

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For more information, contact:

Lynn Norman-Teck
305-216-6208

15 CHARTER STUDENTS EARN 2-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE PRIOR TO GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL

Miami-Dade County, FL – In the fall, Melissa Velasquez, 17, will head to the University of Chicago with enough college credits to enter as a junior. The Hialeah Gardens resident, scheduled to graduate from Mater Academy Charter High School as the school next week, already graduated from Miami Dade College – along with 14 of her high school classmates.

For several years now, administrators, teachers and the college counselor at Mater Academy – located at 7901 NW 103 Street in Hialeah Gardens – have encouraged students to participate in the dual enrollment classes offered at Miami Dade College, Florida International University and Florida National College. The goal is to get students to earn college credits while in high school, raise their GPA and get them thinking about college, explains Judi Marty, Principal. In May 2009, eleven Mater Academy seniors graduated simultaneously from high school and Miami Dade College, 13 earned college degrees in 2008. All of the Mater Academy seniors who graduated from Miami Dade College are Hispanic and children of immigrants. Many are the first in their family to attend and graduate college.

For the past several years, Mater Academy Charter High School's graduation rate has exceeded 95% -- a figure above the national average of 71 percent, and the national average for Hispanics students. According to a US Census Bureau press release dated June 2004, an estimated 57 percent Hispanics had high school diplomas and about 11 percent had bachelor's degrees.

Beginning in the 11th grade, all Mater Academy students are encouraged to take dual enrollment courses and all are required to go through a mock college application process. The students must request information from three universities, fill out applications and financial aid forms, and write essays. "This exercise serves to ease the transition from high school to college," says Ms. Marty. "We want our students to get into a college or university, and we know that the better prepared they are to handle the workload and the more they understand what's expected of them, the greater their chances of succeeding and graduating."

Mater Academy's strong academic track record has been recognized by the Florida Department of Education and Miami Dade County Public Schools. In 2009, Mater Academy Middle was named Breakthrough School by the National Association of Secondary School Principals – one of ten schools recognizes nationwide for dramatically improving student achievement. In 2008 and 2009 was named one of the nation's top 500 high schools by U.S. News & World Report's ranking of "America's Best High Schools."

Mater Academy Charter High School graduation ceremony will take place on Friday, June 11 at 7 p.m. at the University of Miami/BankUnited Center.

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