

Dr. Lawrence S. Feldman, Board Member

SUBJECT: VITA – VIRTUAL INTERACTIVE TRAINING AGENT

COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY

LINK TO STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT: RELEVANT, RIGOROUS AND INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS

The Virtual Interactive Training Agent (ViTA) is the product of a partnership between the Dan Marino Foundation (DMF) and The University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies. Leveraging more than 15 years of U.S. Army funded research into the development of virtual humans for therapeutic and/or teaching applications, the ViTA software program utilizes 6 diverse employer avatars to help young people practice job interviewing skills.

The "employers" are available in three dispositions, from neutral to hostile, in seven vocational backgrounds to train students for successful job interviewing with diverse personalities and in a variety of settings. The software and "interview" can be conducted using computers or larger screens for a more submersible experience.

This program was designed for students on the Autism Spectrum who often struggle to communicate effectively, read social and facial/bodily cues accurately, and for whom the job interview process can be a major barrier to employment. Since its inception at the Marino Campus, pilot tests indicate that 80% of the study participants showed marked improvement in their interviewing skills and 44 out of 72 acquired and maintained employment. The need for programming that addresses this life skill need is highlighted by the alarming unemployment rate of 84% amongst persons with autism or other developmental disabilities.

In 2016, Google announced a list of 25 innovators awarded a grant from the Google Impact Challenge: Disabilities. The DMF is among the recipients for its ViTA software and curriculum. Grant funds are being used to develop new features and to offer it to schools and non-profits throughout the country. The DMF has indicated their willingness to offer this software license and curriculum to Miami-Dade County Public Schools for their use and application at no cost to the District.

This agenda item authorizes the Superintendent to evaluate the feasibility of the DMF's offer to utilize the ViTA software and its applicability, particularly for students in Exceptional Student Education, Autism and Vocational Programs, and to bring back recommendations to the Board by the April 25, 2018 School Board meeting.

This item has been reviewed and approved by the School Board Attorney's office as to form and legal sufficiency.

ACTION PROPOSED

BY LAWRENCE S. FELDMAN: That The School Board of Miami-Dade County authorize the Superintendent to evaluate the feasibility of the Dan Marino Foundation's offer to utilize the ViTA software and its applicability to students, particularly in Exceptional Student Education, Autism and vocational programs and to bring back recommendations to the Board by the April 25, 2018 School Board meeting.