

UM Co-Sponsors Countywide 'Ethics in Education' Conference

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By Richard Westlund
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The School of Education and Human Development's Marilyn Neff moderated a lively discussion on teaching to the test.

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (May 6, 2015)—From high-stakes testing, to engaging disaffected students, to addressing the “win-at-all-cost” attitude, school teachers, administrators, coaches, and parents need to make ethical decisions based on what’s right for the child, according to panelists who took part in the May 1-2 “Ethics in Education: A to Z,” conference organized by the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust.

“Ethics is doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason,” said Professor Susan Mullane, director for Sport Administration in the Department of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences in the School of Education and Human Development (SEHD), which co-sponsored the conference.

Marilyn Neff, the SEHD’s associate dean of Planning, Communications, and External Relations, added, “Ethics is just not a concept. It needs to be put into action in order to change individual and community behaviors.”

More than 200 Miami-Dade County Public School teachers and administrators attended the conference, which began with a Friday evening reception at Storer Auditorium on the UM campus.

“As educators, we need to prepare our students for making sound, ethical decisions when confronting their challenges,” Kenneth W. Goodman, professor of medicine and co-director of UM Ethics Programs, said in the opening session.

Baruti Kafele, an award-winning principal and motivational speaker from New Jersey, delivered an inspiring keynote address on “The Intentionality of Ethics in Education.” He spoke of the importance of taking an ethical approach to ensuring that young people have the right mindset to be successful in school.

“Student attitudes matter,” he said. “So, you need to get them excited about learning and their prospects for the future. Staff attitudes and the school climate and culture also matter. Students need to be acknowledged and recognized just for being themselves, as we give them the tools to be even greater than they are today.”

SEHD Dean Isaac Prillentsky, the Erwin and Barbara Mautner Endowed Chair in Community Well-Being, kicked off the Saturday session at Miami Senior High School with a talk on “Fitness and Fairness in Education.”

Prillentsky said educational policy makers need to shift their focus away from the blame game (“what’s wrong with kids, parents, and teachers”) and promote strengths, prevention, empowerment, and community change, as the school is doing through its SPEC initiative.

“Rather than reacting to problems, we must do more to prevent them from occurring in the first place,” he added. “We must pay attention to fairness and ethics in all the domains of life.”

In other Saturday sessions, Neff moderated a lively panel discussion on “Teaching to the Test: When Does It Cross the Ethical Line,” and David Lawrence Jr., Education and Community Leadership Scholar at the SEHD and president of the Early Childhood Initiative Foundation, moderated a session on “School Choice and Public Resources: What are the Limits for Charter Schools and Private School Subsidies?”

In the closing session, “Touchdown! Balancing Education with the Allure and Power of Sports,” Mullane led a conversation with Miami Hurricanes head football coach Al Golden, *Miami Herald* sports reporter and columnist Michelle Kaufman, and Miami-Dade County Court Judge Edward Newman, a former Miami Dolphin.

“Ethics are those values and principles that you can never compromise,” said Golden. “In sports, as in business, you have to know your organization’s mission and core values and stand up for what is right.”

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