As WorldCity celebrates its 10th year, regional business leaders at Microsoft, MasterCard, AIG, Nortel, DHL, HP, Kraft, Ryder, UPS, Unisys, LAN and dozens of other multinational companies share their views on where and how South Florida needs to focus in order to compete among the top ranks of world cities.
Making the grade

At the core of every great city is a highly educated workforce, employed in high-value sectors and workplaces. Research has shown that educational attainment increases incomes and raises productivity, while reducing problems such as crime, welfare dependence and lack of access to medical care.

For Miami to join the ranks of the great cities, the educational attainment of our residents must increase. Based on the 2006 U.S. Census, the percentage of residents in Miami-Dade with a college degree is 25 percent. This is not only below the national average of 27 percent, but also below that of New York City at 32 percent, Boston at 40 percent, Atlanta at 42 percent, the District of Columbia at 45 percent and Raleigh at 50 percent. Providing access to reasonably priced, high-quality higher education for Miami-Dade residents is critical to Miami’s future success.

But providing access to higher education is only part of the solution. Residents must be prepared to succeed when they enter college. SAT scores are commonly used to measure how well students are prepared for college. The Miami-Dade Public School District reported the average SAT score for students taking the exam in 2006 to be 927. This compares with an average SAT score in Florida of 996 and a national average of 1028.

For Miami to join the ranks of great cities, we need to prepare our residents better to succeed in college. This preparation will pose a special challenge for our educational institutions and will require some innovative approaches given the unique demographics of our community. Fifty percent of Miami-Dade residents are foreign born. This figure compares with a high of 36 percent in New York City to a low of 7 percent in Atlanta.

Key to Miami’s quest to become one of the nation’s great cities is for our community to value education. Realizing this value will require dedicated leadership along with a strong financial commitment from the state, Miami-Dade, local governments and the business community.
World city—a concept promoted by the Loughborough University (UK) geography department—is one that has a direct and tangible effect on global affairs through economics, culture and politics.

That Metropolitan Miami is a world city is undeniable. The assets of our multicultural/multilingual gateway city are admirable and innumerable with tourism, international trade, professional services and Latin media and entertainment forming the competitive backbone of our economy.

Nevertheless, a world city is not synonymous with a world-class city.

To achieve that status, we need to remedy longstanding problems that are rapidly eroding our attractiveness and competitiveness: transportation gridlock, lack of affordable housing, poor quality education and workforce preparedness, punitive insurance rates and property taxes, low growth in higher valued-added job sectors (including information technology and biotechnology) and the brain drain (our best and brightest often move elsewhere).

While it is unfair to compare and foolish to hope Miami will become another New York, London, Hong Kong or Singapore, we can benchmark ourselves with similar multicultural, global cities of similar size—cities that are world-class.

For that, there is no better example than Toronto. Thanks to strong leadership—private, public and non-profit—Toronto has an infrastructure that works well (including its mass transit system), quality job growth, affordable housing and accessible health and social services for its poor, a skilled workforce, a clean and well-appointed international airport where immigration and customs officers and airport workers are friendly and helpful, and symphonic and chamber ensembles that were funded and supported by the community prior to the erection of the modern concert halls that house them.

Despite the impediments to world-class status cited above, the moment is propitious to undertake action for excellence. The new strong mayor system of government in Miami-Dade County, a revitalized Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce and the increase in volunteerism and commitment by ordinary citizens are welcome signs.