

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Board Member

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**SUBJECT: REVIEW OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE REFERENDUM
SUPPORTING IMPROVED TEACHER COMPENSATION AND SCHOOL
SAFETY AND RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS**

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**LINK TO STRATEGIC
PLAN: EFFECTIVE & SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONAL PRACTICES**

Teachers are the backbone of public education. The work of their hands, heads, and hearts continues to leave an indelible mark on the current and future lives of their students. It is their work that represents the fulcrum of student learning, growth, and achievement. Throughout history, the role and impact of teachers on the learning and lives of citizenry, as well as the achievement, progress, and success of Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) have been indisputable. In addition, the work of teachers has consistently played a significant role in the success and prosperity of the local community.

As the 3rd largest school district in the nation and one of the highest performing urban school systems in the state, M-DCPS recognizes that its achievement is based on the outstanding work of teachers and school support personnel who serve our students, as well as the innovative academic programs the District continues to develop and offer throughout the county. It also recognizes the critical nature of ensuring that students, staff, parents, and community partners and stakeholders learn, work, and engage in safe, secure, and orderly learning environments.

Although individual and collective stakeholders continue to play significant roles in the overall success of the District, the many achievements, accolades, and awards received by M-DCPS have been a direct result of the hard work, dedication, and often personal, professional, and financial sacrifices of its teachers—they are the ones that have the proximate relationship with students—who represent our primary unit of impact and purpose. Every member of this community, at some place and point in their lives, has experienced and benefited from the transformative power of a highly committed, competent, and caring teacher. Yet, despite these realities, teachers too often remain the unsung heroes of our time and too often go without the professional recognition and the compensation they deserve.

At its January 16, 2018, meeting, the School Board approved Item H-6, proffered by Dr. Steve Gallon, III, “Exploration and Examination of Alternative Funding Sources and Solutions to Improve Teacher Salaries.” Pursuant to Item H-6, a Task Force was created, comprised of teachers, administrators, community organizations, law enforcement personnel, parents and representatives of collective bargaining units, and a series of recommendations were made, namely, to consider a referendum to supplement teacher salaries and support an expansion of school-based law

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enforcement personnel. In addition, due to the requirement to provide a safe school officer at each school, which became law after the Marjorie Stoneman Douglass Parkland shooting, it was determined that the referendum should also consider the need to hire and compensate additional sworn law enforcement officers at the schools.

The 2018 Teacher Salary Task Force recognized the need for M-DCPS to increase investments and financial support in safety and security beyond what was then provided. At the direction of the Board, the 2018 Task Force, together with District staff, bargaining units, parents, chambers of commerce and community organizations explored all available avenues to secure additional funding. The recommendations were presented to the Board at a workshop on June 27, 2018, wherein it was clarified that Sections 1011.71(9) and 1011.73, Florida Statutes (2018), authorize the imposition by school boards of an ad valorem tax levy for up to four (4) years for operating expenses, subject to approval by the electors of the county voting on a referendum.

Therefore, in order to ensure M-DCPS was able to secure the resources necessary to continue the success it had achieved into the future—and based on the recommendations of the 2018 Teacher Salary Task Force and information provided to the Board at its workshop of June 27, 2018—the Board approved a resolution at its regular meeting of July 18, 2018, to allow the voters of Miami-Dade County to have their voices heard by seeking their approval for the School Board to levy an ad-valorem assessment to be placed on the November 6, 2018 ballot. The levy was for a period of four (4) years, beginning July 1, 2019, and ending June 30, 2023, to support educators, school safety, and innovative programs.

Following the Board's vote and through the democratic process, the electors of Miami-Dade County overwhelmingly expressed their support for teachers and their commitment to school safety and approved a referendum providing for a 0.75 mill levy to support teacher salaries and the hiring of school-based law enforcement personnel (the "2018 Referendum") by more than 71% of the vote. The Board also established the Secure Our Future Advisory Committee (SOFAC) to review, monitor, and make recommendations to the Superintendent and School Board, and inform the public regarding the use of proceeds generated from the assessment of a 0.75 mill levy of ad valorem taxes approved by voters on November 6, 2018, for the purpose of improving compensation for high quality teachers and instructional personnel employed by the Board, and increasing school safety and security personnel for Board-operated schools. The SOFAC was developed to provide transparency and instill confidence in Miami-Dade County taxpayers that these funds would be used for the purposes stated in the 2018 Referendum.

Since 2018, the SOFAC has reviewed and monitored the distribution of the proceeds from the Referendum, including monitoring state funding allocations so that Referendum proceeds were not used in a manner that would constitute supplanting of funds. The SOFAC also monitored funding trends, advised the Superintendent and the Board on the use of the proceeds from the Referendum, excluding all matters related to collective bargaining, and assisted in informing the community of the use and distribution of the proceeds from the Referendum.

