

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Vice-Chair

SUBJECT: PARENTAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR DIGITAL LEARNING

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC

BLUEPRINT: INFORMED, ENGAGED, AND EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS

The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) remains committed to the education, health, safety, and overall welfare of its students, employees, parents, and community stakeholders. As the district, state, nation, and world continue to grapple with negative consequences and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased and intensified focus on the reopening of schools.

On March 13, 2020, M-DCPS announced the closing of its schools until further notice in response to the growing concern over the increased spread of the coronavirus. This announcement was followed by the launch and transition to Distance Learning for students, which was supported and reinforced by the parents and guardians throughout the county. Subsequently, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) announced the closure of schools throughout the state through April 15, 2020. On March 31, 2020, FLDOE would further extend school closures through May 1, 2020, with an additional extension of statewide school closures announced through the end of the school year.

M-DCPS and the State of Florida were not alone. More than 100,000 schools throughout the United States were forced to close due to the spreading virus, leaving 55 million students without traditional classrooms, and parents and teachers working, and in some cases scrambling to find the best ways to teach, engage, and interact with their students through digital platforms and virtual pathways as learning would be restricted to digital and/or virtual platforms and related systems during this period.

In light and in spite of the challenges faced during the pandemic and the immediate and unanticipated closure of school campuses and transition to digital learning, parents and guardians assumed herculean efforts to ensure the continuity of learning of their children. Their assumption of the roles of teachers and deliverers of instruction was unprecedented. Yet, demonstrated an unmatched and unimagined sense of dedication, passion, and resilience as these efforts were made with little to no time to prepare and with little to no formalized, structured training and/or support.

The coronavirus pandemic forced parents and their children, as well as teachers into what some have described as an “education experiment” -- one in which they had to navigate fluctuating schedules and new methods of keeping their children engaged. In M-DCPS, as well as other urban centers around the nation, it also exposed the conspicuous, commonly known chasms and technological disparities between the “haves and have-nots.”

Clearly, there were anticipated disparities that manifested in the availability of technology devices and connectivity in the homes of students and their families. In 2019, more than 25% of U.S. homes lacked internet access, according to the Pew Research Center. In an April survey from Pew, over six times as many lower-income parents said their kids would have to use public Wi-Fi to complete their schoolwork because there wasn't a reliable internet connection at home during the pandemic.

However, another significant disparity that manifested was in the individual preparation and capacity of parents in their ability to guide, help, and support their child's learning and engagement via digital learning. Such disparities in parental capacity and preparation to deliver instruction to their child at home via digital learning platforms have been found to be somewhat indiscriminate. However, they, as with historical patterns of disparity and deprivation, have been proven more pronounced in communities of color, poverty, and among families whose home language is not English. Additionally, these disparities have also been found to be more acute in homes in which students are being raised by the elderly, or those with little education or experience in using technology. These issues, coupled with the lingering, stubborn achievement and an exacerbated 'summer slide' and regression in student learning, have given rise to even greater concerns for the education and academic progression of students in M-DCPS. There is now new evidence that shows that the shutdowns caused by COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate existing achievement gaps as the U.S. education system was not built to sustain extended shutdowns like those that have been imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even more troubling is the social educational context that the persistent achievement disparities reveal across income levels and between white students and students of black and Hispanic heritage. Over time, school shutdowns are likely to not only cause disproportionate learning losses for these students—compounding existing gaps—but also lead more of them to drop out.

The hard truths about the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic school closures will have on students in M-DCPS rests with how much support, assistance, and guidance can be provided to parents, especially those that are impoverished, Black, and Hispanic, yet seek to undertake the role as "home teacher" and assume the responsibility for distance/digital learning for their children. Studies are now concluding what has been readily known: How much learning students lose during school closures varies significantly by access to remote learning, the quality of remote instruction, home support, and the degree of engagement.

