a health fitness specialist at the UHealth Fitness and Wellness Center at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, emphasized the importance of physical fitness for teens.

Canaves explained that real exercise helps improve learning and retention in young people.

"There needs to be a physical aspect for it to really be PE," she said.

Mariano Gutierrez, assistant general manager of the UFC Gym in Kendall, said that, along with missing out on necessary physical activity, taking PE online excludes the important team building skills formed in a traditional PE class.

"Physical education has a lot to do with the social interaction that teenagers and young people have," Gutierrez said.

According to the Health Council of South Florida, last year 12.8% of teens in Miami-Dade were obese. A year earlier, the CDC reported that only 3 in 10 teens get the recommended 60 minutes of daily exercise and that fewer have gym class every day.

Sanchez explained that online PE gives students little incentive to meet their exercise goals. She "kind of" did her online exercises but only needed to record video of a small part of them and complete a quiz to finish her work.

Although the program periodically updates the videos used in the course, there are no major changes planned for the future of the physical education curriculum on FLVS.



**STD FREE  
FOR FREE:**  
Condoms  
were  
distributed  
at the 2019  
Wynwood  
Pride Festival.

Photo by  
David Perez

# LGBTQ+ nothing

## Current sex education courses are not inclusive for all

**BY KAYLEE HILYER**

McArthur High School

Ariel Sabillon wished he had cancer rather than HIV.

“When I was diagnosed with HIV, I honestly thought it was the end of my life,” he said.

Sabillon, a 22-year-old who identifies as queer and non-binary, did not receive the sex education he needed while in middle and high school. Because of his sexual identity, he felt pressured to have a lot of casual sex, which led to him contracting HIV as a junior in high school.

“Most of my sexual education from those years came from Yahoo Answers and Google,” said Sabillon, a Florida State University student from South Florida. “If it’s not the internet, it’s community dialogue.”

The act of having sex is complex and discussing it is often taboo. Due to a lack of proper education, many people who identify as LGBTQ+ are left on their own to learn the basics and how to keep themselves and others safe.

In fact, the Guttmacher Institute, an organization dedicated to educating Americans on sexual health, reports that only 12 states discuss LGBTQ+ topics in sex education classes, with only nine of them allowed to discuss them in a positive light.

Sabillon also knew little about STD testing. He didn’t realize that he had the

disease until a partner accused Sabillon of infecting him.

Although Sabillon’s HIV is now being treated, he is passionate about educating other youth so they do not end up in his position.

In an effort to determine where LGBTQ+ sex education is being taught, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), conducted a National School Climate Survey. The report indicated poor national and state leadership when it comes to developing sex education standards.

GLSEN found that even though “77.6% [of students] had received some form of sex education in school, the sex education they received did not typically include LGBTQ topics.” The survey also found that only “6.7% [of students] reported having ever received LGBTQ-inclusive sex education at school.”

As GLSEN discovered, most schools still do not include LGBTQ+ topics during sex education, despite the fact that the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage nationwide in 2015. That’s because most schools have “No Promo Homo” and abstinence-only standards.

“No Promo Homo” (short for No Promotion of Homosexuality) laws prevent schools from discussing LGBTQ+ topics in a positive way in the classroom. Six states still enforce these laws but Florida is not one of them. Even so, Florida is one of 37 states that require abstinence-only sex education, which focuses only on discouraging students from having sex.

Sabillon’s experience with contracting HIV is one of the worst-case scenarios. But even students who have had an easier experience find the lack of LGBTQ+ sex education frustrating.

Christopher Beytia Frentzel, who identifies as gay, said learning lessons on pregnancy in his classes seemed irrelevant.

“Obviously, me being gay, what the f\*\*k do they have to do with me. I just remember them showing us a pregnancy in a classroom and trying to scare us with it,” he said. “I will never get anyone pregnant, so that didn’t really scare me.”

Even with the abstinence-only model, some schools still advocate for the use of contraceptives, but the education students receive is inconsistent. This leads students to feel left out and puzzled.

“It was a very confusing time because I was just starting to have sex,” Sabillon said. “I had no way I could discuss certain things that I had to learn, and I feel like I’m just now learning those things.”

