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Curriculum, Instruction, and School Improvement

**SUBJECT: REQUEST AUTHORIZATION TO ESTABLISH A YOUNG
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR GIRLS IN GRADES
6-12**

COMMITTEE: INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Rationale:

With the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, public school choice options have grown significantly in popularity across the country. Much of the success of these public options can be directly attributed to the active engagement of students and parents as a result of having a personal choice in the selection of a school that meets their individual needs and reflects the cultures and traditions of their community. Research indicates that this active engagement is an essential component of successful schools and is directly linked to gains in student achievement. However, this level of engagement is often lacking in many public schools, particularly in large urban school districts.

The compelling evidence that supports public choice options as an integral part of school improvement is the foundation for a bold new initiative in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). Through collaboration and partnerships with the community, new educational models designed to engage students and families in the educational process and bridge existing gaps in services and support are being conceptualized. One such model is the proposed Young Women's Leadership Academy.

Research on Single Gender Schools:

Much of the research on single gender education over the last decade has focused on the differences in brain development between males and females. Studies conducted by the National Institutes of Health have shown that the right side of the brain develops more rapidly in males; the left in females. Thus, at an earlier age, boys grasp such things as measuring, perceiving geographical direction, and abstract understanding, while girls master speaking, reading, writing, and listening.

Other research has focused on the differences in educational outcomes for girls and boys who attend single gender schools versus traditional co-educational settings. As a result of a very specialized instructional focus and attention to the research that supports that focus, girls who attend single gender schools tend to develop more self-confidence and are more likely to exhibit leadership qualities and pursue advanced degrees. Data from the Young Women's Leadership School in East Harlem, N.Y. indicate that 100% of graduates over the past five years have been accepted to college. Additionally, studies

indicate that poor and disadvantaged students were especially likely to benefit from single gender education largely due to a sharp focus on academics, lack of distraction from the opposite sex, and an instructional environment tailored to meet specific developmental needs.

While the evidence to support single gender schools continues to grow, there is clearly some consensus that this model can provide unique educational choices for students that open pathways for academic improvement and success. The concept for the Young Women's Leadership Academy is to expand access to this type of educational model as a public choice option for students in M-DCPS.

Proposed Model:

M-DCPS is currently seeking space to lease in an accessible location within the City of Miami to create the Young Women's Leadership Academy. The proposed 6-12 school would provide a choice option for approximately 500 girls to attend a single gender school.

The design of both the school facility and the curricular programs will reflect the unique educational environment. The site will encompass approximately 40,000 square feet, with particular attention given to space utilization and furnishings to meet the biological, emotional, and cultural needs of the school's single gender population.

As a small learning community, students will benefit from a more personalized environment structured to meet their individual needs. A rigorous curriculum and instructional methodologies will be tailored to reflect the research on human development and gender differences in learning, related to sequencing, pacing, and time. Additionally, the 6-12 grade configuration will allow for seamless transitions and scaffolding of instruction and educational experiences as students matriculate through the seven-year program of study.

As a school of choice, parent and community involvement will be an integral element in the instructional program. Participation in school activities, extended learning opportunities in the community, and business/community partnerships will enhance the curriculum in ways that bring both relevance and rigor to the classroom.

Projected Costs:

The capital cost for this project is approximately \$5 million to be funded by the reallocation of a portion of the site acquisition funding available in the District's approved Five Year Capital Plan, and no longer required for Miami Senior High School. These funds will be used for the anticipated facility renovations, furniture, fixtures, and equipment. Once open, operational and staffing expenditures will be FTE driven.

RECOMMENDED: That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, authorize the Superintendent to:

1. establish a Young Women's Leadership Academy for girls in grades 6-12;
2. open the Young Women's Leadership Academy in the 2006-2007 school year for grades 6-10; and
3. add a grade level each subsequent year.

APD/mf