

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Vice Chair

**SUBJECT: SCHOOL OPENING, DISTANCE LEARNING AND RELATED PROGRAMS**

**COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY**

**LINK TO STRATEGIC**

**BLUEPRINT: RELEVANT, RIGOROUS AND INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS**

The School Board of Miami-Dade County remains committed to providing all students with a quality education, inclusive of academic support and enrichment opportunities, during the current pandemic vexing the community, state, nation, and world. The Board, along with the Superintendent, district staff, principals, teachers, and employees have resolved to deliver consistent, continuous, and equitable educational programming to students and families via distance learning programs and platforms. This has been necessary as a result of the risks associated with “face to face” instruction due to recent positivity rates and related health and safety concerns in Miami-Dade County pertaining COVID-19.

As is widely known, Florida has been significantly impacted in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases —placing it among the highest in the nation. Further, Miami-Dade County leads the state in these numbers. In fact, on Sunday, July 12, 2020 Florida broke U.S. state records with 15,300 and saw its second highest daily record the very next day with 12,624 new cases, with Miami-Dade County leading with a staggering 67,713 total confirmed cases with a positivity rate exceeding 28 percent.

This trend decreased the likelihood of a “brick and mortar” school opening at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year and increased the need and demand for parents to access digital/distance learning options for their children. It would also require a more strategic, deliberate, and thoughtful plan of action around training and related support for parents in the use of digital/distance learning platforms and technologies. Ultimately, these combined efforts were intended to improve the quality of the digital/distance learning experiences for parents, teachers, and students, and more importantly, student learning and achievement during these educationally challenging times. Consequently, at the School Board Meeting of July 15, 2020, the School Board unanimously approved School Board Agenda Item H-12, proffered by Vice Chair Dr. Steve Gallon III to provide parental training and support on distance learning programs, platforms, and related home learning topics. Training was reportedly provided to parents beginning the week of August 24, 2020.

Previously, the School Board approved a Reopening Plan at its Special Board Meeting of July 1, 2020 consistent with Executive Order 2020-EO-06 issued by the Commissioner of Education on July 6, 2020 directing that all public schools be opened for the 2020-2021 school year, beginning this fall.

**Good Cause  
H-13**

The Executive Order specified that districts must open brick and mortar schools at least five days a week for all students subject to local health conditions and/or guidance from the Florida Department of Health. School Reopening would be preceded by and subject to the approval of a reopening plan submitted by each school district. During this Meeting, the School Board approved a plan grounded in the following four principles: 1) ensuring the safety and wellness of students and staff; 2) delivering high quality instruction to students, regardless of delivery model; 3) providing parents with flexibility and choice in instructional delivery models; and 4) optimizing the use of resources. More importantly, M-DCPS provided parents, via its Reopening Plan, a Schoolhouse Model, Digital Model, and Hybrid Model which reflected a combination of schoolhouse and digital. However, at the Special School Board Meeting of July 29, 2020 which was scheduled to provide an update to the District's School Reopening, the Schoolhouse Model and Hybrid Model were no longer presented as options for parents to choose.

The Digital Model was presented as the sole option that would be made available to parents, along with a new digital platform, K.12 which would be used as the district's single online platform for teachers, students, and families. The School Board was not presented an item to approve the selection and purchase of K.12, reportedly at a cost of \$15 million, which was allowable via current School Board Policy and though not required to be used by the District, was one of two programs approved by the State. At this meeting, the Superintendent also announced proposed plans to delay the 2020-2021 opening of schools by one week to August 31, 2020, which would include the provision of training and professional development for administrators, teachers, employees, and parents during the week of August 24, 2020. The School Board approved an Amendment to the Elementary and Secondary School Calendar—2020-2021 at the August 12, 2020 regular School Board Meeting.

