

## **Miami-Dade to pilot new college capstone program**

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Miami-Dade schools will help pilot a new college capstone program, designed to give high-achieving students stronger skills in independent research, writing and solving problems in teams.

Four Miami-Dade high schools will offer the program in the 2012-13 school year: Barbara Goleman, Miami Palmetto, North Miami Beach and Southridge Senior. Overall, about 18 schools in the United States and abroad are launching it.

Two major education groups — the College Board and the University of Cambridge International Examinations — teamed up on the program, called AP Cambridge Capstone Program and Credential after colleges and universities asked for a way to equip high school students with stronger research skills, teamwork and critical thinking.

The program was revealed at a news conference Monday morning at Barbara Goleman Senior High in Miami Lakes.

“This is an incredibly rigorous program that sits on top of AP,” said Trevor Packer, senior vice president of Advanced Placement and College Readiness for the College Board. Students in the capstone program will “demonstrate to colleges and universities that they’ve developed additional skills beyond the skills they’ve learned in individual AP courses.” That is to be able to do extended research, think critically and apply knowledge across disciplines.

Officials with the College Board, which administers the SAT, said they asked Miami-Dade County Public Schools to participate because of the district’s track record. The group also wanted a diverse set of schools: private, public, urban and rural. “AP is not for the elite, but it is for the prepared and motivated students,” Packer said.

He told dozens of Barbara Goleman students that they were abnormal, in a good way, for the Miami-Dade district’s top honors in the number of Hispanic students taking AP exams and their high scores.

“Today we are taking it to the next level,” said Miami-Dade schools chief Alberto Carvalho

The new capstone program has three parts:

- A seminar for 11th-graders that focuses on research, extended essays and team projects and explores global problems, like alternatives to oil, medical

ethics and climate change

- A research project for 12th-graders that finishes with a 4,500-5,000 word paper, almost like a thesis
- AP courses, typically taken in 11th and 12th grade.

Students who complete the seminar and research project and score a passing grade on three AP exams would receive a capstone credential.

Carvalho told students they are uniquely suited to solve problems because they've grown up in a world where the rate of change is faster, and ever faster paced, and can easily adapt.

"Think of yourselves as takers of opportunities the likes of which aren't found anywhere else. Think of yourselves as Einsteins in the making, Mozarts in the making," Carvalho told students at the news announcement.

The College Board and Cambridge will subsidize the cost of the pilot, such as professional development; districts in the pilot will pay for teacher salaries. Carvalho said the new program will not cost the Dade district extra dollars.

Said Perla Tabares-Hantman, chairwoman of the Miami-Dade School Board: "This very prestigious program will continue to strengthen our efforts."

"This is an honor for the hard work these students have accomplished," said Joaquin Hernandez, principal at Barbara Goleman Senior High.

Peggy Kratz, who teaches AP human geography at Miami Palmetto Senior High, said her students discuss a lot of issues, such as global warming to the lack of access to clean water for a billion people in the world. "We talk about a lot of global issues in the course. Students get interested in solving the problems, but they've had no outlet. Now they can identify their passion and they have two years to pursue that," Kratz said.

Parents who attended the news conference welcomed the rigorous program as a way for their kids to open doors to more universities and perhaps earn more scholarship money.

"It's going to give them a head start for when they do get to college," said Mary Benaiges, vice president of the PTSA at Barbara Goleman.

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