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SUBJECT: FOSTERING CIVIL DISCOURSE

COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY

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

Promoting respectful, informed, and productive classroom discussions around complex topics strengthens the very foundation of our Constitutional Republic. By fostering civil discourse, we empower students to engage meaningfully in dialogue, listen with empathy, and express their ideas with clarity and confidence.

Instructing K-12 students in civil discourse is important because it equips them to engage respectfully and thoughtfully across diverse perspectives, building empathy, mutual understanding, and the critical thinking skills necessary for healthy democratic participation. Civil discourse instruction helps students learn to communicate effectively with those whose opinions differ from their own without resorting to personal attacks or harmful contention.

Instructing K–12 students in civil discourse ensures they are prepared to navigate a society of varying views with respect and purpose. Students learn to communicate effectively with those whose opinions differ, building both intellectual courage and resilience. This not only elevates the classroom experience but also prepares students for civic life, college, and the workforce.

Teachers play a significant role in creating environments where students can practice these skills. Using the Gradual Release Model, educators can scaffold the process of civil discourse, starting with non-threatening activities such as journaling and/or modeled debates, and then moving toward structured classroom discussions, Socratic Seminars, and open dialogue. This step-by-step approach builds confidence and equips students with tools to participate productively in meaningful conversations.

Civil discourse strategies can be creatively integrated across subjects in alignment with the Florida B.E.S.T. Standards. In Mathematics/STEM, students should be encouraged to justify solutions, debate theories, and evaluate evidence, mirroring mathematical and scientific reasoning practices while reinforcing precision, logic, and collaboration. In English Language Arts/Literacy, text-based evidence should be promoted in discussions of literary works, ensuring alignment with B.E.S.T. benchmarks on citing evidence, analyzing themes, and evaluating arguments, while in Social Studies/Civics, the discussions should be framed around

primary sources, constitutional principles, and civic ideals, supporting benchmarks that emphasize historical analysis and informed citizenship. In Fine Arts & Music students should be encouraged to analyze and debate multiple interpretations of artistic works.

To ensure that classroom discourse remains constructive, academically rigorous, and compliant with Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards, the following parameters and safeguards are recommended:

1. **Standards Alignment:** All discussion topics must be explicitly tied to grade-level B.E.S.T. benchmarks within the relevant subject area. Teachers will select topics grounded in approved curricula, primary sources, and state/district adopted instructional resources.
2. **Neutral Facilitation:** Teachers will serve as facilitators, not advocates, ensuring that multiple perspectives are presented fairly and factually, with a focus on evidence-based reasoning.
3. **Age and Developmental Appropriateness:** Discussion topics must be appropriate for the maturity level of the students, avoiding materials or prompts that are inconsistent with grade-level standards or beyond the scope of the approved curriculum.
4. **Civic and Constitutional Focus:** Emphasis should be placed on civic knowledge, American history, and constitutional principles, reinforcing Florida's statutory requirements for civics instruction.
5. **Safeguards for Respectful Dialogue:** Teachers will establish clear norms for respectful listening, turn-taking, and evidence-based responses, incorporating classroom contracts or discussion rubrics to maintain decorum.
6. **Opt-In Scaffolding:** Teachers will employ scaffolded approaches (e.g., journaling, structured prompts, teacher modeling) before advancing open dialogue, ensuring that students are prepared with the necessary vocabulary, context, and critical thinking tools.
7. **Professional Development:** Teachers will receive training on how to facilitate discussions impartially, de-escalate tension, and keep conversations standards based.

This item directs the Superintendent to review evidence-based strategies used for structured discussion leading to civil discourse that teachers can implement in any classroom setting, and explore the feasibility of implementing these strategies with parameters and safeguards that align with Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards, approved curricula, and age-appropriate instructional practices, and if deemed appropriate, consider applying these strategies across multiple subject areas, including Think-Pair-Share, Socratic Seminar, Philosophical Chairs, and the Fishbowl Method, and also explore the feasibility of creating opportunities for professional development for teachers across all disciplines, focusing on scaffolded approaches such as the Gradual Release Model, modeled debates, journaling, and progressively open discussions.

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

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

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

1. review evidence-based strategies used for structured discussion leading to civil discourse that teachers can implement in any classroom setting;
2. explore the feasibility of implementing these strategies with parameters and safeguards that align with Florida's B.E.S.T. Standards, approved curricula, and age-appropriate instructional practices;
3. if deemed appropriate, consider applying these strategies across multiple subject areas, including Think-Pair-Share, Socratic Seminar, Philosophical Chairs, and the Fishbowl Method;
4. explore the feasibility of creating opportunities for professional development for teachers across all disciplines, focusing on scaffolded approaches such as the Gradual Release Model, journaling, and/or modeled debates, and progressively open discussions; and
5. provide a presentation with recommendations, on December 10, 2025, at the Academics, Innovation, Evaluation, & Technology Committee meeting.