Due to this funding and support from the electorate for the 2018 Referendum, M-DCPS continued to see remarkable success. M-DCPS continues to be one of the highest performing urban school systems in the state, after attaining the status of an "A"-rated district for the first time in 2018. Year after year since 2018, student achievement has climbed, as have graduation rates and school performance. Financially, the District navigated a recession and a pandemic, while creating efficiencies through innovation, while protecting the classroom, the workforce, and programs such as art, music, and world languages.

The Board has recognized the critical importance, utility, and value that the supplemental revenue sources from the Referendum have provided to support educators and public education, as well as the challenges and issues of providing competitive teacher salaries in M-DCPS. Teacher compensation has been a vital component in maintaining an A-rated District, as well as increasing graduation rates throughout the county.

At the Board meeting of May 18, 2022, the Board approved Resolution 22-030, again calling for a vote on a second Referendum to be held on November 8, 2022 (the “2022 Referendum”). The 2022 Referendum included a 1.0 mill levy and ad valorem assessment to continue improving compensation for teachers and instructional personnel, and improve student safety and security for public schools, including charter schools, with oversight by the SOFAC.

Subsequent to this Board meeting and the Board’s vote and again through the democratic process, the electors of Miami-Dade County again overwhelmingly expressed their support for teachers and their commitment to school safety and approved the 2022 Referendum with more than 65% of the vote. With that approval, M-DCPS was able to secure the resources necessary to continue our success for a period of four (4) years, beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2027, to support educators and law enforcement personnel at school sites. The 2022 Referendum proceeds have continued to be used to improve compensation for teachers and instructional personnel and to enhance safety and security for our students by funding additional school safety officers.

Although Florida has made measurable increases in funding for education and teacher compensation, without local support, the current level of state and federal funding, along with the rising costs of living in South Florida, do not provide sufficient resources for M-DCPS to recruit, hire, and retain high caliber educators, provide the enhanced safety and security measures, resources, and staff at each school as required by state law, or deliver the innovative programs demanded and expected by parents and deserved by students.

With the overwhelming support of the voters in Miami-Dade County in 2018 and 2022, M-DCPS has been able to bridge the gap and provide additional funding for these vital resources and indispensable programs. As a result, M-DCPS has obtained and maintained its “A” rating as a District, while also continuing to keep its schools safe.

M-DCPS recognizes the very significant, lifelong impact that teachers have on its students and their ability to positively influence student learning. It is through this positive influence that teachers inspire students towards not only academic achievement and success in their present learning endeavors, but in the active, intentional pursuit of their life’s aspirations, personal dreams, and career goals.

Despite empirical and related data that confirm the enriching effect teachers have on the daily lives of their students, as well as the impact they have on their lifelong educational and career aspirations, despite recent efforts to increase educational funding for students and teacher salaries, teacher salaries in the state of Florida continue to lag significantly behind other states throughout the nation. Although teachers are in high demand, recent studies concerning average teacher pay cite Florida, despite its recent efforts to increase funding for teacher pay, as one of the lowest paid states for teachers. However, the 2018 and 2022 voter-approved referendum payments in Miami-Dade have made teacher pay in M-DCPS much more competitive and on par with other high-performing districts across the nation.

The challenges reflected in teacher salaries in the state of Florida are exacerbated in Miami-Dade County and among teachers employed by M-DCPS. Despite the Board’s and the electorate’s consistent commitment and desire to improve compensation for teachers, factors associated with the cost of living in Miami-Dade make this a daunting task, especially considering housing costs, childcare expenses and rising grocery prices. Another recent study found Miami-Dade to be one of the least affordable places to live for teachers and one of the toughest places in the country for teachers to find housing.

Without referendum supplementing teacher pay, the abovementioned factors would place teachers employed in Miami-Dade County in a financially untenable position and in one that adversely impacts their ability to adequately provide for and support themselves and their families. Without additional referendum support, it would place an inequitable burden on M-DCPS in its continued efforts to recruit, develop, and retain highly committed, qualified, and dedicated teachers for its students.

The SOFAC has continued to oversee the expenditure of funds, and has provided periodic reports, including two annual reports, offering assurances to the public that the District is meeting its fiduciary obligations, and that all funds are being used in accordance with the promises made to voters. The funds from the 2018 and 2022 Referenda have been audited, as a part of the district wide audit, and it has been determined that the funds have been instrumental in support of M-DCPS's educational mission.

