

# Miami Herald

## *South Florida teachers need The Education Fund Opinion*

BY HECTOR J. PONTE

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*In February, The Education Fund is asking our local community to “Have a Heart & Support our Public School Teachers” by donating to the Teach-A-Thon campaign. These funds will be used to support classroom instruction and help make teachers’ jobs just a little easier.*

All these years later, I still remember Mrs. Crews, Mrs. Poland, Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Thue, my favorite teachers from first through third grades at Frances S. Tucker Elementary School in Coconut Grove.

With patience and dedication, they taught me how to pause for a comma and enunciate, as that's how I developed my reading skills.

I've been in banking for over 37 years and have met many customers, colleagues and employees.

Yet, the names of my elementary school teachers have never left my memory. That's the power of a teacher.

## **VALUE OF EDUCATORS**

While I'm not a teacher, let me tell you why I feel qualified to talk about the value of an educator.

In addition to being a proud graduate of Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS), I am the father of two MDCPS educators and the son and husband of retired schoolteachers.

As you can see, the most influential women in my life are — or have been — South Florida educators.

Throughout my life, I've been able to see the pride and love they feel toward their students and the challenges they face in their profession.

I've witnessed first-hand their hard work and commitment to their purpose-driven careers. That's why I am so committed to supporting education.

## **EDUCATION FUND HELPS TEACHERS**

For more than 20 years, I've served on the Board of Directors of The Education Fund, supporting their efforts to encourage private sector investments in public education and help local teachers.

One of my favorite Education Fund initiatives is the Teach-A-Thon challenge.

This program puts business executives in teachers' shoes so we can gain first-hand

experience about why successful teacher retention and recruitment strategies are critical to student achievement.

My team at Wells Fargo and I support education by providing financial guidance and counseling to our customers.

It's important to us to support opportunities that help address the systemic and structural barriers that contribute to the wealth gap and continue to prevent shared prosperity.

By using our financial and volunteer resources, in collaboration with community organizations like The Education Fund, we open pathways to economic advancement for residents of South Florida every day.

## **MONEY FOR CLASSROOMS**

I have the opportunity to bring financial health to our classrooms as I step into the role of a "teacher" via The Education Fund's annual Teach-A-Thon.

Every time I do, I learn from the cleverness and curiosity of our kids and see personally the great work done by our South Florida teachers.

I also hear about the many challenges our teachers face. Since many of the parents in our community struggle financially, teachers use their personal funds to provide supplies and other extras for the classrooms. That's why I am incredibly proud that through a Wells Fargo Foundation grant, we're answering The Education Fund's call to make educational excellence a top priority in Miami-Dade.

In February, The Education Fund is asking our local community to "Have a Heart & Support our Public School Teachers" by donating to the Teach-A-Thon campaign. These funds will be used to support classroom instruction and help make teachers' jobs just a little easier.

During February, the month of love, I cannot think of a better way to "have a heart" than to support our public school educators. And I also think of Mrs. Crews, Mrs. Poland, Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Thue.

### **About Hector J. Ponte**

Hector J. Ponte is Wells Fargo's branch banking regional executive in South Florida. A 37-year veteran in financial services, he serves on the board of directors of The

Education Fund and as the chair-elect and nominating chair for the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's Executive Committee.