

Mr. Roberto J. Alonso, Board Member

SUBJECT: COLLABORATIVE MENTORING INITIATIVE: BRIDGING SUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARE STUDENTS

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: INFORMED, ENGAGED, & EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS

Mentoring programs are a leading blueprint for preventing negative outcomes and improve resilience among children that are in foster care. Although there are various models and strategies, mentoring programs share a common goal of providing children with a support system from experienced people. This proposal advocates for the development of a collaborative mentoring program that includes Miami-Dade County Public Schools employees, such as teachers, police officers, school staff members, and administrators, working together to support students in the foster care system within our District. Recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by students in foster care, this program would provide a school-site specific, comprehensive, and inclusive support network that extends beyond the traditional academic realm.

The objective of this voluntary pilot foster care mentoring program is to provide students in foster care with a holistic understanding of the value of their participation in a mentoring program that combines the expertise and perspectives of teachers, police officers, staff, and administrators to address the diverse needs of students in the foster care system. Once this understanding is achieved, students in foster care will begin to build trusting relationships with mentors and students that will create a supportive learning environment where emotional well-being can be prioritized. Equipping the mentors with the knowledge and skills to advocate for the unique needs of the students in foster care will significantly increase the chances for success of this voluntary pilot foster care mentoring program.

Therefore, this mentoring program should be structured to provide comprehensive training for interested teachers, police officers, school staff and administrators to enhance their understanding of the challenges faced by students in foster care and provide the mentors with effective mentoring skills. When the training is complete, school site specific mentoring teams will be formed to ensure that a well-rounded support system is ready to assist each student in foster care. Regular check-in's can be facilitated between mentors and students, fostering open communication, and addressing both academic and non-academic concerns. On-going workshops and training sessions for mentors and students are crucial in coping with stress management, conflict resolution, basic life skills (especially for those students in foster care that will be transitioning to independent living), and future career and post-secondary guidance. The program structure will allow for ongoing data monitoring and evaluations to assess the program's

impact, identify areas of improvements, and make data driven decisions that will encompass the overall success of the foster care student.

This board item seeks to request that the Superintendent of Schools explore the feasibility of developing a pilot program at American Senior High School and Miami Southridge Senior High School where school-site specific staff at these schools will be recruited, trained, and matched with a youth in foster care. If feasible and appropriate, this pilot will be developed in collaboration with teachers, law enforcement, school staff and administrators, in order to implement a support program that will promote a positive and empowering environment that will contribute to academic success and overall well-being of the students in the foster care system within our school district. At the end of the school year, if deemed appropriate, an evaluation of the program will be made and recommendation on how to strengthen the program and expand it to additional schools for the 2024-2025 school year.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
MR. ROBERTO J ALONSO:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, request that the Superintendent of Schools:

1. Explore the feasibility of creating a voluntary pilot foster care mentoring program at American Senior High and Miami Southridge Senior High; and
2. If deemed feasible and appropriate, extend the voluntary pilot foster care mentoring program to additional schools; and
3. Provide a report back to the School Board regarding a plan of action prior to the July 17, 2024, Personnel, Student, School & Community Support Committee Meeting.