In addition to the physical consequences, a lack of education can affect students’ mental health.

“Non-heterosexual students really face dire and more severe consequences around mental health,” said Becca Mui, the education manager for GLSEN.

Although there is a lack of proper sex education in schools, many community-based organizations have stepped up to offer students LGBTQ-oriented education.

The YES Institute is the “only place that takes education and translates it to everyone,” said Mariana Ochoa, volunteer and former intern for the organization located in Coral Gables. “They do that through communication courses and educating the public on gender and orientation.”

“There’s not a one-size-fits-all solution,” Sabillon said. “Instead of controlling someone’s sexuality, try to work with the grain, not against it.”

# It's not always a gift

## Gifted programs can result in separation among young students

BY DANIEL GONZALEZ III

Miami Lakes Educational Center

Pinecrest Glades Elementary student Angelina Reyes, 9, remembers losing all her friends when she got into the gifted program.

"I didn't have time to talk to them since I was always doing work," she said. "My teacher became more strict. We used to have a lot of fun but now we have to study more."

The gifted program aims to accommodate students who are naturally more advanced by providing them with curricula that are faster paced and more rigorous.

However, the program is causing issues such as isolation, stigmatization and social anxieties for some students.

In Florida last year, the number of students enrolled in the gifted program in kindergarten through 12th grade was 176,457, only about 6% of approximately 2.8 million total students, according to the Florida Department of Education. Although a small percentage, the impact is large.

Nathan Carlson, 11, a student at Beachside Montessori Village, didn't score high enough to make it to the gifted program and said he felt frustrated about it.

"The gifted classes got to do more activities. They also worked faster and got done faster, leaving more free time at the end of the year. I didn't get to do that because I was in the regular class," he said.

His mom, Lillie Carlson, who is a fourth- and fifth-grade substitute teacher at Nathan's school, agreed that the gifted students had more opportunities outside the classroom.

"The gifted classes get to go to a special chess class and a student Apple convention. They have more elaborate projects and present (those projects) to the regular classes," Carlson said.

"The non-gifted kids would then complain and ask how come they don't get to go and why they couldn't do those projects. It's honestly very unfair."

Creating balance in a diverse student body can be difficult, said Manuel Sanchez III, principal of Barbara Goleman High School.

"You have to strategize the way you go about things," Sanchez said. "Ensuring you reward and recognize students without making other students feel separated or left out is very important."

In Florida, giftedness is included under the Exceptional Student Education plan (ESE). The Florida Department of Education describes "exceptional students" to include children who are gifted and children who have disabilities.

Testing requirements in Florida can be variable depending on the district. In general, a score of 130 or higher on an IQ



Photo by Caroline Wheeler-Hollis

**IT'S WITHIN YOU:** Freshman Sofia Palomino didn't test well enough to qualify for the gifted program, but she soon realized she didn't need it to be successful and achieve.

test is necessary, although other factors such as language barriers, family income and standardized test scores are also considered.

A gifted distinction is meant to help students who need harder challenges, but it may disadvantage the other students, said education specialist Katie Bory.

"Students being made aware that they did not get into the gifted program definitely has a negative effect," Bory said. "It hurts their confidence as well as their self-esteem."

"Everybody knew who the gifted kids were," says Sofia Palomino, a freshman at Miami Lakes Educational Center who did not make it into the gifted program. "The gifted students were given more attention than the regular kids and it was obvious."

Sometimes, a gifted label can bring with it extra pressure.

Angelina Reyes's mother, Laritza Reyes, said her daughter struggled in the beginning of the transition from regular second grade to gifted third grade.

"Her first nine-week progress reports she had Bs and Cs and I was confused because those weren't grades she used to get," Reyes said.

After Reyes and her daughter met with the teacher, they realized Angelina had been holding back.

"She was hiding her struggle from the new harder work in fear she would get put back in regular," Reyes said. Keeping kids separated by intellectual abilities might hinder their social skills, Bory said.

"They are so focused on academics they forget they are children," she said.

Some gifted students might not be getting any benefits at all, according to a study conducted at Michigan State University in 2013.

It examined 14,000 fifth-graders and focused on the students who fell on the margin with scores qualifying or not qualifying by only a few points.

