

Ms. Monica Colucci, Board Member

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**SUBJECT: CLASSICAL EDUCATION**

**COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY**

**LINK TO STRATEGIC**

**PLAN: RELEVANT, RIGOROUS, & INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS**

The Miami-Dade County Public Schools Choice & Parental Options Office website states: “Miami-Dade County Public Schools is known for innovation in education. We have been a leader in Choice programs for decades and continue to develop and implement cutting-edge models for delivery of curriculum.” Its Mission is: “To create and implement innovative educational programs to give parents and students an active voice in choosing learning opportunities that foster student diversity, academic excellence, school-to-career pathways, and real-world learning.” Given today’s educational environment, a “one size fits all” approach is not beneficial in allowing each student to achieve his/her maximum potential.

Modern classical education is inspired by the ancient Greek and Roman traditions of art, literature, and language that are the foundation of Western civilization. During the medieval period, educators synthesized much of what was learned from this tradition and developed a framework to educate future generations. The West’s theologians, political leaders, and philosophers were educated in the classical tradition. Classical education seeks to emphasize the truth that all knowledge is unified. This means that every subject has relevance for every other subject, therefore, the well-trained mind looks for the core principles of wisdom from which it can learn all later knowledge. The Classical Education virtue theory assumes that we acquire virtue through practice. By practicing being honest, brave, just, generous, etc., a person develops an honorable and moral character.

The three stages in grades K-12 of the Classical model of education are: Grammar, Dialectic, and Rhetoric, represented in the *trivium*. In Latin, the word *trivium* means “the place where three roads meet.” While each stage has a primary focus of skill development, all skills are developed during all stages. Therefore, the classical education trivium consists of learning and practicing the three arts, or skills.

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- **Grammar**, the first stage, refers not to the rules of language. In the youngest years of a child's education, the goal is to build a foundation for future learning by establishing a knowledge base. Classical education capitalizes on these early formative years by introducing students to the foundational knowledge, or grammar, of subjects they will study in more detail later. In other words, grammar is the inputting of data. This stage is emphasized during the elementary school years.
- **Dialectic** builds upon the grammar stage and teaches students to outline and evaluate arguments. It is the processing of data, often simply referred to as "logic" it refers to logical, critical thinking. Dialectic is all about asking questions prefaced with "why" and "how" rather than "what." This stage is emphasized during the middle school years of education.
- **Rhetoric** is the art of communicating well. Classically, the skill of rhetoric is used to persuade others. Rhetoric is emphasized in students' high school-equivalent years through projects and activities such as debates and presentations, which may include student-led discussions in which a student poses questions to their peers and facilitates the conversation. In this stage students voice their perspectives on events and figures in history.

Students, educators, and parents find themselves examining classical education for answers because policymakers have not found the remedy to the United States' educational concerns, particularly the high rate of illiteracy. Classical education may be an option, as it employs a natural scaffolding approach that builds upon students' application of content. This educational philosophy focuses on the development of language skills first, which leads students to further studies. Classical education emphasizes history, literature, arts, and language. It teaches students to strive for virtue. It puts a premium on reading the works of great writers and thinkers.

The following are examples of schools using the Classical Education model, and the supporting data.

The objective of South Bronx Classical (SBC), a network of four charter schools, is to provide some of New York City's most disadvantaged students with a liberal arts education. Founded by Lester Long in 2006, South Bronx Classical (SBC) is in a poor section of the city's poorest borough. South Bronx public school students are much more likely to be from economically disadvantaged communities and are more likely to experience housing insecurity than students elsewhere in the Bronx. As a result, students in this area lag in educational attainment, with high school graduation rates lower than the rest of the city and state.

Academically, SBC stands far above schools in the surrounding South Bronx area. Each school in the network reflects universal proficiency in core subjects such as English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. SBC's results not only significantly surpass neighboring schools but are positive outliers in New York State. SBC schools meet their mission of educating the community where they are located: Ninety-seven percent (97%) of SBC students are Black or Hispanic, mirroring the Ninety-six percent (96%) of Black or brown students in the South Bronx geographic district.

