Office of School Board Members
Board Meeting of May 16, 2018

May 3, 2018

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Board Member

SUBJECT: **ENSURING STUDENT SAFETY DURING STUDENT WALKOUTS**

COMMITTEE: **PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

LINK TO STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT: **INFORMED, ENGAGED, AND EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS**

The School Board of Miami-Dade County Public Schools is committed to respecting and supporting the rights of each student to express themselves pursuant to their rights afforded through the Constitution, State law, and Board Policy. In fact, *School Board Policy 2240, Controversial Issues and Student Expression,* states that "students are encouraged to participate in discussions, speeches, and other expressions in which many points of view, including those that are controversial, are freely explored." Policy 2240 further defines a "controversial issue" as "a topic on which opposing points of view have been promulgated by responsible opinion or likely to arouse both support and opposition in the community."

Since the tragic school shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas on February 14, 2018, the nation has witnessed a growing and frequent student protest movement involving student walkouts. This movement has not only sought to elevate the national discourse around the tragic gun violence that has occurred and claimed innocent lives in schools around the nation, but it has also shone a light on a narrative around the too frequent occurrence of senseless gun violence that occurs in poor, urban communities. Places such as Miami's beloved Liberty City, where senseless gun violence has been a vexing, intractable issue for decades, has often felt neglected and even bastardized in its omission in the local, state, and national debate around ending gun violence in schools and communities. Following a similar path of expression as was done at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas in Parkland, Florida, students at Miami Northwestern Senior High School participated in a walkout, whose route took them to the off-campus destination in which several of their school-mates were murdered in broad day-light and a stone's throw away from where a 4-year old was also shot and killed days earlier.

School districts across the nation have been recently confronted with the issue of students expressing themselves through walkouts. Many have stood in solidarity with their students and in support of their rights to express themselves. However, all have done so with a keen sense of awareness of maintaining student and school safety during these pivotal moments. Further, many have contended with the unintended consequences of students being allowed to freely think for and express themselves without the interference or engagement of socio-political agendas that are not of the students' making, but may manifest through those advanced by both adults from in and outside of the school. The use of social media further disadvantages principals, as well as school and district staff, in their commitment and obligation to ensure the safety of their students and security of their schools as a result of walk-outs or protests that occur with little to no advance warning.

Though most student walkouts occur without incident other than the walkout itself and end with participating students returning to their schools and classrooms safely, such was not the case for Johnathon Benko, an 11-year old middle school of Parkland Middle School in El Paso, Texas who was killed during a school walkout after being hit by a truck while trying to cross the highway after leaving campus with a group of about 400 of his schoolmates during the National School Walkout. This occurred despite the school taking a proactive approach in setting up a designated spot on the football field to keep students from leaving campus and ensure students' safety. Further, student walkouts conducted in an unauthorized, unsafe, and unprotected manner expose students to unapproved media access and, most concernedly the unintended consequence of placing them in the crosshairs of community conflicts that precipitated some of the violent incidents of which they seek protest.

This item seeks to review the policy and procedures from governing student expression, as well as recent incidents of student walkouts to explore proactive plans of action to ensure the safety and security of students during such incidents. This item also seeks to review Board policies regarding the influence and participation of adults, including school staff and outside individuals, groups, and/or entities in promoting plans, programs, and platforms for student expression, as defined in Policy 2240.

This item has been reviewed by the School Board Attorney for legal sufficiency.

ACTION PROPOSED BY DR. STEVE GALLON III:

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida directs the Superintendent to:

1. review the School Board Policies, specifically, School Board Policy 2240- *Controversial Issues and Student Expression*, in relation to recent student walkouts in Miami-Dade County Public Schools;
2. review recent incidents of student walkouts in Miami-Dade County Public Schools and the nexus to student safety and school security;
3. establish a Task Force comprised of students, teachers, principals, school police, parents, and community members to review policies and practices for student expression, including but not limited to student walkouts to ensure the safety of students, faculty, and staff, and security of schools;
4. work with School Board Attorney to review School Board Policies for student expression, attendance, conduct, and employee participation to ensure compliance with applicable laws, statutes, and standards, and make policy recommendations and/or amendments, as deemed appropriate; and
5. provide update to the Board on the abovementioned no later than the School Board Meeting of October 10, 2018.