The gifted students who barely got in showed no improvement over the regular students in standardized tests. It's important that every student is given an equal opportunity to succeed, Sanchez said.

"All students should have access to achieve what they want to achieve," he said.

And some students access those opportunities on their own, regardless of being in the gifted program or not.

"I would not want to be put into the gifted program," Palomino said. "Not being in it showed me that it's not really about the course but about how much you want to achieve."



Photo Illustration by Lukas Guerra

# The power of words

## Early exposure to vocabulary is essential for a child's growth

BY ABIGAIL TUSCHMAN

Cooper City High School

When a 5-year-old starts screaming and biting during a playroom argument over an action figure, the child often is labeled “troubled” or “temperamental.”

But behind colorful alphabet blocks and glossy picture books, the preschooler's tantrum might point to a larger problem, an insidious phenomenon known as the “word gap.”

“When a conflict arose in the classroom, [children with delayed speech development] didn't always have the words or vocabulary to express themselves,” former preschool teacher Gina Gates said.

Coined by Kansas researchers Betty Hart and Todd Risley, the word gap describes dramatic differences in the vocabularies of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The researchers found there could be a gap of 30 million words by the time children reach age 3, a startling figure that inspired programs such as the Thirty Million Words Initiative and Providence Talks.

“You notice [a word gap] in children as young as 2 or 3 years old,” Gates said.

As many as 19% of children aged 2 to 7 might experience language delay, according to an article in the medical journal *American Family Physician*. The word gap observed in young children is closely tied to income inequality. Early language delay is much more common in children of low socioeconomic status due to fewer resources and more restricted learning experiences.

Six out of 10 American 4-year-olds are not enrolled in publicly funded preschool

programs. Other options, such as private childcare, can be out of many families' budgets. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the annual cost of child care for a 4-year-old in Florida is \$7,668. The median household income in Florida is \$50,883.

For those children in low-income homes, high-quality early childcare can be critical for speech development. An article by Lynn K. Perry, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Miami, said that preschools providing students with dense exposure to complex syntax and vocabulary can improve their language development.

One might assume that a child can “catch up” and overcome this word gap, but its effects are lingering. The oral language and emergent literacy skills acquired during preschool years are foundational for later literacy.

Delayed vocabulary development also can be an indicator of a child's future academic struggles. If a child is a poor reader at the end of first grade, there is a 90% probability that they will remain a poor reader at the end of fourth grade, according to the former U.S. Commissioner of Education Ernest L. Boyer.

Julie Antilla, chair of undergraduate teacher education at Seattle Pacific University, argues that educators should ensure that students meet their grade-level achievement standards, no matter their vocabulary development, before starting school. But for teachers, this can seem like an unfair expectation.

“By the end of the year, I was expected to have all those children, regardless of how they came in, at the same level,” Gates said. “That's a huge responsibility to put upon teachers. There needs to be collaboration between the home environment and the school environment. That education has to start at home.”

Speech therapists can teach parents how to foster their children's speech development at home by speaking in a way that connects

their experiences and vocabulary.

“I do a lot of work that is nothing but coaching parents,” said Wendy Nottoli, president of the Kendall Speech and Language Center. “We have to break things down at the child's level and then build it back up.”

Some of that coaching includes telling parents to speak slowly, use detailed language to describe their surroundings and have back-and-forth conversations with their children.

“Just being able to learn how to talk to your child makes all the difference in the world,” Nottoli said.

Fort Lauderdale mother Kerin Mickenberg is an example of how active parental involvement can keep a word gap from developing.

Mickenberg would read books to sons Max and Sam every day and play games such as “I Spy” and “Mad Libs.” Instead of putting the radio or DVDs on for her sons in the car, Mickenberg would keep a bag of books for the boys to read in the backseat.

Though her sons' preschool teachers noted their early literacy skills, Mickenberg didn't expect the caliber of academic success the boys have achieved. Max and Sam today attend Dartmouth College and Duke University, respectively.

Inevitably, the high cost of childcare leads to different rates of preschool enrollment. Nationally, 61% of children from more affluent backgrounds are enrolled in preschool while only 41% of children from low-income families are enrolled.

