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DEPARTMENT HONORS CHAMPION OF SCHOOL CHOICE AWARD WINNERS

~ Award recognizes efforts of individuals to support and expand school choice in Florida ~

TALLAHASSEE – The winners of the annual Dr. Carlo Rodriguez Champion of School Choice Award were recognized earlier this week in Miami by the State Board of Education. The Florida Public School Choice Consortium, in collaboration with the Nova Southeastern University Fischler School of Education, bestowed the award to Dr. Pansy Houghton, Director of Student Planning and Placement for Hillsborough County, and Lois C. Lee, District Director of Specialized Programs and Schools of Choice for Miami-Dade County. The President of the Florida Public School Choice Consortium Audrey Lewis Potter, presented the awards to the recipients during a brief ceremony.

“I’m honored to recognize two outstanding individuals who have shown us great leadership and commitment to public school choice,” said State Board of Education Chairman T. Willard Fair. “Their dedication to quality and accountability in expanding educational opportunities in Florida truly captures the spirit of Dr. Carlo Rodriguez.”

As part of the award, Nova Southeastern University will grant each recipient a half scholarship at the Fischler School of Education – one at the doctoral level and one at the master’s level. The master’s scholarship is attuned to the needs of individuals who want to become successful leaders. The doctoral scholarship will assist in developing leadership skills that can be applied to the solutions of real problems in schools and other learning environments.

“School choice is an integral component of Florida’s public education system, and this award highlights individuals who have been instrumental in spearheading these options,” said Education Commissioner Dr. Eric J. Smith. “I’m impressed by the determined commitment of our winners, and encouraged by the continued growth and support of choice programs throughout the state.”



The Florida Public School Choice Consortium seeks to recognize a school district or individual who demonstrates exceptional commitment to establishing and expanding public school choice. The recipients were determined through a review of nominations by an award committee representing multiple education agencies who work with various school options in Florida . The committee evaluated nominations based on an increase in the number of available school choice options, equitable practices for recruiting and enrolling students, innovative transportation plans, effective parent awareness and empowerment strategies and raising awareness of the benefits of school choice.

“The Dr. Carlo Rodriguez Champion of School Choice Award and Scholarship is our contribution to the philosophy that school choice at the university level and the K-12 level should be encouraged. This personifies the spirit of school choice in Florida ,” said Provost H. Wells Singleton, Ph.D., Provost and University Dean of the Fischler School of Education and Human Services at Nova Southeastern University , the sixth largest non-profit university in the United States .

Dr. Carlo Rodriguez is the former Executive Director of the Department of Education’s Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice. He was a passionate advocate for improved education and choice for school children in Florida and across the nation. Carlo passed away in June 2007 and continues to serve as a beacon for public school choice in Florida .

For more information about school choice in Florida , please visit the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice at <http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/>. You may also visit <http://www.fpscc.net/> for more information about the Florida Public School Choice Consortium.

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Dr. Pansy Houghton is truly a champion of School Choice in Hillsborough County . She became the Supervisor of Choice and 2004 became the Director of Student Planning and Placement in 2008. Dr. Houghton oversees student placement in Magnet Programs and Choice Programs, development of attractor programs in various schools, training of teachers and administrators who implement Choice attractor programs, is responsible for the Hillsborough County Choice Grant and the Project BRIDGE Grant, and collaborates with staff regarding student placement in Career and Technical Education Programs, Home School, NCLB Choice, Charter Schools , and the McKay Scholarship Program. Dr. Houghton is at the very heart of School Choice in Hillsborough County where “Hillsborough Choice” has become a household term for students and parents because it is integrated so well into the district’s culture.

Ms. Lois C. Lee is the District Director of Schools of Choice and Parental Options for Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Ms. Lee is the champion of ensuring that all the students of Miami-Dade County have the opportunity “to be the best they can be in whatever educational environment they choose.” She is the ultimate learner and educator who has never stopped learning, the teacher who is constantly teaching, the activist who is aware of all the inequities of educational settings and a person committed to being the catalyst for changing those inequities. Ms. Lee has devoted her life to causes that defend, protect and enhance the lives of those in need. Her personal philosophy reflects her commitment to the students she serves: “Those who can do, should do. Those who can be, should be and those in the right position should make right possible.”

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