

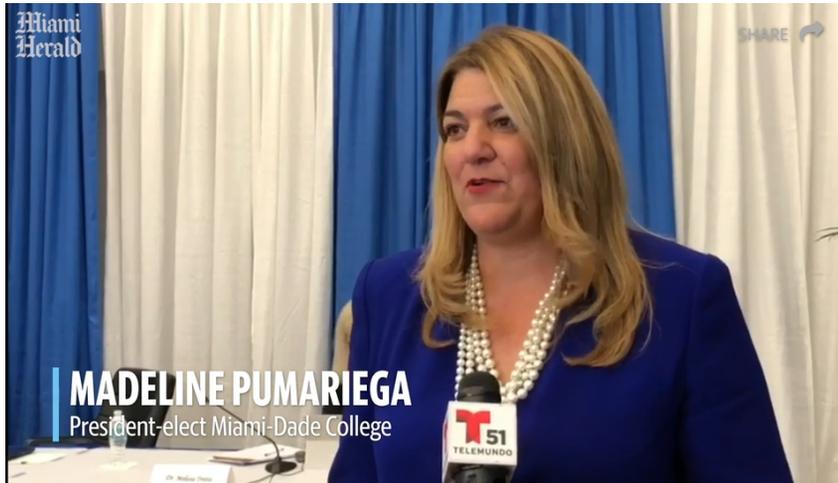
EDUCATION

Miami Dade College's board unanimously selects Madeline Pumariega as next president

BY COLLEEN WRIGHT

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The Miami Dade College Board of Trustees unanimously voted to select Madeline Pumariega as the next president of the college. Lenore Rodicio was the runner up. BY [CARL JUSTE](#) | [PIERRE TAYLOR](#)

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Madeline Pumariega, a Hialeah native who attended Miami Dade College, played and coached basketball there, became a professor and rose through the ranks to be a campus president, was unanimously chosen Tuesday as her alma mater's next president, becoming the first female president of the nation's largest college.

"God is great. And America is great," Pumariega, 53, provost of Tallahassee Community College and former chancellor of the Florida College System, told the board of trustees, who selected her over three other candidates, including MDC provost Lenore Rodicio.

"Because only could a daughter of Cuban immigrants dream today to be back at her alma mater, where she started as a basketball player, to lead Miami Dade," Pumariega noted.

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The board members said Pumariega had what Rodicio, also the college's executive vice president, didn't: Tallahassee connections. Pumariega's references include former Lt. Gov. Carlos Lopez-Cantera, State Board of Education Vice Chair Marva Johnson and Florida Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Mark Wilson.

"From the feel I'm getting from the board, the one thing that was lacking and one thing that was needed was to get those state connections, which Chancellor Pumariega has," said trustee Bernie Navarro, who led the first search last year as the former board chair.

The search for a new MDC president [started 19 months ago and then was halted](#) when the board abruptly scrapped the search after seven months. Board members appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis had said MDC's next president needn't have a Ph.D., a prerequisite normally for college and university presidents. Critics contended the] ed a political leader, not an educator and administrator.

In the spring, the board convened a second search committee, hired a new search firm and began a second search, which led to Pumariega. Michael Bileca is the current board chair.

Gregory Fowler of Southern New Hampshire University. [They were shown around campus and interviewed at length last week.](#)

Rodicio served as the right-hand person to Padrón, who had been at odds with the Republican-controlled Legislature during his tenure. She emphasized that she is not Padrón, and pointed to her guiding the college through the COVID-19 pandemic.

“She proved last year she can do Tallahassee,” said trustee Carlos Migoya, president and CEO of Jackson Health System and the board’s vice chair. “We’re way beyond what happened here years ago. I think Dr. Rodicio would be the right candidate.”

Rodicio was a holdover finalist from the first search last year.

She declined to comment Tuesday, instead pointing a reporter to her tweet congratulating Pumariega.