### NYS Education Dept. Grade 3–8 Test Scores, 2018–19

	ELA (Black)	ELA (Hispanic)	ELA (Economically Disadvantaged)	Math (Black)	Math (Hispanic)	Math (Economically Disadvantaged)
SB1	90	90	90	96	97	97
SB2	NA	88	89	NA	95	94
SB3	98	100	99	100	100	100
NYC Geog Dist 7 (South Bronx)	30	31	30	21	27	26
Bronx County	37	34	34	33	32	32
NYC	35	37	41	28	33	39
NYS	35	36	36	32	35	37

Source: "Data," NYS Education Dept.

Note: No data are available for SB4.

Nashville Classical posts higher rates of proficiency in ELA and mathematics, both as a student body and by ethnicity, than district public schools. Compared with other public schools in the area, Nashville Classical more than doubles its students' proficiency rates in math (64.5% vs. 29.9%) and nearly doubles their proficiency rates in ELA (49.2% vs. 25.9%). Black students at Nashville Classical also achieve far higher rates of proficiency in ELA and math compared with their counterparts elsewhere in the school district and the state. The student body is majority-minority: 62% are black, and 8% are Hispanic (the Metropolitan Nashville school district is 27% Black and 10% Hispanic)..

### 2019 Student Proficiency: Nashville Classical, Davidson County, and Tennessee

	ELA	Math	ELA (White)	ELA (Black)	ELA (Economically Disadvantaged)	Math (White)	Math (Black)	Math (Economically Disadvantaged)
Nashville Classical	49.2%	64.5%	74.4%	43.3%	36.5%	89.7%	57.4%	56%
Davidson County (Metropolitan Nashville)	25.9%	29.9%	43.9%	17%	14.3%	47.2%	20.2%	18.5%
Tennessee	33.7%	40.8%	40.6%	18.4%	18.6%	48%	23.9%	24.7%

Source: "Tread," Tennessee Dept. of Education

Washington Latin Public Charter School has a ninety percent (90%) four-year graduation rate, compared with DC's sixty-nine (69%) graduation rate in the traditional public high schools. The student body performance on the District's standardized Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exams reflects the intensive focus that the school places on the humanities. Students in both the middle (grades 5–8) and upper (grades 9–12) exceed rates of proficiency in the Washington, DC public school district on ELA assessments for Black and white students. While math scores on average at Washington Latin surpass those in the general populations, they lag at the high school level.

## Washington Latin PARCC Proficiency, 2018–19

	ELA	Math	ELA (White)	ELA (Black)	Math (White)	Math (Black)
Washington Latin—Middle	63.4%	48.1%	80.9%	41.4%	66.9%	27.6%
Washington Latin—Upper	83.1%	41.3%	100%	74.2%	62.5%	10.7%
DC	37.1%	30.5%	85%	27.8%	78.8%	21.1%

Source: DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, "2018–19 PARCC Results"

Classical education is not limited to private, religious, and home schools. Charter and public schools, which follow the classical education model, particularly in urban areas, are designed to provide students a stronger educational foundation with respect to literacy, and in practice, closing the achievement gap.

As a District, we must closely examine and monitor not only our students' learning gains but focus even more intently their proficiency levels. Currently, in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), forty-four percent (44%) of students in grade 3, forty-six percent (46%) in grade 8, and forty-eight (48%) in grade 10 and are not proficient in reading, while forty percent (40%) in grade 3, and sixty-one (61%) percent in grade 8, and are not proficient in math.

Thirty-six million adults in the United States cannot read at a third-grade level, according to results from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, while 14.5% of Americans who have low literacy rates are unemployed. As a result, policymakers are finding it necessary to change curriculum and standards to address this significant issue.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent, to explore the feasibility of offering a Classical Education curriculum and if viable, develop a plan and timeline for its implementation at an elementary school(s) or K-8 Center(s), for the 2024-2025 school year.

Revised

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

### **ACTION PROPOSED BY MS. MONICA COLUCCI:**

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

1. Explore the feasibility of offering a Classical Education curriculum, and if viable, develop a plan and timeline for its implementation at an elementary school(s) and/or K-8 Center(s), for the 2024-2025 school year, and
2. Present the findings concerning the feasibility of offering a Classical Education curriculum at the Academics, Innovation, Evaluation & Technology Committee meeting of Wednesday, October 4, 2023

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