

OP-ED

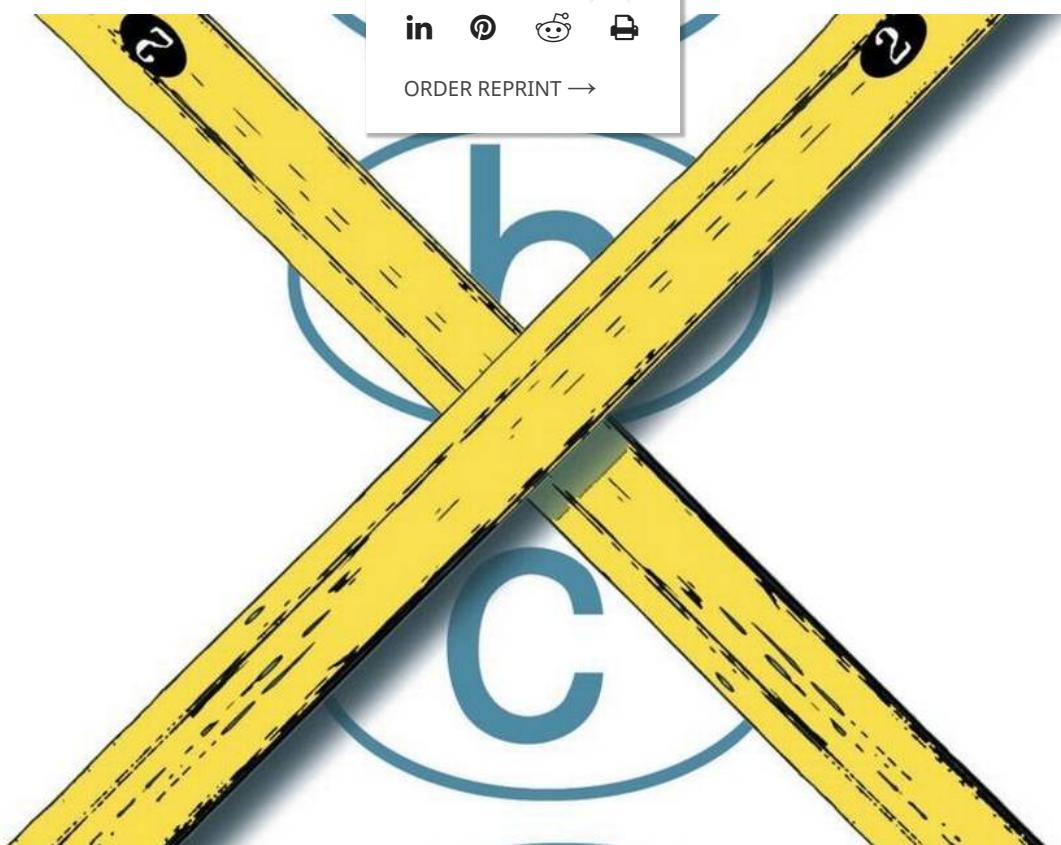
## As meetings grow tense, respect among Miami-Dade School Board members is lacking

By MARTA PÉREZ

[district8.dadeschools.net/](http://district8.dadeschools.net/)

MARCH 29, 2017 09:09 PM, UPDATED MARCH 29, 2017 09:53 PM

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I have had the honor of being a member of the Miami-Dade County School Board for almost two decades. I have seen the board continuously adapt and evolve as new members cycle on, bringing their priorities and personalities to this ever-changing institution.

For the past nine years, several iterations of the board have worked hand-in-hand with the administration to bring stability and common purpose to the organization, resulting in record high academic achievement and unprecedented financial strength.

It is, therefore, dismaying that during recent School Board meetings the tenor of the conversations among board members, and between board members and staff, threaten that stability, which has been the hallmark of our recent success. If we allow the desire for short-term personal wins to lead to unproductive strife, we threaten that which has made us strong. Without the collective commitment to move forward as one cohesive unit, our steady hand at the wheel begins to sway and the organization sways along with it.

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Our community has seen the consequences of taking that unstable path. In 2008, the school district was in complete disarray: Our financial condition was on the verge of bankruptcy; we were about to begin the tenure of our fourth superintendent in less than eight years; despite having the strongest collection of teachers in the nation, we lagged behind the state average in academic achievement. The lack of transparency and mismanagement that permeated the school district during that time prompted me to voice concerns about the path we were taking. Fortunately, a new administration and board steered the district back to financial health and improved student gains.

For those who doubt that simple board politics can negatively affect children's education, look no further than our most recent bond rating reports from Standard & Poor and Moody's.

Both cited strong financial management and policies as elements behind the improved outlook. If we lose critical staff members needed to keep our financial practices strong, or if we adopt policies that do not keep the financial health of the organization paramount, then we risk not only poor financial management but a substantially higher cost of borrowing — which means fewer dollars for capital projects and critically needed maintenance work. The credit agencies monitor and act on our cohesive resolve.

School Board members have dedicated a great deal of our lives to improving public education in South Florida.

The board is united in its desire to ensure that all children receive the highest quality education in the highest quality facilities. We must be careful to ensure that our words and actions do not inadvertently harm what we care about the most.

Marta Pérez represents District 8 on the Miami-Dade County School Board.



Perez

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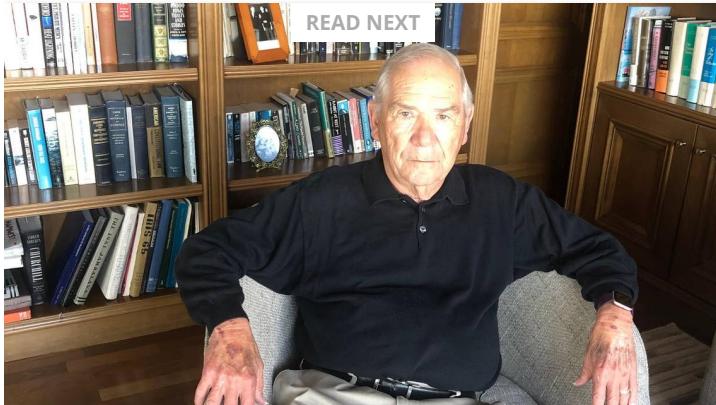
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BY DON BIERMAN

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Solomon Schiff — or "Sol," as everyone who knew him called him — was a rabbi by training and a community leader by choice. He never neglected his work as a clergyman or as a student of Torah.

He followed two important Jewish traditions in living his life. The first was Tikun Olam — the duty to improve the world. I first got to know Sol as a member of the Dade County Community Relations Board. We worked together for years. He became chairman at a crucial time in Miami (1979-1980). There were large protests after six white police officers beat Arthur McDuffie, a Black insurance man, to death. He was chased and stopped for a traffic offense on his motorcycle.

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