

Mr. Danny Espino, Board Member

**SUBJECT: ENHANCING AND EXPANDING M-DCPS' EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION OPTIONS**

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

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

Early childhood education (ECE) significantly contributes to bridging the achievement gap in education by providing equitable access to high-quality learning experiences for all children. Research indicates that participation in quality ECE programs helps reduce disparities in school readiness, particularly among children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Barnett, 2008). Longitudinal studies demonstrate that children attending high-quality preschool programs exhibit higher academic performance throughout their schooling, leading to decreased grade repetition and higher graduation rates, especially for at-risk children (Heckman et al., 2010). By focusing on developing foundational skills such as language, literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional competence, ECE programs equip children with the essential tools necessary for academic success, thus preventing the emergence of learning gaps (Planta et al., 2009; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Ultimately, investing in ECE for children of low socioeconomic status promotes equity in education outcomes by leveling the playing field and empowering children to achieve their full potential (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003).

Despite the promise of ECE, there lies a stark reality: not all children have equitable access to these transformative opportunities. Economic disparities, consistent access, and geographic barriers often combine to widen the chasm of inequality, denying countless children the chance to unleash their full potential. Here, the imperative of enhancing and expanding ECE programs emerges with unparalleled urgency. To this end, M-DCPS, through the Department of Early Childhood Programs and the Office of Career and Technical Education (CTE), offers a variety of high-quality ECE programs that provide educational experiences to our youngest students, from birth to five years old.

1. Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program (VPK) – this free educational program prepares every four-year-old in Florida for kindergarten and builds the foundation for their academic success. M-DCPS offers a variety of options for VPK families depending on their financial needs. These programs are available in 212 elementary and K-8 Centers.
  - a. Title I VPK programs: offer free, full-day (8:20 AM - 1:50 PM) prekindergarten for students who attend a Title I school.
  - b. Fee-Supported VPK programs: offer full-day (8:20 AM - 1:50 PM) prekindergarten for students who attend a non-Title I school. Parents are responsible for paying for the second half of the day (11:20 a.m. to 1:50 p.m.).
  - c. Inclusion VPK programs: offer free, full-day (8:20 AM - 1:50 PM) prekindergarten for ten typically developing VPK students who serve as role models for ten children identified as having a disability with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
  - d. Head Start/Early Head Start VPK programs: offer free, extended day (8:15 am - 3:05 pm) prekindergarten and comprehensive services to income-eligible students and their families.

2. CTE Early Childhood Education Labs for High School ECE Programs – this fee-based program is available at eight M-DCPS Senior High Schools. These programs are used as labs where high school students work with young children to gain hands-on experience in childcare and instruction for this age group. These ECE/CTE Labs are currently open at Coral Gables SHS, Homestead SHS, G. Holmes Braddock SHS, Ferguson SHS, Miami SHS, Robert Morgan SHS, and South Dade SHS. To create more accessible locations for families throughout the District, expanding and evaluating other school sites that could benefit from this program in their area would be beneficial.

The quality and quantity of programs offered by M-DCPS are impressive. However, more must be done to continue bridging the achievement gap and seeing consistent growth in all students' ELA and mathematics achievement. The School Board of Miami Dade County has shown its steadfast commitment to improving the academic achievement of all students as demonstrated by School Board items proffered by School Board Chair Maria Teresa Rojas and other current Board Members, such as Dr. Steve Gallon III and Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, who have been proponents of the Board's continued focus on bridging the achievement gap. The following items are just a few of these examples:

- School Board Meeting of August 16, 2023, Agenda Item H-2, proffered by School Board Chair Maria Teresa Rojas - *INSTRUCTIONAL TRANSFORMATION TO SUPPORT RAPID AND SUSTAINABLE IMPROVEMENTS FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT PROFICIENT IN READING AND MATHEMATICS IN THIRD THROUGH TENTH GRADE IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL (M-DCPS)*.
- School Board Meeting of March 17, 2021, Agenda Item H-6, proffered by School Board Chair Maria Teresa Rojas - *STUDENT REGRESSION AND LEARNING LOSS IN THE EARLY GRADES – PREKINDERGARTEN, KINDERGARTEN, FIRST GRADE, SECOND GRADE, AND THIRD GRADE*.
- School Board Meeting of February 10, 2021, Agenda Item H-21, proffered by then Board Vice Chair Dr. Steve Gallon III - *CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS*.
- School Board Meeting of October 21, 2020, Agenda Item H-15, proffered by Board Member Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall – *ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY AT MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS*.

In the face of compelling evidence that ECE is one of the best ways to foster sustainable academic improvement, this item seeks to direct the Superintendent to explore the feasibility of enhancing and expanding the current ECE program offerings of Miami Dade County Public Schools. It further directs the Superintendent to work collaboratively with local, nonprofit organizations, the Children's Trust, and other philanthropic entities to look for creative and innovative programs and funding opportunities to further enhance our offerings to include, but not limited to, a greater expansion of programs for three-year-old students and ECE/CTE Labs at our high schools. In addition, provide an update to the Board on the status of all the District's early childhood programs, with recommendations for enhancing and expanding based on District and state requirements.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY  
MR. DANNY ESPINO:**

That the School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, consider prioritizing ECE as part of the agenda for the next legislative session, to include increasing state funding for ECE as well as streamlining the regulations for public school licensing of ECE programs that are a current obstacle for M-DCPS and authorize the Superintendent of Schools to:

1. explore the feasibility of enhancing and expanding the current ECE program offerings of MDCPS to include, but not limited to, a greater expansion of programs for three-year-old students and ECE/CTE Labs at our high schools; and

2. explore the feasibility of working collaboratively with local nonprofits, the Children's Trust, and other philanthropic entities to look for creative and innovative programmatic and funding opportunities to enhance further our ECE offering, including but not limited to philanthropic endowments and alternative program models; and

3. provide an update to the Board on the status of the District's Early Childhood Programs with recommendations for enhancing and expanding these programs by July 17, 2024.

**References:**

- Barnett, W.S. (2008). Preschool education and its lasting effects: Research and policy implications.
- Heckman, J.J., Moon, S.H., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P.A., & Yavitz, A. (2010). The rate of return to the HighScope Perry Preschool Program. *Journal of Public Economics*, 94 (1-2), 114-128.
- Pianta, R.C., Barnett, W.S., Burchinal, M., & Thornburg, K.R. (2009). The effects of preschool education: What we know, how public policy is or is not aligned with the evidence base, and what we need to know. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 10(2), 49-88.
- Rolnick, A.J., & Grunewald, R. (2003). Early childhood development: Economic development with a high public return.
- Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M.R., Espinosa, L.M., Gromley, W.T., & Zaslow, M.J. (2013). Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education. Society for Research in Child Development and Foundation for Child Development.