

March 16, 2004

Dr. Marta Perez, Member

SUBJECT: REQUEST THAT THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY AUTHORIZE THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS TO INITIATE RULEMAKING TO AMEND SCHOOL BOARD RULE 6Gx13- 1C-1.16 TO PROVIDE A SPECIFIC MOURNING PERIOD UPON THE DEATH OF A STUDENT OR STAFF MEMBER

COMMITTEE: LEGISLATIVE RELATIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND PERSONNEL SERVICES

On February 3, 2003, President Bush ordered that the flag of the United States be flown at half-staff at the White House and all public buildings and grounds, at all military posts and naval stations, and on all naval vessels of the of the Federal Government in the District of Columbia and throughout the United states and its Territories and possessions, including all United States embassies, legations, consular offices, and other facilities abroad, including all military facilities, and naval vessels and stations, as a mark of respect for the astronauts aboard the Space Shuttle Columbia who gave their lives during the mission of STS-107.

Most memorably, President Bush also ordered the flag to be flown at half-staff as a mark of respect for those killed by the heinous acts of violence on September 11th 2001. Other countries joined the President and also lowered their flags in solidarity with our nation. Additionally, the United Nations on December 11, 2001 lowered their flag at precisely 8:46 am, the time that the first tower was hit, and held an observance of the attacks 3 months thereafter.

On April 22, 1999, Governor Mike Foster of Louisiana ordered the flag over the State Capitol in Baton Rouge to fly at half-staff as a gesture of respect and compassion for the victims and their families of the tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. In a letter expressing his sadness to Colorado Governor Bill Owens, Gov. Foster said, "we share in your grief and confusion over this matter which rips at the core of souls- the safety and happiness of our children." Additionally, Governor Owens of Colorado ordered all Colorado flags to be flown at half-staff on the second anniversary of the Columbine High tragedy.

Flying a flag at half-staff is probably the last symbolic gesture of what was once in some cultures a common way of showing grief. In the event of a tragic incident at one of our district schools, it is understandable that safety, security of the students, dissemination of information, and protection of the crime scene will be the top priority. Taking time out to make the symbolic gesture of lowering the flag at half-staff is also important as it allows the students, the community at large, and the district a moment to regroup, to show respect and grief for the loss of a student or faculty member on campus, and provides a sense of solidarity and strength necessary to move on despite the tragedy.

School Board rule 6Gx13- 1C-1.16, Observance of Death of Staff and Students, addresses the observance of death of staff and students by displaying the flag at half-staff. The board rule, however, does not specify a length of time that the flag should be at half-staff, nor does it state when the mourning period should commence or end.

REVISED
C-29

In establishing a set period of mourning, the district will uniformly display to the community at large that we have tragically lost one of our own. In performing such a unified gesture, we are honoring the person who has passed and grieving our loss.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. MARTA PÉREZ:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, direct the Superintendent to initiate rulemaking in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act to amend Board Rule 6Gx13- 1C-1.16, Observance of Death of Staff and Students, to include a district wide mourning period of 4 days that will commence the morning after the death has occurred when the death of the staff member or student has occurred on district grounds.

Revised