

Rudolph F. Crew, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT: REQUEST AUTHORIZATION TO IMPLEMENT HIGHWAYS TO SUCCESS: AN EDUCATIONAL CONTINUUM FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**COMMITTEE: INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**LINK TO DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN: IMPROVE AND EXPAND CURRENT ADULT/VOCATIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

Presently, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) provides educational services to students who are having difficulty succeeding in traditional educational settings through alternative schools and adult education programs. These alternative and adult education programs, which use non-traditional instructional and behavior modification strategies, are housed at separate facilities and on-campus at designated school sites. Alternative Education programs are implemented at schools operated by the District and through the use of outside agencies that provide services via contracts and agreements to approximately 60 sites. In addition, adult education programs are delivered through 21 sites which provide programs including Adult Basic Education, Adult English Literacy, Vocational/Technical Education, and those to assist in high school completion.

*Highways to Success* will provide for more coherence in program delivery for students who are having difficulty in succeeding in traditional educational settings, as well as a seamless process for their identification, articulation, transition, and progress monitoring. This initiative will start with the needs of the student and will create comprehensive support systems that foster improved student achievement, better attitudes, and regular attendance. *Highways to Success* will also place an emphasis on providing students with employability skills, as well as skills that they will need to be successful in not only school, but also in life. Such skills include reading, writing, computation, listening and speaking, creative thinking and problem solving, personal effectiveness, group effectiveness, and knowing how to learn. This initiative presents an opportunity to improve, restructure, and create new, innovative, and viable educational pathways for students in M-DCPS.

### **Research Implications**

The concerning dropout rate at the national, state, and District levels speaks to the importance and urgency in providing interventions and programs that help keep students in school and on a pathway toward graduation. Sound, flexible educational pathways represent a more promising approach to addressing the needs of at-risk students. Such pathways will help students to remain in school, improve academically, and achieve higher standards.

At-risk students, whose issues go unresolved and for whom effective interventions are not provided, pose a threat to not only their own well-being, but to the safety and educational well-being of other students and have the potential to negatively impact society. Research has demonstrated that youth who are not in school or in the labor force are placed at an increased risk for delinquency and crime and are placed on a pathway to prison (Snyder and Sickmund, 1995). Such research and related data conclude that despite the costs associated with at-risk

students and those with special needs, society ultimately pays a much higher and long-impacting price for children's failure in school.

One study showed that the benefits of dropout prevention through alternative and adult education schools and programs, over time, would exceed the costs by a ratio of nine to one (Alternbaugh, Engel, and Martin, 1995). Over a lifetime, an 18-year-old who does not complete high school earns about \$260,000 less than an individual with a high school diploma, and contributes about \$60,000 less in federal and state income taxes. This same group of non-graduates is also placed at greater risk of being on public assistance (Olson, 2006). Viable and effective alternative and adult education programs can stem the tide of an increasing dropout phenomenon. Through programs offered via this initiative, students will be able to engage in relevant and meaningful learning in a small, intimate setting. *Highways to Success* will improve and expand the provision of such programs to students in M-DCPS and transcend a "one size fits all" approach to educating and supporting struggling learners.

Lastly, this initiative supports a key strategy in the "*Revised 2005-2008 District Strategic Plan*" which was approved by the Board at its October 11, 2006 School Board Meeting. It represents a new conceptualization and paradigm shift regarding alternative and adult education in M-DCPS for future years, beginning in the 2007-2008 school year. *Highways to Success* involves the development of new program models for students, as well as improving and expanding the current District operated alternative and adult education schools and programs. An emphasis has also been placed on strengthening the articulation, coherence, and organizational structure of the existing District's alternative and adult education programs to provide for more efficient utilization of resources. A copy of the document *Highways to Success: An Educational Continuum for At-Risk Students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools* will provide more detail and be submitted through transmittal under separate cover.

**Projected Costs:**

Costs for the 2007-2008 school year will be approximately \$4.2 million. These costs will be covered by remaining funds budgeted for alternative and adult education for the 2006-2007 school year.

**RECOMMENDED:** That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, authorize the Superintendent to implement the *Highways to Success* initiative, beginning in the 2007-2008 school year.

RFC/FW/SG:jc