To close the school readiness gap, the Obama administration established the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge, a federal grant to improve early learning and development programs, and invested \$1 billion in early childhood education.

The Trump administration is cutting funds to early childcare, proposing a 19% reduction in education spending on children in the 2019 budget. While the 2020 budget proposes a 12% reduction in education spending, it also allocates \$1 billion to support underserved populations and encourage employer investments in childcare.

# Bonding over health journalism

## Montage students explore controversial wellness issues

BY DAVID A. PEREZ

Christopher Columbus High School

For the first time in 11 years, Miami Montage students moved into their dorm rooms at the University of Miami in mid-June, rather than the traditional date after the 4th of July.

Not only were these students the first class to start Miami Montage production early, but they also reported on complex issues such as the word gap, LGBTQ+ sex ed and shooter drills.

When applying for the Peace Sullivan/James Ansin High School Workshop in Journalism and New Media for summer 2019, students expected to gain journalism experience, but many did not realize the connections they would make with one another.

Abigail Tuschman, 17, is one of these students and the author of a story on the lasting impacts of the word gap between children who are read to often and those who are not.

"I think that we all come from such different schools," she said. "So becoming friends with people from different areas, who are all student journalists, helps you learn how to really accomplish the goals that you set out for your publication at your own school."

Being one of the 16 high school students from across Florida to join the Miami Montage 2019 staff, Tuschman was thrilled to learn more about her passion — journalism.

"I think Montage means exposing student journalists to different forms of storytelling and enriching those skills so they can take back new knowledge to their publications," she said.

From the moment students arrived, they began learning what it was like to work on a magazine and accompanying web site.

Staff members welcomed students to the program with a news story brain storming session. With the help of faculty, students were assigned stories related to health and wellness in order to create Miami Montage.

Not only did students begin reporting and writing during the first week, but they also began forging friendships.

"It's really interesting to watch from an outsider's perspective," said Reagan Creamer, a 2016 Miami Montage alumna and 2019 counselor/editor. "I think that they're all growing and learning together. They're also able to have fun writing stories and doing videos."

As the days passed, responsibilities rose. Students were not just expected to write articles, but to serve as broadcasters and photographers as well. Students came into the program with different strengths and



Photo by Miami Montage staff

**TEAM EFFORT:** Marcus Callegari (left) and Thomas Morcillo tweak settings on a video assignment.

began learning skills in multiple aspects of multimedia journalism.

"I feel I'm really strong with the broadcasting aspect but to basically become a great journalist, you'll need to have all traits such as writing and photography," said Benjamin Schiller, 17, author of a story on patients taking ride shares rather than ambulances for doctor and ER visits.

"For me, I'm acquiring the writing and photography skills by coming to Miami Montage."

For Miami Montage co-director Fred Blevens, there is something truly special about the program, which launched in 1984.

The change you see in a student over a three-week period from beginning to end, is like nothing else you will see," said Blevens, who has been co-director since 2008. "The connections that are made during Montage are something I have never seen before."

Schiller agrees, adding that he is proud to say that the friendships he has created are significant.

"I can assure you that 20 years from now, I will see one of the kids here somewhere and I'll spend time connecting with them again," he said.

Luis Gonzalez, 23, a 2013 Miami Montage

alumnus and 2019 counselor/videographer, said all students make connections that last a long time.

"Everyone wants to hang out and everyone loves one another," Gonzalez said. "It's so funny. The first week they all want to go home and by the third week they never want to leave. It always happens."

Along with other staff members, Gonzalez has given up his own time to ensure that students have a meaningful experience. While this may be an overwhelming commitment for some, it keeps Gonzalez going.

"Seeing the fire that they have, and how quick they pick up on stuff, it never fails to keep me grounded," he said.

During this year's magazine production, students bonded over reporting on health and wellness topics. Students covered the use of CBD oil in humans and animals and reported on the effects of marijuana on mental illness.

Alexander Someillan, 17, who reported on the farm-to-table trend, agreed.

"I'm truly never going to forget my time here at Montage," Someillan said. "From the bonds I've made to the story I produced, this has easily been one of the best experiences of my life."



