



More Than 100,000 Underserved Students in Miami-Dade County to Receive Free High-Speed Internet Access and Digital Training Opportunities

Innovative public-private partnership aims to bridge the digital divide in one of the nation's fastest growing cities

Miami – March 15, 2021 – The Miami Foundation and Achieve Miami today announced the launch of Miami Connected, a highly anticipated effort to bring free broadband connectivity, digital literacy and career opportunities in technology to more than 100,000 students and their families in Miami-Dade County. Joining in this critical initiative are Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho, City of Miami Mayor Francis X. Suarez, Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava, philanthropist and Citadel Founder and CEO Ken Griffin, The Children's Trust, philanthropist and Achieve Miami Founder Leslie Miller Saiontz, tech leader eMerge Americas, TD Bank facilitated by the Miami HEAT, and Code.org.

This public-private partnership represents a unified effort to make Miami-Dade the most technologically inclusive county in the nation. Currently, more than one in five Miami-Dade County residents are disconnected from the internet, and Miami is the second least-connected large city in the United States.

Ken Griffin, the lead funder of Miami Connected who convened and funded a similar effort in Chicago last year, said, "Connectivity is a lifeline to opportunity—it improves outcomes and gives students and their families critical resources they need to succeed. It is inspiring to see the Miami community come together to address this important issue, and I look forward to continued progress in bridging the digital divide."

Achieve Miami Executive Director Sarah Emmons added, "If a student cannot connect to the internet, or if they don't yet know how to navigate the virtual environment, they are missing out on the opportunity to accelerate their learning. Through internet access, digital literacy programs, and workforce opportunities, Miami Connected seeks to equalize the playing field so that all students and families can build the digital fluency they need to stay competitive in 21st-century learning and work environments."

Providing Reliable High-Speed Internet Access to Students Who Need It Most

Starting this month, Phase One of Miami Connected will provide two years of free broadband internet service to approximately 22,000 eligible M-DCPS students in four Miami-Dade County neighborhoods. The program begins in Overtown, and will extend to Little Haiti, Liberty City and Homestead. Phase Two will expand coverage on a school-by-school basis to serve all under-resourced communities in the county where home internet access is severely limited or does not exist.

An initial \$5 million investment in CARES funding from Miami-Dade County was leveraged as part of the Miami Connected initiative to purchase devices for Miami-Dade County Public School students last fall. The expansion of free internet access will allow M-DCPS students to use their new laptops to complete schoolwork at home.

"One year after we were forced to temporarily shut down the physical schoolhouse, it is evident that this

pandemic has negatively impacted under-resourced neighborhoods much more than others in our community,” said Superintendent of Schools Alberto M. Carvalho. “With 52 percent of M-DCPS students engaging in online learning and the remaining 48 percent in the classroom still heavily relying on consistent broadband access to achieve educational success, high-quality home internet has become a necessity for our region’s young learners.”

Greater Miami’s Vision for Digital Access

In addition to providing internet service, Miami Connected will teach students and their families the skills necessary to use their devices and become digitally literate. This aspect of the program will be achieved through a community advisory group that will execute grant programs.

“In order to be the most technologically inclusive city in the nation, we must ensure that all children and families have access to the internet and digital literacy tools, and we must foster highly inclusive workplaces that reflect the diversity of our incredible region,” said Rebecca Fishman Lipsey, president and CEO of The Miami Foundation. “This bold collaboration is a massive step in that direction.”

Miami Connected will also invest in career pathways that increase diversity and inclusivity in the technology sector. The effort will issue startup grants to help innovators develop new technologies aimed at solving disparity issues in disenfranchised communities. The final phase of the project will identify long-term, cost effective strategies to maintain broadband internet for all students in need in Miami-Dade.

“Expanding access to opportunity for all of our residents is a top priority for my administration and we’re proud to partner in this landmark initiative. Providing access to digital tools from an early age is critical to ensuring young people across Miami-Dade have an equal foundation to learn, grow, and thrive,” said Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava.

