

Ms. Perla Tabares Hantman, Vice Chair

SUBJECT: EXPLORE THE FEASIBILITY OF IMPLEMENTING A PILOT PROGRAM FOR ONLINE PAYMENT SYSTEM FOR PARENTS TO USE TO PAY FOR STUDENT MEALS AND OTHER FEES

COMMITTEE: INNOVATION, EFFICIENCY & GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

As technology has advanced, online payment systems have gained popularity as safe and efficient ways to pay bills. A system accessible to parents to pay online for their children's meals could provide advantages for both parents and schools. Parents will have a flexible and convenient way to pay for fees, children will not be handling cash or checks and schools will be provided with an easy and efficient method for collecting these fees. Additionally, this service will promote the use of the school's web site by parents and provide a positive image for the District. In addition to school meals, other fees encountered by parents are field trips, tickets for school events, uniforms, and many others.

Parents could access online payment systems through a link on their child's school's internet web page. They select the items they want to purchase and then pay for them using a credit card or electronic check. Payments are automatically processed and the money is applied to the District's bank account. As more parents use an online system to make purchases and pay fees, the money will be deposited electronically in a central account. The account will accumulate increased interest earnings that can be used for the benefit of all schools in the District. Staff time is eliminated for processing these collections. Controls can be enhanced through the reduction of handling cash and/or checks at the school site and through the use of automated reconciliation systems.

District staff has already determined that implementation of this type of online payment processes for a wide range of school-based activities is both feasible and achievable. A broad-based implementation, however, will require systems changes in the Controllers and Treasury offices and process changes at every school site. The systems changes required to accomplish this have been incorporated into the systems specifications for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) for Business project that is currently progressing, but full implementation will take up to three years, and it is not known where this aspect of the project will be accommodated within that overall project timeline.

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Food Services is a standalone, non-General Fund operation that necessitates that thousands of cash payments be collected, accounted for, and processed every school day. In order to gauge the popularity of this type of program with parents and the feasibility of broader-based applications, it is recommended that the Superintendent explore the feasibility of implementing a pilot online payment program for school breakfasts and lunches.

ACTION PROPOSED BY

VICE CHAIR PERLA TABARES HANTMAN: That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida authorize the Superintendent to explore the feasibility of implementing a pilot online payment system for parents to use to pay for student meals and submit findings and any recommendations at the September 13, 2006 meeting.