

Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Board Member

SUBJECT: MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (M-DCPS) RECOGNIZES THE MONTH OF APRIL AS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH (SAAM)

COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATIONS, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: RELEVANT, RIGOROUS, & INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, the month of April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) and marks the twenty-second Anniversary this year. It is time to draw attention to the prevalence of sexual assault and educate individuals and communities about how to prevent it. Sexual harassment, abuse, and assault are widespread problems. We know that, in the United States alone, nearly one in five women and one in 67 men have been raped at some time in their lives (Smith et al., 2017), and that one in six boys and one in four girls is sexually abused before the age of 18 (Dube et al., 2005).

Sexual harassment, assault, and abuse happen in all communities and that includes online spaces. We are spending more and more of our lives online, whether that's for work, school, or entertainment. Unfortunately, with this increase in virtual connection comes an increase in online abuse and harassment. Consent and boundaries can be violated online in several ways, and the trauma of online abuse is all too real for many survivors. But each of us has the power to change that. We can all make a difference to ensure that our online communities are safe and respectful for everyone.

As long as there have been people who care about making the world a better place, there have been individuals advocating for sexual assault prevention. In the United States, movements for social change and equality began to gain traction in the 1940s and 50s with the civil rights era. Although open discussion of the realities of sexual assault and domestic violence were limited at these times, activists for equal rights began to challenge the status quo.

Efforts during this time were championed by Black women and women of color. Advocates like Rosa Parks worked at the intersections of race-based and gender-based violence (a framework that years later in 1989, advocate and professor Kimberlé Crenshaw would call "intersectionality").

Wide social activism around the issue of sexual assault continued into the 1970s, bringing with it support for survivors and heightened awareness. The first rape crisis center was founded in San Francisco in 1971, the same city where the first U.S. Take Back the Night event was held seven years later.

The following decades mobilized survivors and advocates to call for legislation and funding that would support survivors, such as the Violence Against Women Act of 1993 (VAWA).

Monumental changes like VAWA demonstrated that national efforts promoting sexual violence prevention were needed. Even before SAAM was first nationally observed in 2001, advocates had been holding events, marches, and observances related to sexual violence during the month of April, sometimes during a week-long “Sexual Assault Awareness Week.”

As 2023 marks the twenty-second anniversary of SAAM, and the theme of this year’s campaign is “We Can Build Safe Online Spaces.” The campaign calls on us to create online spaces that are built on the foundational values of practicing consent, keeping kids safe, and supporting survivors.

This item has been reviewed and approved by the General Counsel’s Office as to form and legal sufficiency.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY DR. DOROTHY
BENDROSS-MINDINGALL:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, recognizes the month of April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) in all Miami-Dade County Public Schools.