

Ms. Lubby Navarro, Board Member

SUBJECT: AUTHORIZE THE SUPERINTENDENT TO EXPLORE COLLABORATIONS TO STUDY AND ENHANCE THE RATE OF REFERRAL AND IDENTIFICATION OF FEMALE STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

COMMITTEE: FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

LINK TO STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT: INFORMED, ENGAGED AND EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS

A recent study conducted by the Children's National Health System reveals that a strikingly disparate rate of autism diagnosis between girls and boys may indicate that vast numbers of girls with autism are not identified and are often left untreated. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 68 children is affected by autism. Of this number, boys are four and a half times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls. The study suggests that autism among girls is often masked by their ability to hide social deficits and other symptoms associated with autism more effectively than boys. This in turn leads to reduced rates of diagnosis and provision of early intervention for girls with autism. The consequences are detrimental as girls with undetected autism struggle to adapt to social and behavioral stressors in the absence of established support systems. The research further suggests that reduced diagnosis rates for girls may ultimately contribute to the emergence of mental health issues such as depression and eating disorders.

Data for Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) indicates that 84% of students diagnosed with autism are male and 15% are female. This discrepancy is in alignment with national trends. In an effort to address the adverse impact wrought by the underdiagnoses of female students, procedures for the referral and identification of students with autism should be refined to enhance the detection rate of signs of autism among girls. Specifically, training for instructional personnel should be tailored to enable them to identify behavioral characteristics that may be more prevalent among girls with autism. By developing a common understanding that female students with autism may be overlooked for treatment because they are more adept at hiding traits typically associated with ASD, this will enable schools to offer early intervention and thereby improve academic, emotional and behavioral outcomes.

Collaborations with local entities dedicated to studying ASD and supporting children and families will bolster this effort. The University of Miami-Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UM-NSU CARD) can provide research-based training aimed at eliminating gender disparity in ASD diagnosis and evaluation through summer academies for teachers, school psychologists, school social workers and other personnel who serve as first responders for students demonstrating academic or behavioral deficiencies. Similar specialized training and outreach to support families can be offered in partnership with Autism Speaks and The Dan Marino Foundation.

This item has been reviewed by the School Board Attorney's Office and approved for legal sufficiency.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
MS. LUBBY NAVARRO:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, authorize the Superintendent to explore collaborations to enhance the identification of female students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).