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Eduardo Padrón guides nation's largest community college to offer low-cost quality education despite state aid cutback

Since moving to the United States as a refugee at 15, Eduardo Padrón has spent 41 years at Miami Dade College, working his way through the ranks at the only school he said would give him a chance after high school.

Since graduating from the college, Dr. Padrón has worked as an assistant professor of economics, department chair, division director, associate dean, dean, vice president, campus president and now college president.

His goal is to ensure that all students, young and old, rich or poor, receive access to a quality education at a low cost.

"Opportunity changes everything," he said, "and our concern is making sure that people who have the least opportunity are given a chance to get an education... Education is the passport to a better life."

As head of one of the most diverse institutions in the nation, in 2003 he pushed to receive state approval to offer bachelor's degrees through the college. He has advocated on behalf of the Dream Act to provide those born outside the US with lower tuition costs and been asked to serve on the White House Commission on Education Excellence for Hispanic Americans, where he works to provide educational opportunities to all nationalities.

"This institution has changed many lives," he said, "and it's demonstrated that you can have open access and excellent academic programs. The students who finish here are second to none and are able to compete in the best universities in the country."

Dr. Padrón discussed his plans to provide Miami-Dade residents with a quality education, how he plans to counter recent reductions in state funding and what the college is doing to better the community with Miami Today staff writer Ashley Hopkins at his downtown office.

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Video Interview Excerpts

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