

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Vice Chair

**SUBJECT: CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN MIAMI-DADE
COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION, & TECHNOLOGY

LINK TO STRATEGIC

BLUEPRINT: RELEVANT, RIGOROUS & INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS

The “achievement gap” is one of the most widely discussed, yet intractable issues in public education. It refers to the disparity in academic performance between different groups of students and shows up in student grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college and career technical education (CTE) participation and completion rates, among other measures of learning and academic success. In the context of educational practice and policy, it is most often used to describe the vexing, obstinate performance gaps between Black and Hispanic students, at the lower end of the performance scale, and their non-Hispanic white peers. It is also used to describe similar academic disparity between students from low-income families who struggle to meet their basic needs and those whose families are from middle income to rich and have the financial means to live a life of security and even abundance.

Over the past decade, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), along with educators, researchers, scholars, organizations, activists, and policymakers have focused on addressing the achievement gap. In doing so, many have expanded their focus and attention on other achievement gaps, such as those based on gender, English-language proficiency, immigration status, and learning disabilities. Despite such efforts, the challenge of narrowing the achievement gap in classrooms and schools remains a recalcitrant phenomenon in M-DCPS and throughout the state and nation. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused even greater concern for the adverse impact that distance learning and other innovative, non-traditional learning approaches will have on students. If there have been concern and consternation around the achievement gap prior to the pandemic, such concerns and consternation have justifiably increased.

In fact, at the School Board Meeting of October 21, 2020, School Board Member Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall proffered School Board Agenda Item H-15, Academic Accountability at Miami-Dade County Public Schools, which was unanimously passed. Though not explicitly focused on the achievement gap, this item addressed anticipated increased declines in student learning based on the educational challenges educed by COVID-19 and called for strategies to address the academic needs of students, as well as the provision of data relative to student performance and engagement during and since the pandemic.

The School Board embraced its professional, moral, and statutory obligation to address and improve student learning performance and to provide equitable opportunities for student learning, achievement, and life-long success. Specifically, ss. 1001.42 *Powers and duties of district school board* states that “The district school board shall annually approve and require implementation of a new, amended, or continuation school improvement plan for each school in the district which has a school grade of “D” or “F”; has a significant gap in achievement on statewide, standardized assessments administered pursuant to s. 1008.22 by one or more student subgroups, as defined in the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), 20 U.S.C. s. 6311(b)(2)(C)(v)(II); has not significantly increased the percentage of students passing statewide, standardized assessments; has not significantly increased the percentage of students demonstrating Learning Gains, as defined in s. 1008.34 and as calculated under s. 1008.34(3)(b), who passed statewide, standardized assessments; or has significantly lower graduation rates for a subgroup when compared to the state’s graduation rate.” Although M-DCPS has improved student learning and performance as measured by its elimination of “F” schools, a significant gap in student achievement over the past decade continues to persist---a gap often concealed or even masked within improved school letter grades.

M-DCPS noted its attention and commitment to closing the achievement gap in Priority 2 of Pillar I of the *2015-2020 M-DCPS Vision 2020 Strategic Blueprint*. However, this plan expired in December 2020. In it, the District did affirm its commitment to closing the achievement gap through objectives which stated that the District would:

- 1) *Increase kindergarten readiness by expanding quality Pre-K programs, as measured by an increase in the participation of students in Pre-K by 10 percent over the next five years;*
- 2) *Increase the percentage of students scoring at grade level in each individual student sub-group on state assessments by 2 percentage points annually;*
- 3) *Decrease the number of low-performing schools as evidenced by Florida’s School Accountability Program by at least 10 percent over the next five years;*
and
- 4) *Accelerate the entry of ELL students into the general curricula as evidenced by a decrease in the average number of semesters in the ESOL program annually.*

As the District approached year 2020 which was the culmination year of the *Vision 2020 Strategic Blueprint*, an assessment and examination of the above objectives and related strategies in relation to their impact on closing the achievement gap though prudent and timely, had not been formally presented to the School Board or broader community. However, though increases in student performance by 2 percentage points annually was reflected in the *Vision 2020 Strategic Blueprint*, metrics to close the achievement gap between Black and Hispanic students and their white counterparts, a key indicator for achievement gap closure, was not explicitly reflected.

As previously referenced, M-DPCS, in its commitment and endeavor to provide equitable and high-quality educational programs for its students, had realized monumental achievements and recognitions. The School Board, Superintendent, administrators, principals, teachers, employees, community stakeholders, and students are all to be commended. M-DCPS’ recent “A” rated district designation and elimination of all “F” rated schools are also to be applauded, commended, and celebrated. Yet, these achievements cannot overshadow the lingering achievement gaps that continue to vex and academically shackle Black and Hispanic students at an alarmingly concerning rate.