Challenges and issues were reported with the launch of the training and professional development on K.12 beginning August 24, 2020. Concerns and issues were voiced by teachers, as well as parents who were also registered to begin online training during the same period. Concerns ranged from the effectiveness and delivery methods and content of the training to the compressed time to learn and prepare to utilize a new, critically important digital learning platform. Some teachers also expressed concerns that curriculum for their particular subject areas were not available and/or offered through the system. These concerns and issues were expressed through Monday, August 31, 2020, the first day of school at which point a "tipping point" was realized with the total "shutdown" of M-DCPS' online system---preventing students, parents, and employees from accessing the district and related student learning platforms.

Inasmuch as latitude in educational and related purchasing decisions is granted to the administration, none abdicates the role, responsibility, and accountability of the School Board for district expenditures and school system operations, and ultimately, the educational experiences and outcomes of students.

Although an initial explanation of a technical issue was described as the potential source of the initial problem, a subsequent explanation was issued as a potential problem that involved Comcast. However, a later explanation was issued as a cyber-attack as the cause of the disruption of service to the system. In the event that this may prove to be the case, the District must take proactive and preventive measures to mitigate and abate such threats in the future.

Lastly, the School Board has consistently placed cybersecurity at the forefront of the agenda, especially in the era of distance learning options. At the School Board meeting of July 25, 2018, the Board approved Agenda Item H-9, proffered by School Board Member Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas and co-sponsored by School Board Member Ms. Susie V. Castillo. Item H-9 requested a review of current practices, procedures, and realistic recommendations to enhance cybersecurity in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). Following that item, the Superintendent followed up with memorandum on October 1, 2018 to the Board concerning cyber-security and the creation of an "Office of Data Security, Governance, and Compliance, whose primary focus is to develop policies and procedures to define proper data governance in an effort to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the District's information systems and to address the rapid pace at which the cyber world evolves." As part of Item H-9, the Chief Auditor initiated a review of the cybersecurity systems, and engaged an outside auditor, RSM US LLP for "Network Security Testing Services." At the May 12, 2020 virtual Audit and Budget Advisory Committee Meeting, the Chief Auditor provided a report regarding data security concerns, measures and technical solutions to improve the M-DCPS security profile, although the content of the report remains confidential due to its sensitive nature.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to provide an update to the School Board on issues, incidents, and/or resolutions pertaining to the 2020-2021 Opening of Schools. This update is to be provided at the Academics, Innovation, Evaluation, and Technology Committee Meeting of October 14, 2020 and shall include a review and discussion of the paradigm, process, and policy utilized to select and contract with K.12 as the sole provider of online learning curriculum and/or platform services to M-DCPS; the training and professional development provided to district and school leaders, teachers, employees, and parents in preparation for the 2020-2021 school year; procedures and protocols, as well as personnel responsible for the mitigation and avoidance of cyber-attacks on the District's technology and internet infrastructure; available approved options for distance learning that may be used other than that which is currently provided and related contractual terms of the existing provider; and plans moving forward to ensure a safe, seamless, and smart reopening for both distant and schoolhouse learning models.

Good cause exists to vary from the established agenda because the information technology and cybersecurity issues arose after the agenda was published, and these are matters of great public importance.

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, direct the Superintendent to:

1. Provide an update to the School Board on issues, incidents, and/or resolutions pertaining to the 2020-2021 Opening of Schools. This update is to be provided at the Academics, Innovation, Evaluation, and Technology Committee Meeting of October 14, 2020, and shall include:

- a. a review and discussion of the paradigm, process, and policy utilized to select and contract with K.12 as the sole provider of online learning curriculum and/or platform services to M-DCPS;
- b. information regarding training and professional development provided to district and school leaders, teachers, employees, and parents in preparation for the 2020-2021 school year;
- c. procedures and protocols, as well as personnel responsible for the mitigation and avoidance of cyber-attacks on the District's technology and internet infrastructure as such information should be provided in a manner that informs the Board and does not compromise data security;
- d. available approved options for distance learning that may be used other than that which is currently provided and related contractual terms of the existing provider; and
- e. plans moving forward to ensure a safe, seamless, and smart reopening for both distant and schoolhouse learning models.