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TWO SOUTH FLORIDA TEACHERS RECEIVE NATIONAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Miami-Dade County, FL -- Harold Benoit and Milly Pierce, two Florida International Academy educators, were recently named winners of the 2009 Excel Award from the Foundation for Excellence in Education. Harold Benoit and Milly Pierce were among 81 educators in Florida to receive this prestigious recognition.

Located in a busy, urban neighborhood in Miami – at 7630 Biscayne Blvd -- Florida International Academy (FIA) is a Title I public charter middle school that serves 283 at-risk students in grades 6-8. In 2009 FIA received a grade of “A” and AYP status, a great accomplishment for a middle school serving such a high percentage of inner city, at-risk students. It is one of the highest performing public middle schools in the state that serves such a large population of black students qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

Based on analyzed data provided by the Florida Department of Education, student in Mr. Benoit and Ms. Pierce’s classes made the greatest annual growth / learning gains among all students and high performing students — those with FCAT Achievement levels of 3, 4, and 5, for three consecutive years.

According to Patricia Levesque, Director of the Foundation for Excellence, the Excel Award is part of Excelling in Teaching -- a broader initiative launched by the organization to identify and share the secrets of successful teaching with educators and policy makers around the nation. This year, the program awarded cash and prizes to educators whose students learned at least one-and-a-half times the average student in their grade and achievement level in reading or math in the following categories:

- All students
- Low performing students (FCAT Levels 1 and 2)
- High performing students (FCAT Levels 3, 4, and 5)
- Students eligible for free or reduced price lunch
- Special needs populations, including students with disabilities and English language learners
- Students in charter schools

The 2009 *Excel Award* winners received a package of prizes, including cash, a cruise and other gifts. The winning teachers will be honored at the *Celebration of Teaching*, featuring former Governor Jeb Bush, former Lt. Governor Toni Jennings and educator and author Ron Clark, on Saturday, December 5, 2009 in Orlando.

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