

Ms. Christi Fraga, Board Member

SUBJECT: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH SEMINARS FOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS – GRADES 9- 12

COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY

LINK TO STRATEGIC

BLUEPRINT: RIGOROUS, RELEVANT AND INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS

The closure of public schools brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic has worn away some of the protective layers provided by school-based mental health support programs. The impact of school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly severe for students and their families. Therefore, as school districts prepare for a potential full reopening of schools, in the 2021-2022 school year, some students may require additional mental health and social and emotional assistance that may be provided by schools, to support students, teachers and school personnel's health and overall well-being.

Realizing that many K-12 students have been adversely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, this item specifically focuses on senior high school students, as the result of over a year of disrupted learning has created a significant decline in academic performance among many high school students. In surveys conducted regarding academic progress in the spring and fall of 2020, the drop-off is affecting the very students that colleges have been trying to recruit: disadvantaged students, minorities, and first-generation college students. This produces additional pressure and stress for senior high school students as they prepare for life after high school, and their apprehension of how the Covid-19 pandemic may disrupt their future, whether applying for college, entering the workforce, or other career paths.

These interruptions caused by the pandemic have intensified already existing disparities within the education system but also in other aspects of students' lives. Adults and children continue to face significant challenges, including, but not limited to:

- Interrupted learning;
- Poor nutrition;
- Increased exposure to violence and exploitation;
- Social isolation;
- Loss of loved ones;
- Limited access to food and shelter;
- Drug or substance abuse;
- Changes in daily routine;

- Increased fears about their safety and the safety of loved ones;
- Difficulty reacclimating to school;
- Increased financial hardship; and
- Outlook on post-secondary goals

This agenda item seeks the Board's approval to direct the Superintendent to explore the feasibility of District staff assisting senior high schools with frameworks, templates, and resources for them to conduct site-based seminars that provide these students with an opportunity to engage and participate in seminars and small engagement groups that will support them meeting the challenges associated with physically returning to school sites after more than one year of remote learning for many students. These seminars may also provide much needed support to students suffering from the social anxieties, family loss, changes in family finances, and myriad of ramifications caused by the pandemic.

These school-based seminars will also benefit school staff, by allowing them to become familiar with their students (particularly incoming ninth graders), as well as allowing outside partnering organizations an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the students and the community the school serves. The seminars should focus on topics such as those previously listed in this Board Item, and other relevant topics that would support and provide senior high school students with the skills to manage the stress and pressures resulting from this pandemic. Senior high schools are strongly encouraged to provide incentives for their students to voluntarily participate in the seminars, such as awarding participating students with community service hours, attending special events, etc.

While the purpose of the seminars and topics addressed are designed to provide support and empowerment to student's physical and mental well-being, some issues may be of an extremely sensitive nature, that may require smaller groups where student reactions can be monitored. The use of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) should be considered to support these efforts. This item also requests that an update be presented to the Board prior to the August 18, 2021 School Board meeting, in preparation for the 2021-2022 school year.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
MS. CHRISTI FRAGA:**

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

1. Explore the feasibility of District staff assisting senior high schools with frameworks, templates, and resources to conduct site-based seminars and small group sessions that will provide these students with an opportunity to proactively participate in discussions that will prepare them to meet the challenges associated with physically returning to school sites after more than one year of remote learning for many students; as well as addressing social anxieties, family loss, changes in family finances, etc., due to the pandemic;
2. Explore the possibility of partnering with outside organizations, where applicable, to provide senior high school students with an opportunity to engage and participate in site-based seminars that will prepare them to meet the challenges associated with physically returning to school sites as well as addressing social anxieties, family loss, changes in family finances, etc., due to the pandemic;
3. Strongly encourage senior high schools to provide incentives for their students to participate in the seminars;
4. Explore the viability of allocating Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) to support senior high schools in offering these seminars;
5. Determine the feasibility of the seminars, and provide an update, prior to the August 18, 2021 School Board meeting, that informs the Board as to status of the seminars that will be initiated at the start of the 2021-2022 school year; and
6. Provide an update at the January 2022 Academics, Innovation, Evaluation & Technology Committee meeting, of the effect on students that participated and continue to participate in site-based seminars offered by senior high schools.