Additionally, learning loss will probably be greatest among low-income, Black, and Hispanic students. Lower-income students are less likely to have access to high-quality remote learning or to a conducive learning environment, such as a quiet space with minimal distractions, devices they do not need to share, high-speed internet, and parental academic supervision. Data from one creator of digital-instruction and assessment software found that only 60 percent of low-income students were regularly logging into online instruction; yet, 90 percent of high-income students do. Engagement rates also lagged behind in schools serving predominantly Black and Hispanic students; just 60 to 70 percent were logging in regularly.

The School Board, Superintendent, educators, and community stakeholders must lean courageously into this knowledge and understanding and develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate ways to ensure equitable and maximum technical support for parents.

Recently, the School Board approved a Reopening Plan at its Special Board Meeting of July 8, 2020. During this Meeting, the 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. Although the Reopening Plan highlighted the district's response to COVID-19 in the section titled same on page 4 and cited the distribution of 119,000 devices, training of 18,000 plus teachers on Distance Learning Best Practices, and a student connection rate of ninety-nine percent, none of the response strategies or deliverables included explicit, deliberate training or support on the utilization of technology in the delivery of instruction for parents. Parental capacity to support distance/digital learning at home is one of the most significant factors to ensure student engagement, participation, learning, and success.

Subsequently, the Florida Commissioner of Education issued Executive Order 2020-EO-06 on July 6, 2020 directing that all public schools be opened for the 2020-2021 school year, beginning this fall. 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.

Soon thereafter, Florida would experience a dramatic spike in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases —placing it among the highest in the nation. Miami-Dade County leads the state in these numbers. In fact, on Sunday, July 12, 2020 Florida would break U.S. state records with 15,300 and see 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 raises the likelihood of an increased demand for parents to access distance/digital learning options for their children for the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. Doing so will require a more strategic, deliberate, and thoughtful plan of action around training and related support for parents in not only the use of distance/digital learning platforms and technologies, but also in establishing daily routines and activities to ensure maximum engagement of their children in meaningful, structured learning activities. Ultimately, these combined efforts will improve the quality of the distance/digital learning experiences for parents, teachers, and students, and more importantly, student learning and achievement during these educationally challenging times.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to review any existing plans of action to provide training to parents on distance/digital learning and related platforms; review, and where needed, establish a schedule and/or program of training for parents on distance/digital learning and related platforms prior to the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, which may include direct training sessions and/or available online vignettes; ensure a system of ongoing technical support or helpline for parents in using distance/digital learning and related programs and/or platforms; develop a set of recommended protocols and best practices for parents to consider and apply in establishing daily routines and activities to ensure maximum student engagement in meaningful, structured learning activities at home, such as “Tips for Distance Learning” and/or “Scheduling for Success While Learning at Home” to be available via the district website and/or through the Parent Academy; and provide the School Board with an update no later August 14, 2020.

This item has been reviewed and approved by the School Board Attorney for legal sufficiency. This item does not appear on the published agenda.

There exist good cause to vary from the published agenda as the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic has worsened in Miami-Dade County since the publication of the agenda, and potential responses to this worsening crisis and its impact on the school system should not be delayed until the August 12, 2020 Board meeting.

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

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

1. review any existing plans of action to provide training to parents and teachers on distance/digital learning and related platforms;
2. review, and where needed, establish a schedule and/or program of training for parents and teachers on distance/digital learning and related platforms prior to the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, which may include direct training sessions and/or available online vignettes;
3. ensure a system of ongoing technical support or helpline for parents in using distance/digital learning and related programs and/or platforms;
4. develop a set of recommended protocols and best practices for parents to consider and apply in establishing daily routines and activities to ensure maximum student engagement in meaningful, structured learning activities at home, such as “Tips for Distance Learning” and/or “Scheduling for Success While Learning at Home” to be available via the district website and/or through the Parent Academy; and
5. provide the School Board with an update no later than the School Board meeting of August 12, 2020.