

Dr. Lubby Navarro, Board Member

Co-Sponsor: Dr. Marta Pérez

**SUBJECT: RE-OPENING FLORIDA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2020-2021
SCHOOL YEAR RECOMMENDATIONS**

COMMITTEE: FACILITIES & CONSTRUCTION

**LINK TO STRATEGIC
BLUEPRINT: EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES**

In response to Covid-19, school boards, superintendents, school district staff, teachers, students and families statewide have made extraordinary efforts in response to community needs and quickly pivoted to digital learning to ensure students continued their education. During the last couple of months, families, school district staff, and communities have made sacrifices on behalf of public school students in a very short period of time, adapting to the immediate needs of students in response to immediate school closures. The structural changes to the traditional school days and calendars has been swift and considerable. The transition to distance learning throughout the state has been inspiring. As school districts prepare for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year, it is critical that the state provide the opportunity for the development of informed best practices for the reopening of schools.

Governor DeSantis has led Florida taking a strategic and methodical approach in response to the COVID-19 pandemic with the establishment of the Re-open Florida Task Force, and that the same approach must be taken when reopening our state's public schools. Providing a safe environment for every student and staff member *must* be the starting point as it is the foundation upon which learning opportunities can be maximized. The Governor's Re-Open Florida Task Force included several working groups; none was specifically focused on K-12 education. The Industry Working Group touched upon numerous fields inclusive of administrative, education, information and technology, manufacturing, utilities and wholesale. While Governor's Safe, Smart and Step-by Step Plan for Florida's Recovery Plan addresses childcare facilities, daycare and summer camps, it does not provide specific recommendations for the re-opening of schools. The report, however, states that the Department of Education in consultation with state health officials should monitor the re-opening phases and should develop a plan to phase-in education safely during the summer months.

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The importance of Florida's public school districts to the state's economy cannot be ignored. According to Florida TaxWatch, in 61 of Florida's 67 counties, public employers are the largest employers. District school boards are the largest employer in 49 counties and one of the 10 largest employers in 66 counties, employing over 337,000 full-time employees across the state. Despite the differences between the 67 school districts, we do have many similarities.

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Therefore, as we approach the 2020-2021 school year, despite the differences between the 67 school districts, we do have many similarities. As Florida phases in its Re-opening, the establishment of a statewide, cross-functional workgroup to provide informed input to assist and guide policy decisions that will impact the reopening of Florida's public schools would be quite beneficial. School districts would benefit from a robust and thorough dialogue including school board members, school superintendents, academic experts, school safety and security professionals and a cross section of stakeholders inclusive of parents and business along-side healthcare experts.

Establishing the workgroup would provide the opportunity to provide all members of the education community involvement in innovative problem-solving and flexibility creation for the benefit of families, students, and school districts.

The input and recommendations of healthcare professionals cannot be underscored in the reopening of schools thus representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Florida Department of Health should be part of this workgroup. Parents, families, and staff will rely on these partners' input to make the transition to a successful reopening of schools and positive educational outcomes.

School districts will need to address a myriad of issues and challenges as reopening of schools is contemplated inclusive of sanitization of school buildings and classrooms; mental health services to both students and staff; reconfiguration of the classrooms, and class size, cafeterias, and transportation services to address social distancing; remediation of struggling students and narrowing the achievement gap; developing and executing IEP's and 504 plans; need for bandwidth, hardware and technology support for devices and connectivity across the state; and the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitization services, as well as others. The exchange of ideas and the development of best practices, recognizing flexibility, in these areas would be very beneficial to school districts statewide regardless of size.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
Dr. LUBBY NAVARRO:**

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

- (1) support the Florida School Board Association's request that the Governor and the Commissioner of Education through the Department of Education to establish a statewide taskforce to provide informed input and assist in the development of "best practices" and guide policy decisions that will impact the reopening of Florida's public schools;
- (2) taskforce include school board members, school superintendents, teachers, academic experts, school safety and security professionals, the teacher of the year, principals, as well as a cross section of stakeholders inclusive of parents and business along-side healthcare experts as part of the taskforce;

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- (3) that the taskforce be responsible for providing provide a list of best practices for school districts minimally in the areas of sanitization; mental health services to both students and staff; reconfiguration of classrooms, cafeterias, transportation services to address social distancing; need for devices and connectivity; and procurement of services and PPE; athletics, and
- (4) that the Superintendent forward the recommendations of the District's Reopen Work Group to state entities for consideration, after its presentation to the Board.

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