

Dr. Lawrence S. Feldman, Vice Chair

SUBJECT: EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL HOMELESS STUDENTS, NATIONAL HUNGER AND HOMELESS AWARENESS WEEK, AND THE HOMELESS TRUST'S HOMELESS AWARENESS DAY

COMMITTEE: INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

LINK TO STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: SCHOOL/DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week is held each year the week before Thanksgiving. This is a time for all of us to reflect upon how grateful we are for what we have and a perfect opportunity to demonstrate our compassion for our neighbors who are experiencing difficulties, as well as, homelessness. This year, the National Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week is being held from November 15-23. Participating in National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week not only brings greater awareness to our community, but also make a conscious effort to promote ending hunger and homelessness.

School districts must contend with the fact that more than 1.6 million children are homeless at some point in their lives and that number continues to increase. Along with losing their home, community, friends, and routines, as well as, their sense of stability and safety, many homeless youth are also victims of trauma. While trying to survive on the streets, our youth are exposed to countless dangers with an increased likelihood of substance abuse, early parenthood, impulsivity, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a vulnerability to being trafficked.

Locally, the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust is the coordinating entity for the system of care that has resulted in a significant reduction of street homelessness. This year, The Homeless Trust celebrated its 6th Annual Homeless Awareness Day to educate, inspire change, and ultimately, end homelessness in our community. The culminating event took place on November 6, 2014 at Port Miami and the University of Miami and featured the participation of over 800 Miami-Dade County Public School (M-DCPS) students and local business and community service heroes. M-DCPS currently serves over 1,600 homeless students through 'Project Upstart', under the Division of Student Services. Project Upstart educates teachers and administrators on how to address the needs of homeless students and was involved in the Homeless Trust's county-wide comprehensive count of homeless students last year. This count was realized in the hopes that the Department of Housing and Urban Development would recognize this issue and fund specialized services for unaccompanied and homeless youth.

A special focus of this year's Homeless Awareness Day was to honor homeless veterans and raise awareness about efforts underway to assist this special population. With an estimated 240 homeless Veterans in Miami-Dade, the task is enormous, but thanks to the leadership of the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust and the Veteran's Administration in Miami, the Chapman House, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami-Dade is on track to permanently house those who served our country with honor, courage, and dedication and are now battling homelessness.

This item seeks that The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida direct the Superintendent to partner, whenever feasible, with local and county agencies seeking federal assistance to address the needs of our homeless students; explore the feasibility of M-DCPS adult and vocational program involvement in developing alternative housing options; and continue to support National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week, The Homeless Trust's Homeless Awareness Day and enhance efforts to engage students in related awareness advocacy and volunteer efforts.

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ACTION PROPOSED

DR. LAWRENCE S. FELDMAN:

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida direct the Superintendent to partner, whenever feasible, with local and county agencies seeking federal assistance to address the needs of our homeless students; explore the feasibility of adult and vocational program involvement in developing alternative housing options; and continue to support National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week, The Homeless Trust's Homeless Awareness Day and enhance efforts to engage students in related advocacy and volunteer efforts.

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