Ken Griffin has provided \$5 million in leadership support through a challenge grant fund. Miami Connected has also been made possible through investments from The Children’s Trust, The Miami Foundation, philanthropist and Achieve Miami Founder Leslie Miller Saiontz, eMerge Americas, TD Bank facilitated by the Miami HEAT, City of Miami, as well as \$5 million in CARES funding through Miami-Dade County and Miami-Dade County Public Schools and in-kind contributions from Code.org. The current total investment for this effort is more than \$11 million.

Miami Connected is currently seeking additional support for this critical initiative. Individuals and entities wishing to join the effort may make a donation by emailing info@miamiconnected.com or calling 305-204-6184.

ABOUT THE MIAMI FOUNDATION

The Miami Foundation builds the philanthropic, civic, and leadership backbone for Greater Miami. Since 1967, the Foundation has invested \$485 million to strengthen our community with partnerships and contributions from more than 1,000 fundholders and 35,000 donors. The Miami Foundation, which currently manages over \$350 million in assets, mobilizes donors, nonprofits, leaders, and locals to set a bold vision for our community’s future and to invest in a *stronger*, more *equitable*, more *resilient* Greater Miami. www.miamifoundation.org

ABOUT ACHIEVE MIAMI

Achieve Miami seeks to advance educational equity in Miami-Dade County through providing meaningful educational experiences that bridge disparities and demonstrate the power of students learning with and from each other. Since launching in 2015, Achieve Miami has positively impacted thousands of students through literacy, music, service, leadership, and college readiness programming. www.achievemiami.org

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Miami Connected is supported by a strong network of public private partners

•City of Miami Mayor Francis X. Suarez

"Miami Connected is bridging the gap in one of our areas of extreme vulnerability: broadband connection to the most needy," said City of Miami Mayor Francis X. Suarez. "In creating a Miami for everyone we have to ensure that every child in the city of Miami has an opportunity to be successful in the economy of tomorrow. Miami Connected takes a giant leap in that direction. I want to thank The Miami Foundation, Rebecca Fishman Lipsey and Ken Griffin for their generous donation and for prioritizing the future of our city. It is philanthropic gifts and programs like this that will help us break the stigma of tech as a stratifier and gentrifier and instead help create a city that can be a model for all cities by using tech to bridge the digital divide."

•Jim Haj, president and CEO of The Children's Trust

"High-speed internet access has become a critical tool in the development of our children," said Jim Haj, president and CEO of The Children's Trust. "This project is necessary to level the playing field and ensure all children have a path to success with access to the resources they will need for a bright future!"

•Melissa Medina, president of eMerge Americas and the Medina Family Foundation "We are very excited and proud to be partnering and working closely with Miami Connected," said Melissa Medina, president of eMerge Americas and the Medina Family Foundation. "Our mission at eMerge Americas has always been to foster a thriving tech and entrepreneurial hub in South Florida, and an integral part of this mission is ensuring that an equitable and diverse ecosystem is being built. With initiatives such as Miami Connected we can help to deliver on this promise."

•Nick Miceli, Regional President – Metro Florida, TD Bank

"We are excited to collaborate with the Miami HEAT, The Miami Foundation and Achieve Miami to support the Miami Connected initiative, providing internet to students who don't have access at home," said Nick Miceli, Regional President – Metro Florida, TD Bank. "As the first corporate funder, TD is leading the way in supporting programs aimed at closing the digital divide and giving students of all backgrounds a chance to succeed. This is incredibly important work, and we're excited to bring more organizations together to support this program for years to come."

•Eric Woolworth, President of The HEAT Group's Business Operations

"Internet access for students in this unprecedented time can make a huge impact in academic success," said President of The HEAT Group's Business Operations, Eric Woolworth. "We couldn't be happier to partner with TD Bank, The Miami Foundation and Achieve Miami to help make this a reality through the Miami Connected Initiative."