

**EDITORIALS** APRIL 5, 2017 11:57 PM

# Florida lawmakers should not punish Miami Dade College's frugality



## MIAMI HERALD EDITORIAL BOARD

The nation's new Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, will be in Miami-Dade on Thursday for a visit to Florida International University.

This is a perfect opportunity for local education leaders to whisper in DeVos's ears about South Florida's needs — from early education and kindergarten to higher ed.

For FIU, Miami Dade College, and Miami-Dade Public Schools, DeVos's visit comes at a time when they are all facing possible devastating cuts by Florida lawmakers.

Proposed budget cuts from Florida's House and Senate are the worst seen in years, and will impact our community's most vulnerable students, who need the greatest support. Among the hardest hit will be Miami-Dade's public schools system and Miami Dade College, which is the gateway to the American Dream for many of its poor students.

At the popular college, which has 165,000 students, 46 percent — many of them minorities — live at or below the federal poverty threshold.

If these budget cuts were to pass, they would be, according to Miami Dade College, the most severe funding reduction the college has faced since its founding. This should not be allowed to happen.

What is surprising is that these proposed cuts are not needed; that, we could understand. But Florida currently has a large surplus.

To make matters worse, two South Florida state colleges — Miami Dade College and Broward College — appear to be affected disproportionately. There are two ways the proposed cuts are being addressed by lawmakers: The Senate is pursuing defunding developmental education, and the House is considering cutting funding by deducting a *pro rata* share of the reserves accumulated by the most frugal and fiscally responsible of the colleges. In other words, the colleges that have reserves will be losing state funding.

### **THE SENATE**

The Senate budget proposals aim to take significant dollars away from state colleges for developmental education. Approximately \$15 million could be slashed from Miami Dade College alone. This seems unfair for MDC because it enrolls the bulk of developmental education students in the state, according to the college.

### **THE HOUSE**

The deepest cuts could come from the House, which is targeting higher education, with a drastic \$87 million reduction for the Florida College System alone. That is an astounding amount.

For Miami Dade College, this represents a potential loss of approximately \$22 million, not to mention the harsh consequences for those students who depend on MDC's programs to prepare for college-level courses. Scholarships funding is also at stake.

State colleges are absorbing 74 percent of the reduction to the overall higher education budget. And the distribution of that \$55 million decrease in funding for developmental education represents a \$15 million loss for MDC.

We ask lawmakers to reconsider these harsh cuts, especially to Miami Dade College. In the past, lawmakers and college President Eduardo Padrón have not seen eye-to-eye on setting funding for the college. We hope that's not at play here.

A college education is the only key to better paying jobs for young Floridians. The budget cuts proposed in Tallahassee will ultimately make MDC students suffer, eliminating their pathways to good careers. No one wins in that equation.