These reports have demonstrated that due to the voters' approval of the 2018 and 2022 Referenda, M-DCPS has been able to maintain a competitive average annual salary for teachers that is comparable to, or even exceeds, our neighboring districts, all of which also benefit from operational ad valorem millage levies within their counties. The reports have demonstrated that the Referenda has been critical to M-DCPS's ability to compete and bring in high quality talent. Funds have also allowed M-DCPS to meet its commitment to provide a law enforcement officer at every District school.

Since the 2022 Referendum was approved, M-DCPS has continued to maintain its "A" rating as a district. Moreover, graduation rates have continued to improve, reaching an all-time high of 93 percent this year, showing steady improvements among subgroups, English Language Learners, disadvantaged students, low-income students and all students who attend M-DCPS, regardless of their economic circumstances and backgrounds.

Below are some recent highlights of M-DCPS's graduation rates:

- In 2024-2025, M-DCPS surpassed the statewide graduation rate overall and across all reported subgroups, including Hispanic, Black, White, English Language Learners, Students with Disabilities, and Economically Disadvantaged students.
- Hispanic students increased by 1.2 percentage points, from 92.4 percent to 93.6 percent, exceeding the statewide rate of 91.6 percent.
- Black students increased by 1.9 percentage points, from 87.9 percent to 89.8 percent, exceeding the statewide rate of 89.2 percent.
- Students with Disabilities improved by 0.4 percentage points, from 89.6 percent to 90 percent, surpassing the statewide average of 89.1 percent.
- Economically Disadvantaged students increased by 1.9 percentage points, from 91.2 percent to 93.1 percent, exceeding the statewide rate of 89.5 percent.
- English Language Learners demonstrated notable growth of 3.9 percentage points, increasing from 84.2 percent to 88.1 percent, and surpassing the statewide rate of 86.3 percent.

Additionally, the graduation rate for our District schools remained stable at 95 percent, reflecting continued consistency in student outcomes.

Referendums in the State of Florida have been successfully approved in large, contiguous school districts to augment funding to improve teacher salaries and ensure and strengthen school safety such as Orange, Broward, Palm Beach, Duval, Hillsborough, and Pinellas.

If the referendum is allowed to sunset in Miami-Dade County, so will the funding used to compensate teachers, instructional staff and law enforcement officers at school sites. Bringing a new referendum back to the voters on November 3, 2026, will provide funding to allow M-DCPS to continue to remain competitive with surrounding districts, while also providing a safe environment for our students to learn.

Therefore, it is timely and appropriate to direct the Superintendent to review the SOFAC's reports and identify and analyze the funding challenges and issues associated with providing competitive teacher and law-enforcement salaries in M-DCPS; Consult with bargaining units, parent groups and community groups regarding the funding challenges and issues of attracting teachers and law enforcement personnel with competitive salaries in M-DCPS; Review the expenditure of funds from the 2022 Referendum assessment of a 1.0 mill levy of ad valorem taxes for the purpose of continuing to improve compensation for teachers and instructional personnel, continuing to improve

student safety and security for the public, including charter schools, and determining if the funds have been utilized for the purposes approved by the voters; Analyze whether the levels of funding provided by the 2022 Referendum from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2027, are sufficient to maintain competitive teacher salaries and levels of support for law enforcement at school sites; Make recommendations concerning whether a new Referendum, which will include annual audits, should be presented to the electors of Miami-Dade County during the November 3, 2026, general election, in order to maintain appropriate levels of funding and support for instructional and law-enforcement personnel beyond June 30, 2027; and Present a report with findings and recommendations to the Board by the School Board Meeting of May 13, 2026.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. STEVE GALLON III:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, allows the electors of Miami-Dade County to express their continued support for teachers and commitment to school safety, through a vote on a referendum, and directs the Superintendent to:

1. review the SOFAC's reports and identify and analyze the funding challenges and issues associated with providing competitive teacher and law-enforcement salaries in M-DCPS;
2. consult with bargaining units, parent groups and community groups regarding the funding challenges and issues of attracting teachers and law enforcement personnel with competitive salaries in M-DCPS;
3. review the expenditure of funds from the 2022 Referendum assessment of a 1.0 mill levy of ad valorem taxes for the purpose of continuing to improve compensation for teachers and instructional personnel, continuing to improve student safety and security for the public, including charter schools, and determining if the funds have been utilized for the purposes approved by the voters;
4. analyze whether the levels of funding provided by the 2022 Referendum from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2027, are sufficient to maintain competitive teacher salaries and levels of support for law enforcement at school sites;
5. make recommendations concerning whether a new Referendum should be presented to the electors of Miami-Dade County during the November 3, 2026, general election, in order to maintain appropriate levels of funding and support for instructional and law-enforcement personnel beyond June 30, 2027; and
6. present a report with findings and recommendations to the Board by the School Board Meeting of May 13, 2026.