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SUBJECT: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION TEACHERS IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (M-DCPS)

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS, LEADERS, & STAFF

The demand for qualified exceptional student education teachers has reached unprecedented levels, reflecting the increasing number of students requiring specialized instruction and support. Despite their critical role in fostering inclusive education, schools across the nation face significant challenges in filling these essential positions. Many school districts struggle to fill these critical roles due to a combination of increasing demand and high turnover rates.

Shortages of exceptional student education teachers may lead to larger caseloads for existing staff, limited support for students, and ultimately, a decline in the quality of education provided to learners with unique needs. Addressing this pressing issue requires a comprehensive and proactive plan to recruit skilled educators and retain them through sustained support and resources.

As unfilled positions disrupt classrooms and hinder student progress, the urgency to act becomes clear. Filling these positions is not just a practical necessity but a commitment to ensuring equitable learning opportunities for every child upholding the promise of education for all students.

Collaboration with the United Teachers of Dade (UTD) will ensure that recruitment and retention strategies will align with the needs and priorities of teachers, ultimately creating an environment where exceptional student education professionals feel valued, supported, and empowered to succeed. The support of UTD will be vital in addressing the current staffing shortages and building a robust foundation for the future of exceptional student education in Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

A comprehensive plan to recruit and retain exceptional student education teachers in Miami-Dade County Public Schools may address both short-term and long-term goals, focusing on making the profession attractive, supportive, and sustainable. *The following are some examples that may be considered to be included in the plan, with the understanding that some of these strategies or initiatives may have already been implemented in M-DCPS:*

Recruitment Strategies

1. Targeted Outreach:

- Partner with local and state universities, especially those with strong exceptional education programs, and a willingness to work with M-DCPS.
- Offer scholarships or tuition reimbursement for students committing to teaching in M-DCPS. Seek the support and collaborate with local businesses, foundations, and community organizations for sponsorships or donations.
- Attend education job fairs and conduct targeted advertising on platforms that educators frequent.
- Create marketing materials highlighting the benefits of working in M-DCPS, including testimonials from current exceptional student education teachers.

2. Incentives:

- Offer signing bonuses for exceptional student education teachers.
- Provide competitive starting salaries and opportunities for salary growth.
- Create a loan forgiveness or repayment program for those with student debt.
- Consider reducing unnecessary administrative expenses or non-essential programs to increase funding for high-impact initiatives.

3. Streamlined Hiring Process:

- Simplify the application and interview process to minimize delays.
- Provide clear communication about timelines, expectations, and job requirements.
- Consider the deployment of Human Capital staff to different sections of the county to bring the hiring services closer to the prospective candidates.

4. Grow-Your-Own Programs:

- Develop partnerships with local high schools and colleges to inspire students to pursue careers in special education.
- Provide pathways for paraprofessionals or general education teachers to transition into special education through district-funded training.
- Provide incentives for general education teachers to teach in exceptional student education by expediting the certification waiver process in the district and encourage institutions of higher learning to offer the needed certification courses in a cohort model with discounted tuition and even the possibility of the district providing scholarships.

Retention Strategies

1. Professional Development:

- Offer ongoing training tailored to exceptional student education, such as behavior management, individualized education program (IEP) planning, and inclusive teaching strategies.
- Provide mentorship programs pairing new teachers with experienced exceptional student educators.
- Consider providing sabbatical leave after five years of teaching exceptional education students to re-energize and refresh current teaching strategies and programs for exceptional education students.
- Support attendance at workshops, conferences, and certification programs.

2. Supportive Work Environment:

- Ensure manageable caseloads to prevent burnout.
- Hire sufficient paraprofessional staff to support classroom needs.
- Provide dedicated time for planning, collaboration, and administrative tasks.

3. Recognition and Appreciation:

- Regularly recognize and reward exceptional student education teachers for their contributions.
- Celebrate milestones and achievements publicly (e.g., teacher appreciation events).

4. Mental Health and Wellness Support:

- Offer access to counseling, wellness programs, and stress management resources.
- Encourage a work-life balance by discouraging excessive after-hours work.

5. **Opportunities for Growth:**

- Provide clear pathways for career advancement, such as leadership roles within special education.
- Support teachers in earning advanced certifications or degrees.
- For those teachers who already have a Florida Professional Certificate, enhance the delivery of the Academic Endorsements in Gifted and Autism and provide financial incentives for those in attendance and a commitment to teach in these two areas.
- Incentivize local colleges and universities to work with M-DCPS to accept those state approved courses offered by the District for the Academic Endorsements in Gifted and Autism, reducing the number of credits required to earn a master's degree in special education, through an approved training to credit model offered at most colleges and universities.
- Seek state funding to expand the apprentice teaching pathway program with local colleges and universities.

Community and Parent Engagement

1. **Foster a Positive Perception:**

- Educate parents and the community about the critical role of exceptional student education teachers.
- Encourage community support through volunteering and advocacy.

2. **Parent-Teacher Collaboration:**

- Provide resources and training to help parents collaborate effectively with exceptional student educators.
- Ensure parents understand and respect the work and efforts of exceptional student education teachers.

Transparent Reporting and Accountability

1. **Develop a Financial Oversight Team:**

- Assign a dedicated team to monitor the use of funds allocated for special education teacher initiatives.
- Ensure that funds are used effectively and in alignment with district goals.

2. **Regular Updates to Stakeholders:**

- Report annually to the School Board, district leaders, and the community on the financial outcomes and impacts of recruitment and retention programs.
- Highlight success stories to maintain support and encourage additional investments.

3. **Evaluate ROI on Initiatives:**

- Assess the return on investment (ROI) of each program by measuring outcomes such as teacher satisfaction, reduced turnover, and improved student outcomes.

Data-Driven Improvements

1. **Conduct Surveys and Exit Interviews:**

- Gather feedback from current and former exceptional student education teachers to understand challenges and identify areas for improvement.
- Present a data-driven case highlighting the need for competitive salaries, professional development, and supportive resources to retain teachers.

2. **Monitor Teacher Turnover Rates:**

- Track data to measure the effectiveness of recruitment and retention initiatives.

3. **Adjust and Innovate:**

- Regularly evaluate and adapt the plan based on changing needs and feedback.

It is clear that some of these examples for consideration and others that may be proffered will have a financial impact on the school district. Ensuring financial resources are available to implement recruitment and retention initiatives for exceptional student education teachers requires strategic planning, and will involve securing adequate funding, and may even require budget realignment. However, the School Board must have all the information readily available in order to ensure that students requiring specialized instruction and support have outstanding instructional staff to build on a robust academic, social, and physical foundation for our most vulnerable students.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY CHAIR
MS. MARIA TERESA ROJAS:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, direct the Superintendent of Schools to develop a comprehensive plan that validates all of the current initiatives and strategies that have been implemented along with new approaches that may address short-term and long-term goals to enhance the recruitment and retention of exceptional student education teachers in Miami-Dade County Public Schools and present to the Board the findings and any financial impact to the district included in this plan during the Personnel, Student, School & Community Support Committee scheduled for May 7, 2025, with a written report and a presentation.