The four finalists in the Miami Dade College presidency search, top row, left to right: Morgan Phillips of Pima Community College and Lenore Rodicio of Miami Dade College; bottom row, left to right: Madeline Pumariega of Tallahassee Community College and Gregory Fowler of Southern New Hampshire University. Jose A. Iglesias *MIAMI HERALD/EL NEUVO HERALD*

The board knew the decision was down to the two women, both Miami natives and homegrown at Miami Dade College.

“We have to look homeward first,” Navarro said. He spoke about those two homeward choices, then looked back.

“It’s been 19 or 20 months and whatever decision we make here today, it’s time to heal,” he said. “It’s time for the faculty to heal and I think it’s time to move this institution forward.”

The United Faculty of Miami Dade College took the board and the presidential search to task. They alleged the first search was rigged for a politician and ultimately filed a lawsuit. They bemoaned the decision to prefer, not require, a doctorate.

That was all behind them Tuesday. Pumariega says she’s a dissertation away from her doctorate. Barry University said she was a student from 2003 to 2012 pursuing a Ph.D. in education and leadership.

“We’re absolutely delighted and confident that it was a fair and transparent process,” said Elizabeth Ramsey, the union’s president.

Referring to Pumariega, Ramsey said, “She’s a living example of the college’s capacity as a dream factory.”

Congratulations poured in from community members.

“We congratulate Madeline Pumariega on being named the next president of Miami Dade College,” wrote FIU president Mark Rosenberg in an emailed statement. “FIU has a longstanding and important relationship with Miami Dade College focused on student success and community well-being. Dr. Pumariega’s energizing efforts at MDC and in Tallahassee have always been appreciated by all her friends at FIU!”

Pumariega also got a nod from Cesar L. Alvarez, senior chairman of Greenberg Traurig who is both an MDC alumni and past MDC trustee.

“I am delighted at the selection of Madeline as the next president of Miami-Dade College and look forward to what innovation she will bring to the school’s future,” he said in an emailed statement. “As a graduate of Miami-Dade College and a proud Hialeah native, she is the perfect successor to carry on the ground-breaking leadership of Eduardo Padron and assure that MDC remains the source of opportunity for so many students in our community, particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds for whom education may provide a key to a better life.”

Montoya, whom the board brought back when Padrón retired in August 2019, received a standing ovation Tuesday for sticking around during tough times.

“I’m happy the process is finally completed,” said Montoya, a new grandfather. “I’m also proud of having been able to facilitate the logistics (of the search).”

Montoya said Pumariega succeeded him as president of the Wolfson campus. He described her as effective and efficient, committed and motivated and working long hours.

Pumariega’s strength, according to Montoya, was her connections with the external community.

“The politicians in Tallahassee wanted her and that’s why they gave her the chancellorship,” he said.

Montoya said he worked directly with Rodicio on a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant and by improving the college’s student completion rate to 44%, higher than the national average of 26% to 27%.

Referring to his own applause, “half of that belongs to Dr. Rodicio,” Montoya said.

“She’s a powerful, important administrator,” he said.

The job of president is expected to pay an annual salary of \$500,000. Pumariega, who says she will meet with Montoya to begin the transition, is expected to lead the college for the spring 2021 semester.





Madeline Pumariega speaks during her presentation Friday on the second and final day of presentations by candidates for the job of president of Miami Dade College. Pumariega is the provost of Tallahassee Community College and a former president of MDC's Wolfson campus. On Tuesday, the college's Board of Trustees unanimously selected her to be the next president of MDC. JOSE A IGLESIAS JIGLESIAS@ELNUEVOHERALD.COM

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Colleen Wright returned to the Miami Herald in May 2018 to cover all things education, including Miami-Dade and Broward schools, colleges and universities. The Herald was her first internship before she left her hometown of South Miami to earn a journalism degree from the University of Florida. She previously covered education for the Tampa Bay Times.

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