THE EDUCATION FUND RECEIVES $100K SAPPHIRE AWARD FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH EXCELLENCE FROM THE BLUE FOUNDATION FOR A HEALTHY FLORIDA

CONTACT: **Linda Lecht, The Education Fund**
Phone: 305-892-5099, ext. 16
llecht@educationfund.org

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The Education Fund won the prestigious **2009 Sapphire Award** along with **$100,000** from the **Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida** at a ceremony held Dec. 2 in Orlando.

Recognized for its **Plant A Thousand Gardens Collaborative Nutrition Initiative (CNI)** school gardens program, The Education Fund was one of two nonprofits selected for the top honor and the sole Miami-Dade County recipient of the Sapphire, the only statewide award that recognizes nonprofit organizations for demonstrating excellence in addressing health disparities within their communities.

CNI's seed-to-table schoolyard edible gardens program was created three years ago to counter the alarming rate of childhood obesity, diabetes and other conditions due to poor nutrition literacy and eating habits among at-risk students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). Students plant, maintain and harvest vegetable gardens over the school year while relating the lessons in the garden to multidisciplinary classroom exercises. Parents take part in planting and attend workshops on preparing healthy meals. Positive data from CNI participants shows an 80% increase in children who report eating vegetables with lunch and that 88% of parents are preparing healthier foods.

CNI has expanded to 25 Miami-Dade County Public Schools in 2009 with plans to be implemented in every elementary school within two years.

The Sapphire Award selection committee recognized CNI's hands-on and cross-curricular approach to learning as "…a sustainable method of ensuring the ongoing health of Floridians by changing students' attitudes towards food and nutritional awareness."

"This program is a model of community collaboration, involving key stakeholders—educators, parents, students, chefs, gardeners, community wellness advocates, etc.—in an effort to teach students, and subsequently families, the importance of a nutritious lifestyle," the committee wrote.

"With this fabulous confirmation that we are on the right track, we are one step closer to ensuring that every school has an edible garden and every child has improved health and eating habits for a lifetime," said Linda Lecht, president of The Education Fund.

Since 1985, The Education Fund has raised more than $36 million for Miami-Dade public schools. The organization's mission is to design, shape and implement initiatives that involve the private sector in improving our schools and bringing excellence to public education. The funding has subsidized more than 4,000 classroom projects through individual grants, provided more than 10,000 refurbished computers to students and parents, and supported teachers and students with numerous other programs and initiatives. For more information on The Education Fund, visit www.educationfund.org.

The Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida is the separate, philanthropic affiliate of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida. The Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida funds programs operated by community-based, nonprofit organizations in Florida that serve the health care needs of uninsured and underserved individuals.