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COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Established in school districts, cities, counties and states throughout the nation, college promise programs seek to break traditional barriers to post-secondary education by facilitating scholarships, financial resources and, in some cases, built-in support mechanisms to scaffold students from high school to college. These programs acknowledge that despite federal financial aid, grants and scholarships, many students are unable to afford to attend universities and programs of post-secondary study. Communities who have engaged in college promise initiatives have recognized pervasive issues in the rising cost of tuition affecting a shrinking middle class, persistent disparity in college enrollment and graduation for minorities, and the growing need for an educated workforce. They believe in a shared moral obligation and responsibility to address solutions to these issues, committing themselves to collaboratively developing college promise programs which leverage the resources and financial commitment of a cross section of stakeholders in an accountable manner.

One of the first and most widely referenced college promise programs was initiated in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 2005. Since that time, the Kalamazoo Promise program has disbursed \$90 million in anonymously donated scholarship funds to graduating seniors in its high schools. Research has shown that benefits from this initiative include increased college enrollment and degree completion amongst students benefiting from the program when compared to school districts from across the state. Since the launch of the Kalamazoo Promise, over 300 college promise programs have been initiated nation-wide, each created locally, often through public-private partnerships, and benefitting school districts in cities such as Cleveland, Buffalo, and in Knox County, Tennessee.

Nationwide, college promise programs exist in designs and models as varied as the communities they serve but have several standard components that are usually contemplated, such as eligibility criteria, scholarship amounts, distribution methodology, etc. There is no shortage of existing research and scholarly articles addressing design models, best practices, and accompanying data, all of which serve as useful tools when considering the development of a program and its components.

Of interest for communities mindful of the historical challenges in college admission and completion for first generation, low-income, and minority students is compelling evidence surrounding wrap around services and support as an additional component in the program design.

Stakeholders in college promise communities choosing to include wrap around services, such as dedicated coaching and mentoring resources, acknowledge that a gap in college enrollment and completion rates still exists for students with these indicators as well as others across the educational spectrum desiring to attend college and better their access to opportunities.

These communities have, in essence, provided for these “front-end” resources to increase the likelihood that fragile students, in particular, will be ready to take advantage of their promise programs by supporting them along their path and ensuring they are ready to enroll in and complete post-secondary programs. Another consideration when designing these programs addresses the options in funding distribution methods. In the planning stages, local committees consider first-dollar vs. last-dollar funding, and deliberate the benefits of each. As a testament to the solution-minded, thoughtful deliberation some communities have undertaken, the middle-dollar method, designed to address the shortcomings of a last-dollar method without incurring the cost of a first-dollar method, has evolved and gained considerable momentum.

Locally, our two largest post-secondary institutions offer their own variations of college promise type programs. At Miami-Dade College (MDC), high school graduates who meet the established grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or minimal test score criteria can access a tuition-free education at its campuses once they have utilized all financial aids, grants, scholarships and Florida Prepaid College funds available to them. Most recently, in 2018, MDC received an additional \$10 million from local benefactors to grow this scholarship. In 2017, Florida International University (FIU) also established a similar program for incoming freshman, launching the Golden Promise to help low income students earn a degree without going into debt. Eligibility criteria includes U.S. citizenship or permanent resident status and is available only to students with an expected family contribution of zero on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. MDC and FIU are to be commended for their initiatives and efforts to address the financial needs of our academically proficient and most economically challenged students. Their efforts exemplify what can be achieved when progressive, innovative leadership rises to undertake a seemingly impossible task and it has provided access and opportunities for countless students to achieve their dream of attending college.

Without minimizing these local efforts, we must recognize that although these programs are certainly making college a reality for many of our students, a sizable population remains uncaptured by these initiatives. Eligibility requirements effectively exclude many students, including those who we would still consider in financial need; who may have resided in our county but are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents; who have borderline GPA's but show promise and desire to further their education. Students who have an interest in enrolling in certificated or trade programs from accredited institutions or who wish to pursue degrees in other state institutions are, similarly, not addressed. According to research cited by The Florida College Access Network, “Communities benefit when they increase the proportion of residents with a postsecondary credential. They enjoy a higher tax base, lower criminal rates, and healthier residents. They are also better positioned to attract employers offering good paying jobs.” For these reasons, it is vital to the well-being and economic sustainability of our community that opportunities to access a post-secondary education are broadened to include the universe of all of our applicable students.

Through remarkable successes achieved as a result of progressive and bold initiatives, Miami-Dade County Public Schools has proven itself across the spectrum of measurable indicators as the premiere urban school district in the nation.

An opportunity now exists to take the next logical step in our re-engineering of the public education design and build upon our community's documented interest in workforce development, facilitating college access, and realizing philanthropic potential and endeavors. This agenda item seeks to initiate the conversation amongst an essential cross-section of stakeholders representing business, philanthropic, educational, 501(c)(3) and governmental agencies and communities as it relates to interest in the development of a countywide local college promise type program.

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

ACTION PROPOSED BY

DR. LAWRENCE S. FELDMAN:

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, authorize the Superintendent to convene a task force comprised of a cross-section of stakeholders representing business, philanthropic, educational, 501(c)(3) and governmental agencies and communities to determine interest in and potential for establishing a county-wide college promise type program. To that end, the task force will purposely limit its initial scope and phased actionable goals to:

1. review national case studies, particularly programs featuring public school district collaborations, to familiarize themselves with varying designs and implementation models, and financial considerations of a college promise-type program;
2. based on data, analyze projected program needs and financial implications for either an established consensus of envisioned program design criteria or varying program designs as determined by the task force, which will be non-binding but serve as a benchmark to deliberate upon; and
3. provide The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida with its findings and final recommendations, to include whether a follow up phase/task force is advisable for future steps towards the development of a countywide college promise type program that meets the needs and desires of our high school graduates, by no later than the December 11, 2019 School Board meeting.