

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Board Member

SUBJECT: DISCIPLINE, DIVERSION, AND YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT: SAFE, HEALTHY, & SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is committed to ensuring the safety and security of its schools, employees, community members, and most important, its students. This has been and must always remain a priority of the School Board and the District. Tangential to this effort, is the development, implementation, and monitoring of district and school-based discipline and/or diversion programs, as well as supporting community wide efforts and programs to stem and end the tide of youth gun violence overall---a phenomenon that has taken the lives of countless youth in Miami-Dade County over the past decade. Research shows that there is a nexus between discipline, diversion, and gun violence among youth, specifically those in communities of poverty and communities of color.

M-DCPS has taken a proactive approach in providing for the safety and security of its students, as well as promoting and supporting efforts and partnerships that seek to address youth gun violence. In fact, at the School Board Meeting of June 9, 2016, School Board Chair Ms. Perla Tabares Hantman proffered School Board Agenda Item, H-7, Youth Safety. This item, which was unanimously approved by the School Board, authorized the Superintendent to explore the feasibility of the District engaging in partnerships and programs to address the issue of youth violence throughout Miami-Dade County. Subsequently, the Superintendent convened with other government, education, business, law enforcement, justice and funding entities as the Together for Children Coalition to establish the necessary system infrastructures to tackle the issue of youth violence.

Since that time, the issue of school safety and security, as well as gun violence, has been elevated because of the tragedy that took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Senior High School on February 14, 2018. As a part of a review of this tragedy and incidents before, during, and after it, as well as efforts to determine any system and/or programmatic failures, the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission (the Commission) was established and implemented. Subsequently, the Commission issued its Initial Report on January 2, 2019, and at the School Board Meeting of December 19, 2018, the School Board approved Agenda Item H-9 proffered by School Board Member Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas authorizing the Superintendent to establish a Safety and Security Task Force to review the findings of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission Initial Report.

One critical component of the Initial Report addresses school discipline and diversion programs. In Chapter 10 of the Initial Report, a juvenile diversion program is described as follows:

“A juvenile diversion program is an intervention strategy that attempts to prevent children from entering the formal juvenile justice system while still holding them accountable for their actions. The primary goal of diversion programs is to reduce recidivism or the occurrence of problem behaviors without having to formally utilize the justice system.”

The pre-arrest diversion concept is based on the idea that while young people may commit minor crimes for which they need consequences, arrests for incidents are usually unnecessary and may be a barrier to future success. Diversion programs are also designed to be less costly than formal court proceedings by reducing the burden on the court system.”

The use of school based disciplinary and/or diversionary programs in school districts has come under increased scrutiny in light of some of the findings and recommendations of the Commission’s Initial Report. In fact, on February 13, 2019, Governor Ron DeSantis issued Executive Order Number 19-15 (Ensuring the Safety of Our Children in Our Schools) which in part, directed the Commissioner of Education to *“conduct a statewide audit of all 67 county school districts to ascertain any and all types of school-based discipline diversion programs in place...to determine requirements for eligibility and operations, their stated impact on school and public safety, their costs, and whether there is evidence to support their continuation, closure, or regulation in law.”*

It also directed the Department of Education to work in partnership with the Department of Juvenile Justice to *“determine the efficacy of these programs and their impact on school and public safety.”*

Clearly, the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Senior High School remains one of the most horrific acts of school violence in the nation. Mass shootings rightfully capture headlines and lead to talk of policy changes at the local, state, and federal levels. It also resurrects a conversation and opens up old wounds over the silence and lack of urgency and resources to end the everyday gun violence that accounts for most killings in Florida and around the country, specifically in underserved communities.

In addition to shedding light on issues of school and youth gun violence, the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Senior High School has also shone a light on the frequent, unnoticed, and often immeasurable acts of violence and loss of life in the urban core. South Florida has seen gun violence involving youth claim over 1,300 lives in the past decade---a majority of the deaths occurring in Miami-Dade County. All are unacceptable acts of violence involving youth victims and in which many of the youth offenders are or have been enrolled in schools, have displayed a pattern or propensity for violence, and lack the socioemotional, mental, and family structures, supports, and interventions to identify, mitigate, and end the destructive trajectory upon which they find their young lives. In these instances, discipline and diversion programs, if implemented consistently, and with fidelity, as well as a research-base, often prove helpful in stemming and eliminating the tide of school and community violence and improving school and public safety.

Inasmuch as the District has adopted and implemented discipline and diversion programs, in light of the recent findings and recommendations of the Commission’s Initial Report, as well as the Governor’s Executive Order, a review of such programs at this time would be prudent. In conjunction with this review, a review of initiatives, programs, and partnerships designed to stem and end the tide of youth gun violence among students in Miami-Dade County should also be conducted.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to conduct a review of school based and/or districtwide discipline and diversion programs to determine impact as it relates to school and public safety, efficacy, and alignment with School Board Policy and State Statues, and provide a list of programs by name, inclusive of partners, where applicable, and summary inclusive of description, purpose, and population to the School Board regarding same. It also seeks to direct the Superintendent to explore the development and/or expansion of any intervention programs and/or partnerships that address stemming the tide of school and community violence among school-aged youth in the urban core.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. STEVE GALLON III:**

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

1. conduct a review of school based and/or districtwide discipline and diversion programs being implemented by and/or with M-DCPS, as referenced and defined in both the Initial Report of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission and the Governor's Executive Order Number 19-15, to determine impact as it relates to school and public safety, efficacy, and alignment and compliance with School Board Policy and State Statutes;
2. provide a list of school based and/or district wide discipline and diversion programs being implemented by and/or with M-DCPS by name, inclusive of partners, where applicable, and program summary that includes a program description, purpose, and student population served;
3. review and evaluate any existing programs and/or partnerships designed to establish the necessary system infrastructures and supports to tackle the issue of youth violence and their impact to date in M-DCPS and throughout Miami-Dade County;
4. continue to work with the Department of Juvenile Justice, law enforcement, and local municipalities, community agencies, groups, and organizations to discuss root causes, programs, and strategies to stem and eradicate violence among school-aged youth in Miami-Dade County;
5. explore and research the development and/or expansion of any intervention programs and/or partnerships that address stemming and eliminating the tide of school and community violence among school-aged youth in Miami-Dade County; and
6. present findings to the School Board, with any recommendations for program or partnership adoption, implementation, revision, or elimination, as well as applicable policy adoption and/or revision, no later than the School Board Meeting of May 8, 2019.