The school letter grade and specific academic improvements in student achievement in the District highlighted data from both State and National Assessments. Most recently, the 2019-2020 graduation rates showed marked improvements. M-DCPS' graduation rate increased, reaching 93.1 percent (excluding charters) for the 2019-2020 academic year, an increase of 4 percentage points. While the District's graduation rate has increased over the past 10 years by almost 31 percentage points from 58.7 percent in 2006-2007 to 89.6 percent in 2019-2020, challenges with the achievement gap in ELA and Math for grades 3-10 remain. For example, the graduation rates is 92.5% for White; 90.3% for Hispanic, and 85.6% for Blacks. There exists a nearly 7 percent delta between Black and White students.

Based on the 2019 FSA English Language Arts (ELA) data---the most recent and prior to the pandemic for M-DCPS, students scoring at levels 3-5 in grades 3-10 there was a 0.8 percent increase for Black students and a 1.9 percent increase for Hispanic students from 2018 to 2019. Both fell below the stated goal of 2 percent annually for *“Increasing the percentage of students scoring at grade level in each individual student sub-group on state assessments by 2 percentage points annually”* and was a decline in the rate of increase in closing the achievement gap as compared to 2017 to 2018.

With respect to the achievement gap and according to the 2019 FSA ELA data---the most recent and prior to the pandemic, Black and Hispanic students in M-DCPS continue to lag behind their White counterparts in Math in which:

- Blacks students in M-DCPS lag behind in ELA in M-DCPS by 36.8 percentage points; and
- Hispanic students lag behind in ELA by 16.2 percentage points.

At the state level for ELA, the achievement gap for Blacks and Hispanics and their white counterparts is much narrower, with a 28.5 percent proficiency gap between Blacks and their white counterparts at the state level as compared to 36.8 in M-DCPS; and a 14.9 percent proficiency gap between Hispanics and their white counterparts at the state level as compared to 16.2 in M-DCPS.

Concurrently, 2018 FSA Math data for M-DCPS' students scoring at levels 3-5 in grades 3-8, there was a 1.3 percent increase for Black students and a 2.8 percent increase for Hispanic students from 2017 to 2018. However, for the subsequent 2019 FSA Math data---the most recent and a year prior to the pandemic, there was a decrease for M-DCPS students scoring at levels 3-5.

2019 FSA Math data for M-DCPS students scoring at levels 3-5 in grades 3-8, there was a 0.4% increase for Black students and 1.4% increase for Hispanic students from 2018 to 2019. Though there was an increase for both groups, the rate of increase was cut in half. Again, both fell below the stated goal of 2 percent annually for *“Increasing the percentage of students scoring at grade level in each individual student sub-group on state assessments by 2 percentage points annually”* and was a decline in the rate of increase in closing the achievement gap as compared to 2017 to 2018.

With respect to the achievement gap and according to the 2019 FSA Math data---the most recent and prior to the pandemic, Black and Hispanic students in M-DCPS continue to lag behind their White counterparts in Math in which:

- Black students in M-DCPS lag behind their white counterparts in Math by 34.2 percentage points; and
- Hispanic students lag behind their white counterparts in Math by 14.3 percentage points.

At the state level, the achievement gap for Blacks and Hispanics and their white counterparts is narrower, with a 28.5 percent proficiency gap between Blacks and their white counterparts at the state level as compared to 34.2 in M-DCPS; and a 14 percent proficiency gap between Hispanics and their white counterparts at the state level as compared to 14.3 in M-DCPS.

The challenges with the achievement gap in M-DCPS over the past 10 years remain clear on other indicators and in prior years, based on data reflected in the *2016-2017 Annual Measurable Objectives Report* for M-DCPS on the Florida Department of Education Accountability database, achievement gaps, as measured by the percentage of students scoring “satisfactory” in ELA and Mathematics also exist. According to these data, Black and Hispanic students, as well as those from other groups, lag behind their White counterparts in ELA as follows:

- Blacks lag behind by 40 percentage points;
- Hispanic students lag behind by 17 percentage points;
- English Language Learners lag behind by 42 percentage points;
- Special Needs students lag behind by 56 percentage points; and
- Economically Disadvantaged students lag behind by 27 percentage points.

In Math, based on data reflected in the *2016-2017 Annual Measurable Objectives Report* for M-DCPS on the Florida Department of Education Accountability database, achievement gaps, as measured by the percentage of students scoring “satisfactory” exist as follows:

- Black students lag behind by 35 percentage points;
- Hispanic students lag behind by 16 percentage points;
- English Language Learners lag behind by 30 percentage points;
- Special Needs students lag behind by 49 percentage points; and
- Economically Disadvantaged students lag behind by 24 percentage points.

