

Ms. Luisa Santos, Board Member

**SUBJECT: R.O.A.D. (ROUTES OPENING ACCESS TO DREAMS)
TRANSPORTATION FRAMEWORK UPDATE**

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

**LINK TO STRATEGIC
PLAN: EFFECTIVE & SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONAL PRACTICES
INFORMED, ENGAGED, & EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS**

School districts nationwide rely on transportation as a strategic driver of enrollment, attendance, and academic outcomes. According to the 2026 State of School Transportation Report, 45% of surveyed public school parents noted that transportation was a major factor in selecting their child's current school, while 44% have seriously considered switching schools due to transportation concerns.¹ Daily transportation operations remain a decisive factor in school choice. In an increasingly competitive educational landscape, robust student transportation services are paramount to ensuring Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) remains the top choice for local families.

At the School Board Meeting of December 17, 2025, the School Board unanimously approved School Board Agenda Item H-8, the R.O.A.D. (Routes Opening Access to Dreams) Transportation Framework. H-8, the R.O.A.D. Transportation Framework, has five pillars, as outlined below:

1. **Increase Student Access to Educational Opportunity Through Reliable Transportation:** Students must have access to consistent, timely, and safe transportation that enables full participation in core instruction and extracurricular programming. Effective communication with families, including accessible tools for real-time updates and route information, is essential to ensuring students can take full advantage of these opportunities.
2. **Improve Operational Efficiency and Route Optimization:** The district must reduce miles per transported student, increase average bus occupancy, and modernize routing systems to deliver cost-effective, scalable service that meets changing student demographics and attendance patterns.
3. **Promote Resiliency and Innovation:** The district must future-proof its transportation system by investing in low-emission vehicles, expanding multimodal partnerships, and implementing smart routing technologies that align with operational goals as supported by industry standards.
4. **Grow Ridership for Students with Complex Transportation Needs:** Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students and those attending choice programs must be supported through responsive eligibility policies, specialized routing, and school-level coordination to reduce transportation-related barriers.
5. **Stabilize the Transportation Workforce:** M-DCPS must strengthen driver recruitment and retention by addressing compensation, scheduling, and professional development to ensure we have a consistent and reliable workforce.

Pursuant to Agenda Item H-8, M-DCPS' Department of Transportation reviewed district transportation operations, analyzing operating costs, state funding, fleet performance, staffing

¹ HopSkipDrive. (2026). (rep.). *The State of School Transportation Report 2026*. Retrieved from <https://www.hopskipdrive.com/download/5Xm92NDLwniy84AFqAVknR/2026%20State%20of%20School%20Transportation%20Report.pdf>.

retention, and service enhancements.² The review highlights a large, active system that transported 43,780 students in the 2024–2025 school year, a 27% increase in ridership since 2021, across 14,500 stops and 12.68 million annual miles.^{3 4} While operating at a 95% on-time performance rate and incorporating enhanced features like the Chipmunk app for real-time GPS tracking and parent notifications, the report also identifies critical financial and operational efficiency opportunities.⁵

During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, transportation operating expenditures totaled \$103.3 million, 2.17% of total district spending.⁶ While M-DCPS operates at an average cost of \$527 per base student, below the state average of \$569, its operating cost per mile of \$8.14 exceeds the state average of \$5.97—demonstrating an opportunity for improved cost-effectiveness.⁷ A major area identified for cost recovery includes addressing the 6,552 students currently riding without Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) eligibility, which accounts for \$16.5 million in unfunded annual costs.⁸

Additionally, M-DCPS faces severe recruitment and retention challenges due to non-competitive compensation compared to local counterparts, as evidenced by driver retention dropping to 86% with starting pay (\$17.21/hr) trailing Broward County (\$21.00/hr) and Miami-Dade County Transit (\$21.21/hr), while mechanic retention falls to 57% with starting pay (\$19.04/hr) trailing behind Miami-Dade Transit (\$28.92/hr) and Broward County (\$32.21/hr).⁹ Optimizing operational efficiencies and addressing unfunded ridership presents a key opportunity to reallocate the budget and offer competitive workforce wages.

Safe and efficient transportation serves as a powerful tool for student success. Rigorous data tracking and progress monitoring are vital to route optimization, budget streamlining, and service quality improvement. By leveraging dependable insights, M-DCPS can make evidence-based decisions that safeguard resources, empower the workforce, and elevate the stakeholder experience.

This item seeks the Board’s approval to direct the Superintendent to provide an update on initiatives and progress aligned to the “R.O.A.D. (Routes Opening Access to Dreams) Transportation Framework” since the Board’s approval of a comprehensive review of District practices aligned with said Framework at its December 17, 2025, meeting.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
MS. LUISA SANTOS:**

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

1. Provide an update on initiatives and progress aligned to the “R.O.A.D. Transportation Policy Framework,” including but not limited to:

² Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (2026, April 10). *Staff Follow-Up School Board Meeting of December 17, 2025 Agenda Item H-8: R.O.A.D (Routes Opening Access to Dreams) Transportation Framework* (Memorandum No. 0695). [Memorandum].

³ Department of Transportation (2026, April 15). M-DCPS operational overview R.O.A.D framework presentation. [Miami-Dade County School Board Committee Presentation]. M-DCPS - Eduvision. <https://www.eduvision.tv/?mmAmggAh&t=2485>

⁴ School Transportation Management Section, Florida School District 2024-25 Transportation Profiles (2026). Florida Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.fldoe.org/file/7585/SchDistTrans2425.pdf>.

⁵ Department of Transportation (2026, April 15). M-DCPS operational overview R.O.A.D framework presentation. [Miami-Dade County School Board Committee Presentation]. M-DCPS - Eduvision. <https://www.eduvision.tv/?mmAmggAh&t=2485>

⁶ School Transportation Management Section, Florida School District 2024-25 Transportation Profiles (2026). Florida Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.fldoe.org/file/7585/SchDistTrans2425.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Department of Transportation (2026, April 15). M-DCPS operational overview R.O.A.D framework presentation. [Miami-Dade County School Board Committee Presentation]. M-DCPS - Eduvision. <https://www.eduvision.tv/?mmAmggAh&t=2485>

⁹ Ibid.

- a. An operational review of updated routing efficiency, including but not limited to analysis of average bus occupancy, total students transported, on-time performance, and corrective action plans to address any new operational issues;
 - b. An updated workforce assessment that evaluates opportunities to fill vacancies and improves retention for all transportation department employees (including but not limited to school bus drivers, school bus aides, dispatchers, trainers, mechanics, etc.);
 - c. A review of the district's current transportation fleet and infrastructure, including an update on cost-savings efforts, fleet modernization (including multimodal vehicles), and vehicle lifecycle planning;
 - d. A review of emissions output, cost-per-student-per-mile, and existing partnerships with municipalities or public transit providers, as well as opportunities to expand partnerships;
 - e. A communications and engagement review that catalogs how families, schools, and drivers receive transportation updates, request support, or submit feedback;
 - f. An assessment of district capacity to build and maintain an internal interactive dashboard that reports operational metrics (on-time performance, missed routes, driver vacancies), equity indicators (ridership by student subgroup), and efficiency benchmarks (fuel usage, fleet composition); and
2. Present all updates, findings, and recommendations at the Fiscal Accountability and Government Relations Committee meeting on January 6, 2027.