

Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas, Chair

Co-Sponsors:            Mr. Roberto J. Alonso  
                                 Mr. Danny Espino  
                                 Dr. Steve Gallon III

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**SUBJECT:                    FOLLOW-UP TO THE FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A SCHOOL CHOICE CONCEPT OF DISTRICTWIDE CENTERS FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)**

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

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

At the School Board Meeting of May 24, 2017, the Board approved Agenda Item H-16, proffered by School Board Member Mari Tere Rojas, and co-sponsored by School Board Chair Dr. Lawrence S. Feldman, as well as Board Members Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Ms. Susie V. Castillo, Dr. Steve Gallon III, Ms. Perla Tabares Hantman, and Ms. Lubby Navarro. Agenda Item H-16 authorized the Superintendent to: 1) review and analyze the feasibility of establishing the school choice concept of Districtwide Centers for Autism Spectrum Disorder: 2) determine if the concept can be implemented within existing resources or if additional funds may be necessary: 3) provide a report to the Board by October 11, 2017.

A staff follow-up was submitted by the Superintendent on September 29, 2017. Some of the concepts reported included the following:

- “It is the district’s intent to continue the implementation of the Superintendent’s Autism Intensive Communication Academies at the following schools:
  - Blue Lakes Elementary (ASD Academy is K-8)
  - Citrus Grove elementary
  - Gratigny Elementary
  - Redondo Elementary
  - Paul Bell Middle
  - South Dade Middle
  - Homestead Senior High
- “The Academies at Citrus Grove Elementary, Gratigny Elementary, Paul Bell Middle, and Homestead Senior have capacity to serve additional ASD students, if transportation boundaries were expanded.”
- “In an effort to further leverage resources and maximize the support offered to students with ASD and their families, the district will pilot the concept of an *ASD EpiCenter* during the 2017-2018 school year. Under the new *ASD EpiCenter* concept, staffing allocations will be as follows:
  - One teacher and one classroom paraprofessional for every six students;
  - a Behavior Management Teacher; and
  - a Program Specialist.”
- Some other items in this follow-up included a full-inclusion model for students with disabilities, including students with ASD, at Toni Bilbao K-8 Center beginning in 2018-2019; additional Career and Technical Education (CTE) elective offerings will be made available

to secondary students with ASD in separate class settings beginning during the 2018-2019 school year; CODE instruction will be provided to students with ASD in the middle grades; possible funding through IDEA grant; and elective offerings in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) will be provided in senior high schools.

Additional questions were posed by Board Member Rojas, and a response by the Superintendent was provided August 28, 2018, regarding the original staff-follow-up inclusive of transportation, expansion of the *EpiCenters*, success data regarding the pilot program at Citrus Grove Elementary School; ASD student participation in general education electives and secondary CTE options for students; success of parent workshops and pilot webinars.

A districtwide center would ensure that all students, regardless of which school they attend, have equitable access to a comprehensive range of autism-specific resources, therapies, and trained professionals. A centralized center may allow for uniform standards of care and education, closing the equity gap and meeting legal and ethical obligations under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). By concentrating resources in a dedicated facility, the district can recruit and retain staff with advanced training in autism education and behavior interventions, including Behavior Management Specialists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and special education teachers with ASD expertise and certification. These professionals can also serve as a resource hub, providing coaching and support to staff across the school district. A centralized center can also offer families a consistent point of contact and provide training, resources, and workshops that empower parents and caregivers. This strengthens the home-school connection and fosters a more holistic approach to student development.

Centralizing services also allow for more robust data collection and program evaluation. The district can monitor student outcomes, measure program effectiveness, and adapt strategies using evidence-based practices. This data-driven approach ensures continuous improvement and accountability.

While the information provided at that time was limited in terms of the original direction of the Board, there were some important programs and strategies provided for ASD students. However, it has been over seven years, and the Board should receive any updates available in response to the original intent of the Board action taken on H-16.

A Districtwide Center for Autism Spectrum Disorder represents more than a facility. It is a commitment to an inclusive, equitable, and evidence-based education. It affirms the district's dedication to meeting the diverse needs of all learners and provides a scalable model for excellence in autism education that other districts can emulate.

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 provide an update regarding the concept of establishing a comprehensive school choice concept of Districtwide Centers for Autism Spectrum Disorders in Miami-Dade County Public Schools in District-owned facilities with available space; to further provide additional information regarding the concepts described in the two staff follow-ups provided by the Superintendent at the time; and submit a report to the Board by June 16, 2025.

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