

# SAVES Program

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MIAMI DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## GED in Spanish Offers Unique Chance for New Students

With a steady influx of new students arriving to Miami-Dade County on an almost daily basis - many of whom are high school-aged students - local schools are faced with huge challenges. How do area schools best meet the vast needs of these new students while keeping in compliance with stringent state mandates on high school graduation rates?

A new local initiative, developed to benefit high school-age students (16 – 18 years old) who have recently entered the United States from Latin American countries, has allowed immigrant high school students a viable opportunity to not only work towards a GED in Spanish certificate, but to also take advantage of a host of benefits that can be useful now, and in their futures. The GED Success Management Academy at Miami Springs Adult & Community Education Center is one of a few adult education centers in the county presently providing GED in Spanish preparation for students, while also providing them with English instruction. This program is being offered at three of our centers, Hialeah Gardens High School (since January, 2014), Miami Springs High School (since August, 2014), and Westland-Hialeah High School (since August, 2015). Students go to class from 7:20 a.m. to 2:20 p.m., just like their high school counterparts. A modified instructional schedule allows students to feel as if they are a part of the regular high school culture while receiving unique instruction tailored towards earning a GED in Spanish certificate. Since the core classes (Language, Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies) are taught exclusively in Spanish, students receive a double dose of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) instruction every day to also build their English skills.

But that is only part of the experience.

Students also benefit from unique support systems such as free/reduced health care, access to social services, job placement, and other essential benefits that allow a student the opportunity to focus on their studies. Thanks to support from the Cuban National Council (CNC) and South Florida Youth Co-Op, such services have been secured from local health providers and stakeholders, including Florida International University. These institutions are going the extra mile, not only providing for recently-arrived students, but also compiling data and research on student progress and using that data to improve the delivery of future instruction and services. With the GED certificate, which is equiv-

alent to a high school diploma, students will have the opportunity to apply for admission to colleges and vocational centers. The excitement regarding such a great opportunity is on display everyday on students' faces.

So far, parental and student support has been favorable. A strong emphasis on attendance and extra lab work has paid dividends as first generation program students have shown great promise, with several students having already earned their GED in Spanish certificates. For those students, the road begins there. A generous benefit from the SAVES program (for those students who qualify) allows many of these GED earners to obtain a scholarship to Miami-Dade College, where they are able to study during the first year tuition-free.

Such creative solutions have allowed a student population that may have otherwise languished and dropped out a new opportunity that genuinely addresses true needs and prepares students for legitimate future success. A testament to this fact is the recent Miami Springs Adult summer (2016) graduation, where 90 GED in Spanish students graduated with their diplomas! Hats off to the GED Success Management Academy program at Miami Springs Adult – where all students have an opportunity to shine brightly – even during traditional high school hours.

