



May 7, 2015

Peggy R. Bell
Mayor

OPEN LETTER FROM MAYOR BELL

Nothing is more important than the education of our children. We have invested Town funds into creating a high school for our Town, furnished with specialized programs dedicated to the advancement and prosperity of the academic future of our youth. We have similarly invested in our middle school by adding advanced programs and academia comparable to those offered at our high school. We have been very happy with our partnership with Miami Dade County Public Schools and are extremely proud of the milestones reached by our high school students.

Although we have been aware of the academic struggles experienced at our middle school, and in hearing it personally from voters while campaigning last summer, thus making it a personal priority upon becoming Mayor, the Town was not aware that our middle school was experiencing such a problem with fighting, that it was ranked number one in violence out of the 4,200 public schools in the State of Florida.

To address the middle school's low academic rating, the District School Board decided it was in the best interest of the school and our Town to transition from one Principal, to a new one, assuring the Town Council that all measures were being met in order to produce positive changes for our Cutler Bay Middle School.

Since this assurance, we have been receiving updates from the new Principal and representatives from the office of the Superintendent at several Town Council meetings. At no time have they disclosed to the Council that there was a serious problem with violence at the school. The School District did not, at any time, provide such information to the Town, leaving us in the dark regarding this issue and thus having us believe that all was well at the school. In fact, the Town Council demanded answers from the District as soon as the Channel 10 report stated that our middle school was the 3rd "most violent school in the county." I invite you to listen to the audio from our April 15, 2015 Town Council meeting where the Council specifically requests that the School Board respond to the Council's concerns regarding the media's unflattering report about our middle school.

It was during the April 15th Council meeting that I stated that our children are at risk and everything that can be done, must be done in order to ensure that a safe environment is being provided to them. The Superintendent's representative assured me that the Channel 10 statistics were "outdated" by several years and that the School Board had already taken many measures to fix the problem, concluding that the middle school had greatly improved. Additionally, during our April 15th meeting we urged the School District's representative to inform the public that, the channel 10 report was inaccurate, according to the School District. Not only was this information presented to the Council at a public meeting, but it was reiterated with the Assistant Superintendent herself, when we met in Tallahassee for Dade Days just last month.



I personally spoke with Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho and urged him to inform the public in an open letter with an explanation to disprove the Channel 10 report.

Today, the Town faces an even bigger issue as Channel 10 once again reports that our middle school is now number one for being the “most violent school in the State.” As your Mayor, I am urging you to trust in your Council as we are looking at any and every solution to extinguish this issue. I have personally contacted our School Board representative, Dr, Lawrence Feldman, and have spoken with Superintendent Carvalho. The Superintendent has once again informed me that the figures provided in the media are three (3) years old and the incidents have improved eighteen percent (18%) since last year. According to the District, it has invested approximately \$250,000 into programs and personnel in an effort to address these problems.

I have personally invited the Superintendent to attend our May 20, 2015 Town Council meeting. It is to my dismay that he has declined my invitation due to prior commitments, to which my response was that this is an important issue requiring immediate intervention, stating further that what they are doing is obviously not enough. I offered to convene a special meeting at the convenience of the Superintendent, so that he may visit Cutler Bay to address this issue. His response was that he would “send representatives.” I have made it my mission as Mayor to urge the Superintendent to personally, and publicly, commit to addressing the violence issue at our middle school.

I would like to note, that because the School District is a completely separate government agency, with their own rules and personnel, we the Council are not able to direct how they run their operation. However, as Mayor, I am responsible for the safety and welfare of our Town and its residents, many of whom are students at our middle school. Along with the Town Council I must insist the School District take immediate action, above and beyond what they have been doing.

Zero tolerance for fighting should mean expulsion, not a ten (10) day holiday. Students who attend school seeking an education, should not be subjected to bullying, nor forced to attend a school where there is fear in the halls. If the School District does not act immediately, I will hold a Town Hall meeting to hear from the residents, who pay the lion share of their property taxes to the School Board, and together we will find a solution. I hope that you will join me in this effort.

Sincerely,

Peggy R. Bell
Mayor