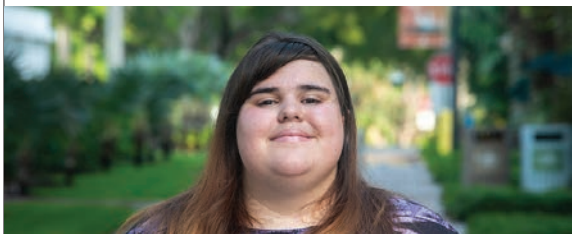
**Marcus Callegari**, 16, is a rising senior at Christopher Columbus High School. He is the lead anchor and deputy executive producer of CCNN Live, his school's news network. He enjoys lifting weights and training in grappling sports. He plans on studying communications in college.

**Daniel Gonzalez III**, 16, is a rising junior at Miami Lakes Educational Center. He is the YouTube manager and staff writer for his school's newspaper, The Harbinger, and photographer for the school's yearbook, Alpha Omega. He has his own photography and videography website.



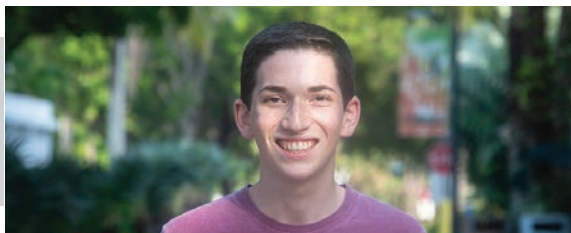
**Lukas Guerra**, 17, is a rising senior at Christopher Columbus High School. Serving as both the vice president and equipment manager of his school's broadcast program, CCNN Live, he enjoys video editing and production. In college, he plans to study communication and broadcast journalism.

**Katya Gutierrez**, 17, is a rising senior at Coral Gables Senior High School. She is a staff member on the school's literary magazine, Catharsis, and plans to study English in college.



**Kaylee Hilyer**, 17, is a rising senior at McArthur High School. She is the copy editor of the school's newspaper, The Mustang Spirit, and will begin to work on the yearbook staff this year. She is an avid band nerd and music lover, playing flute in both the school marching band and wind ensemble. In the future, she hopes to attend the University of Florida.

**Carson Merlo**, 17, is a rising senior at St. Thomas Aquinas High School. He is the editor-in-chief of the school's yearbook and a member of the Quill and Scroll Journalism Honor Society. He hopes to pursue broadcast journalism in college.



**Yasmine Mezawi**, 17, is a rising senior and vice president of her class at Miami Lakes Educational Center. She is the editor-in-chief of the school's yearbook, Alpha & Omega, and a staff writer on her newspaper, The Harbinger. She plans to keep journalism as a hobby while pursuing a career in dentistry.

**Thomas Morcillo**, 17, is a rising senior at Coral Gables Senior High School. He is a member of the school's student produced news magazine, highlights, and its literary magazine, Catharsis. He hopes to continue his education and innovation in multimedia communication in college.





**Chika Ojukwu**, 16, is a rising senior at Barbara Goleman Senior High School. She is editor-in-chief of her school's newspaper, The Vanguard, and president of her school's Literary Society. She hopes to study journalism and theatre in college.

**David Perez**, 17, is a rising senior at Christopher Columbus High School. He is currently the executive producer and head of marketing at his school's broadcasting program, CCNN Live. David is aspiring to study film in college and eventually become a Pixar employee.



**Kevin Reyes**, 17, is a rising senior at Christopher Columbus High School. He is the creative content producer at his school's broadcast journalism program, CCNN Live. He enjoys pushing his boundaries in all aspects of digital media and hopes to one day produce content in the sporting world.

**Benjamin Schiller**, 17, is a rising senior at Saint Andrew's School in Boca Raton. He will be the co-editor-in-chief of his school's newspaper, The Bagpiper. He hopes to pursue a career in broadcasting and have his own news show on a major network.



**Alexander Someillan**, 17, is a rising senior at Christopher Columbus High School. He is the president of CCNN Live, his school's broadcast journalism program. He also enjoys listening to and playing music, playing golf and collecting vinyl.

**Joseph Sturgeon**, 17, is a rising senior at Cooper City High School. He is a head editor of his school's newspaper, The Lariat, and is the media relations specialist for Reaching Success Together, a club focused on mentoring at-risk students.



