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Miami Dade College getting \$15 million to prepare next generation for tech jobs

BY ROB WILE

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Miami Dade College President Madeline Pumariega announces a \$15 million investment from local government entities and the Knight Foundation to support broadening the school's technology curriculum. *MIAMI DADE COLLEGE*

As [Miami's tech wave continues](#), Miami Dade College is set to receive \$15 million from a quartet of public and nonprofit entities to beef up its technology curriculum — and make artificial intelligence education available to all of its students.

The investment — \$7 million from the Knight Foundation, \$5 million from Miami-Dade County, \$2 million from the City of Miami and \$1 million from the Miami Downtown Development

Authority — will be used to hire as many as 15 faculty members with technology backgrounds that can satisfy surging enrollment in MDC’s School of Engineering and Technology. MDC is also launching [MDCTECH](#), a web portal designed to serve as the hub for its tech efforts.

Wednesday’s announcement comes a week after Miami and MDC [announced the creation of a tech-focused high school that will be centered at the college’s Wolfson campus.](#)

At a press conference announcing the investment, Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said the money would support Miamians “who were here before” the wave of tech-oriented professionals from outside the area began relocating here last year. While these newcomers have helped fuel the Miami tech movement, she said, it was incumbent on community leaders to make the gains from the movement more accessible.

“It’s really important to make these investments, so all can rise in this rising tide,” Levine Cava said, referencing the fact that the growing tech sector has also brought with it rising real estate prices. “We need to be creating those opportunities for everyone.”

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez expressed a similar message, saying the way to increase access to high-paying jobs starts with investing in education.

“This is about creating fairness to accessing these opportunities,” Suarez said. “That is our obligation.”



Miami-area leaders gathered Wednesday to announce the \$15 million investment in Miami Dade College’s tech programs. *MIAMI DADE COLLEGE*

The emphasis on and financial commitment to technology education and training comes as the city grapples with its [newfound focus as a tech center](#), a development that's led to an unprecedented influx of professionals from California and other places. It has also exposed the city's talent shortage and the need to expand the tech movement's reach in local communities.

"There's been a lot of talk about who Miami tech is for, and we want to highlight that there's a trend here, that Miamians are seeking out these educational paths, career paths," said Raul Moas, who recently took on new responsibilities as a senior director at Knight Foundation, in addition to his role as the Miami nonprofit's program director. "We still have work to do to translate that into actual employment, but we see that Miamians are seeking out these opportunities. That's an incredibly important part of the narrative."

In addition to making an artificial intelligence course part of MDC's core curriculum, the millions of dollars also will be used to establish a bachelor's degree in applied artificial intelligence. MDC is building two AI centers, at its North and Wolfson campuses, to foster experiential learning and collaboration between industry and academia. They will join the college's existing technology centers focused on animation and gaming, cloud computing and cybersecurity.

"We have seen Miami and South Florida getting more investment, more startups, more venture capital, and what we now need is investment in our education system," said [Antonio Delgado](#), MDC's vice president of innovation and technology partnerships, "so that we can create pathways for students and Miamians to participate."

Aaron Burciaga, an artificial intelligence expert, said the \$15 million investment represented a key step in forming a blue-collar workforce that has AI expertise — a critical development needed to meet national security concerns.

"We don't need more masters or Ph.D. students to stand up to the threat of Chinese tech dominance — we won't be able to graduate enough of them in time," he said. "Instead, the ones getting it done are our colleges. I see Miami and MDC as the ones rolling up their sleeves and rolling out these first associate's and bachelor's programs in these fields."

For the Knight Foundation, the \$7 million donation represents the latest in what is now a total of \$22 million invested in Miami tech and innovation in the past 12 months — following its [\\$15 million commitment](#) to Florida International University, the University of Miami, and Baptist Health South Florida — and \$60 million in local tech investments over the past decade.

Moas said the organization is responding to increased enrollment in tech programming it is seeing at these academic institutions.

"For us, it's about meeting community demand," he said. "More Miamians than ever before are seeking out careers in tech, and we're responding to that aspiration."

Christina Crespi, executive director of the city's Downtown Development Authority, said in a statement that Pumariega had approached the authority's board of directors about contributing to Miami Dade College's artificial intelligence program.

“We saw an opportunity to build upon the Miami DDA’s broader economic development push, which is bringing new companies — and jobs — to Downtown Miami from around the world,” Crespi said. “Artificial Intelligence is already playing a critical role in our daily lives, and that presence will only grow with time. The Miami DDA is making this \$1 million investment with the goal of putting Downtown Miami on the global map as one of the top places to learn and develop the science behind AI.”

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