Consequently, there exists a double achievement gap for English Language Learners, Special Needs, and Economically Disadvantaged in M-DCPS.

Lastly and notably, these challenges went back even further to 2011. Based on 2011 data reflected in the *2011-2012 Annual Measurable Objectives Report for Florida’s Schools, Districts, and Schools* on the Florida Department of Education Accountability database, in 2011, Blacks lagged behind whites in Reading “satisfactory” by 40 percentage points and Hispanics by 20 percentage points. In Math “satisfactory,” Blacks lagged behind whites by 34 percentage points and Hispanic by 16 percentage points.

In 2011, there existed a double-digit “achievement gap” for both Black and Hispanic students in M-DCPS. Gaps that remain today based on 2019 FSA data—the most recent and that available prior to the pandemic.

Many often submit that the achievement gap is "a matter of race and ethnicity." However, based on the data for M-DCPS from 2011 to 2018, and although race has been a factor, achievement gaps exist and have persisted for other groups such as English Language Learners, Special Needs, and Economically Disadvantaged students. And while most state assessment and accountability data may focus primarily on showing this gap by means of standardized test scores, these gaps also exist via a comparison of dropout rates, the relative numbers of students who take and pass advanced placement examinations, enroll in honors, who enroll in and receive career technical education (CTE) endorsements, advanced placement, and "gifted" courses.

The School Board must provide leadership and take appropriate and decisive action in ensuring that approaches and efforts to improve the learning and achievement of all students, and their access to high quality programs are enhanced, implemented, and monitored. As M-DCPS has established a General Obligation Bond (GOB) Oversight Committee, it must also develop, implement, and leverage a collaborative structure that involves the various stakeholders in this work and monitors the progress and investment of resources to close the disparate gap in student learning and achievement. Through this deeper, deliberate, and inclusive "dive" of analysis and discussion of the achievement gap in M-DCPS, the District will improve its understanding and addressing of issues that relate to the persistent inequality of educational outcomes that exists (and has always existed) among certain groups of students in its schools, and thereby accelerate its movement toward meaningful, measurable solutions that address this long-existing, underlying problem that create, enable, and through silence and inaction, perpetuate a system in which some students succeed and others continue to fail---based on race, ethnicity, language, country of origin, special needs, and/or poverty.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to conduct a review and examination of the achievement gaps in M-DCPS; utilize data from this review as a foundation for the establishment of goals and/or objectives in the development of the 2021-2026 District Strategic Plan; present to the School Board at its Academics, Innovation, Evaluation, & Technology Committee Meeting of April 14, 2021 detailed analysis of student performance, based on the achievement gap for ELA, Mathematics, and Science; share and review findings with the Diversity Equity and Excellence Advisory Committee (DEEAC) at a regular scheduled meeting by April 30, 2021; initiate rulemaking to establish an "Achievement Gap Oversight Committee" including members appointed by each School Board Member, the superintendent, United Teachers of Dade, the Diversity Equity and Excellence in Advisory Committee (DEEAC), Dade County Council of PTA/PTSA, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Urban League, Spanish American League Against Discrimination (SALAD), The Children's Trust, and related community organizations; initiate rulemaking to provide an annual analysis and update to the School Board on data regarding the achievement gap for ELA, Mathematics, Science, graduation rates, and dropout rates; and continue to propose and make recommendations to the School Board regarding programs, practices, and policies to address and close the achievement gap in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, as appropriate.

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 and examination of the achievement gaps in M-DCPS;
2. utilize data from this review as a foundation for the establishment of goals and/or objectives in the development of the 2021-2026 District Strategic Plan;
3. present to the School Board a detailed analysis of student performance, based on the achievement gap for ELA, Mathematics, and Science at the April 14, 2021 Academics, Innovation, Evaluation, & Technology Committee Meeting;
4. share and review findings with the Diversity Equity and Excellence in Advisory Committee (DEEAC) at a regular scheduled meeting by April 30, 2021;
5. initiate rulemaking to establish an "Achievement Gap Oversight Committee" including members appointed by each School Board Member, the superintendent, United Teachers of Dade, Diversity Equity and Excellence in Advisory Committee (DEEAC), the Dade County Council of PTA/PTSA, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Urban League, Spanish American League Against Discrimination (SALAD), The Children's Trust, and related community organizations;
6. initiate rulemaking to provide an annual analysis and update to the School Board on data regarding the achievement gap for ELA, Mathematics, Science, graduation rates, and dropout rates; and
7. continue to propose and make recommendations to the School Board regarding programs, practices, and policies to address and close the achievement gap in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, as appropriate.