**Abigail Tuschman**, 17, is a rising senior at Cooper City High School. She is the co-editor-in-chief of the school's newspaper, The Lariat, the president of the school's National Honor Society chapter and the vice president of marketing of the speech and debate team. She hopes to study creative writing in college and eventually pursue medicine.

**Caroline Wheeler-Hollis**, 17, is a rising senior at Creekside High School. She is the editor-in-chief of the school's yearbook, the Tributary. She hopes to pursue journalism and history.



# Normalizing nightmares

## Fears over school shooter drills fuel statewide debate

BY MARCUS CALLEGARI

Christopher Columbus High School

For teacher Eric Garner, going back to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School after a shooting that killed 17 students felt like returning to a crime scene.

Now, going through constant active shooter drills only serves as a reminder of those he lost on that day.

"It's somewhat of a necessary evil. I don't know how we can avoid it and I think it would be wrong to try to avoid it," Garner said. "We got to do it, get it done, keep moving."

Garner has lived through a traumatic shooting, and he believes that the way to prevent the reality of an active shooter is with preparation.

Last year, 114 people were either killed or injured in school shootings in the United States, according to Education Week's school shooting tracker. These numbers have put school boards nationwide in a state of panic as they try to ensure that their students and teachers are properly trained on how to handle an attack.

The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act was signed on March 9, 2019, and a part of this law requires active shooter training in schools once a semester. But although these drills are meant to protect students, they might be damaging their mental health.

Communities are beginning to question whether active shooter training is the best way to prepare students for possible disaster. Alissa Alfonso's daughter, Goldie, is a student at Beachside Montessori Village K-8 in Homestead. Alfonso said that the drills are scaring children with the threat of death, even if they are preparing them for emergency.

"I do feel like they run through it so there's a plan in place, but I also feel that it's just too much, it's overload," Alfonso said. "Every single month there's something going on and I feel that it's scaring our children."

Thoughts like these may keep students on high alert for surprise drills. Grace Tejada, a rising senior at G. Holmes Braddock Senior High, has been exposed to these active shooter drills for all three years of her high school experience.

Tejada described how her school administrators simulate an unlucky student who is left outside in the hall during a drill.

After the students lock themselves in, the administrators walk through the halls, banging on doors and yelling for help, teaching students to keep doors shut.

Tejada, along with many of her classmates, despises the idea of having to abandon a friend for dead.

"Just imagining what the situation would be like if it were to be real is pretty



Photo by Abigail Tuschman

**LIMITING TRAUMA:** Daniel Villanueva Sr., a security consultant, says educating teachers and students about shooter safety is the key to survival, not traumatizing them.

unsettling," Tejada said. "To think that I would have to leave a fellow classmate outside, just because we're not allowed to open the door."

Much of this fear stems from training that is carried out by uninformed administrators. Daniel Villanueva Sr., former marine and owner of a security consulting company, teaches his clients that education and prevention is more effective than traumatizing students.

"I'm against [these physical simulations of shootings]," Villanueva said. "I'm all for training the teachers, the administration, and basically talking to the students, not to traumatize them, but to assure them that we're ready."

Despite some professionals taking issue with active shooter drills, others believe that they efficiently ensure safety.

Laura Mazo, 18, a recent graduate of TERRA Environmental Research Institute, believes the drills are helpful.

"I do feel that the drills are helpful, and due to this, I feel that it's gotten to the point

where the kids are comfortable with how many drills we've done," Mazo said. "Of course, I believe that teachers and counselors should be open to the idea of kids discussing possible alternatives with them."

The students' conflicting views on active shooter drills aren't without reason.

Dr. Ted Wasserman, a pediatric neuropsychologist, believes that all students are affected differently.

"It's hard to say whether they are good or bad just from the psychological reaction, but it's safe to say that some kids will be affected more than others," Wasserman said.

"This is due to what type of preparation they receive."

These opposing opinions raise questions about what the general population wants out of these drills.

As a survivor of a shooting, Garner said crisis preparation methods must be continually improved.

"That's the advice I would give at the end of the day about this," he said. "We just have to keep moving."