

**MINUTES OF THE
SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA
SUPERINTENDENT'S DISTRICT ADVISORY PANEL FOR ESE
IN-PERSON / ZOOM MEETING
Thursday, November 14, 2024**

VOTING MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

In-Person

Sandy Ames
Norma Urquiza (for Michelle Cumming)
Ivan Deveaux
Beverly Heller
Kelli Hunter-Sheppard
Yvonne Leon
Blanca Malagon
Laurie Malman
Maria Ratti
Lisette Rodriguez
Patrick Salmasi
Mark Thompson
Jennifer Urbay

Virtual

Nayar Arzuaga
Emely Beltran
Pierre De Agostini
Lynn Miskiel
Kirenia Pintado
Gisel Prado
Elias Seife
Kathy Vergara

MDCPS STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

In-Person

LaKisha Richardson Jones
Olga Gonzalez-Olivera
Natalie Tappert
Ray Novo
Allison Mollman

Virtual

Ava Goldman
Shannon Gottardi
Josee Gregoire
Lynn Maceyras
Anseing Partridge
Alina Rodriguez
Marie Sellek
Dayana Cadaya
Tiombe Bisa Kendrick-Dunn
Brianna Llado
Carla Magluta
Raydelin Munoz
Rachell Lafrance
Luis Loriga
Danita Duhart

CALL TO ORDER

The Superintendent's District Advisory Panel for ESE (SDAPESE) meeting was held in-person and by virtual Zoom, on Thursday, November 14, 2024. The meeting was called to order at 1105 a.m. by Ms. Beverly Heller, 2nd Vice Chairman.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS OF PANEL MEMBERS AND GUESTS

Standard introductions were made by panel members, guests, and staff.

AGENDA REVIEW

Panel Liaison, LaKisha Richardson Jones, reviewed meeting norms and agenda. She explained that approval requested for September meeting minutes and meeting agenda through a consent agenda.

Correction: Dr. Rodriguez states that page 4 of the minutes states “IEPs and EPs” – conversation only IEPs. Correction noted and minutes will be updated.

CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Heller presented the consent agenda and asked if there were any objections to its adoption with noted corrections. Hearing no objections, the consent agenda was adopted by unanimous consent.

V. Special Presentation: District Updates

Updates from Ms. Yvonne Leon, District Director (Office of Educational Services and ESE):

Ms. Leon provided an update on recent and upcoming events and initiatives within the Department of Exceptional Student Education (ESE):

- **Upcoming Events**
 - **ESE Day 12/2**
 - **Inclusive Schools Week-Week of 12/2-12/6**
- **Dyslexpert Summit (10/15):** The first Dyslexpert Summit for the 2024-2025 school year was held on October 15th, had 141 participants, in-person. The summit focused on providing teachers with strategies to better support MDCPS students with dyslexia, dyscalculia, or dysgraphia.
- **Empowering Paraprofessionals Summit (11/5):** A total of 275 paraprofessionals attended the summit on November 5th, which focused on equipping paraprofessionals with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively support students.
- **LEA Training (11/13):** A virtual LEA Training was held on November 13th, with over 450 participants. The training aimed to provide staff with the tools necessary to successfully deliver ESE services and ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.
- **ESE Hiring Fair (11/16):** ESE staff will be attending a hiring fair on November 16th at Ronald Reagan Doral Senior High School to recruit personnel for ESE roles in MDCPS.
- **Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) Evaluations:** As of October, 353 evaluations were conducted for Speech-Language Pathology services.
- **Parent Support Requests:** In collaboration with FDLRS South, ESE department supported 357 parent/family requests for additional resources and support for their child.

Ms. Leon opened the floor for questions.

- **Mr. Mark Thompson Question's:** What is LEA?
 - **Ms. Leon's Response:** The LEA stands for Local Education Agency, which refers to the team member responsible for overseeing education within a specific area, ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations, and providing services to students with disabilities.

- **Ms. Blanca Malagon's Question:** Has there always been a compliance department within MDCPS, and what are its objectives?
 - **Ms. Leon's Response:** Ms. Leon stated yes, there has been a compliance department and provided an explanation of the compliance department's role in ensuring that ESE services are delivered in accordance with legal and regulatory standards, covering areas such as individualized education programs (IEPs), services for students with disabilities, and adherence to state and federal requirements.
- **Ms. Maria Ratti's Comment on Paraprofessional Summit and Parent Involvement:** Ms. Ratti expressed interest in information shared with paraprofessionals, particularly regarding how this information is shared with parents and teachers. She suggested that topics related to gifted education and paraprofessionals should be discussed together.
 - **Ms. Leon's Response:** Ms. Leon shared that the Empowering Paraprofessionals Summit was hosted by the district to provide professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals. She expressed interest in involving parents in future professional learning opportunities for paraprofessionals, particularly to enhance their understanding of strategies used in the classroom.
- **Mr. Salmasi's Comment:** Mr. Salmasi highlighted the importance of sharing information about the *Zones of Regulation* program, which is designed to help paraprofessionals understand how instructional staff support students' emotional regulation in the classroom. Considering the different types of students coming in to MDCPS post-COVID closures (students who have missed early intervention, among other factors), he cautioned about overwhelming parents of students with disabilities (SWD) but noted that feedback from the community would be gathered and considered to better support families. He further explained the *Zones of Regulation* program as a key resource for paraprofessionals to help students develop self-regulation skills.
- **Ms. Heller's Comment:** Ms. Heller noted that she and other parents had not been invited to other MDCPS professional learning sessions or opportunities to engage with ESE. She expressed interest in increasing parental involvement in such learning sessions.
- **Mr. Salmasi Comment:** He will work with the team to gather feedback and refine approaches to involving families of students with disabilities, particularly with respect to the *Zones of Regulation* program.

Quorum: Ms. Heller motion – Ms. Leon: yes; Ms. Malman: seconded - Motion passed

Updates from Dr. Lissette Rodriguez, Executive Director, Division of Academics:

Dr. Rodriguez provided an update on the various academic programs supported by the Division of Academics, including those for gifted students, international programs, Cambridge International programs, dual enrollment, and Advanced Placement (AP) courses across all MDCPS high schools. She shared the following highlights:

- **College Board Recognition:** MDCPS was recently recognized by the College Board for its record enrollment and for surpassing both state and national averages in AP exam scores. Notably, 67% of MDCPS students earned qualifying scores of 3 or higher on the AP Exam, marking an all-time high. MDCPS also received the AP Honor Roll and the AP Access Award, with 58% of MDCPS high schools and 90% of MDCPS high schools

earning the AP Access Award. This is double the percentage of Florida schools and four times the national average.

- **Dual Enrollment and Advanced Placement:** Dr. Rodriguez emphasized the growing participation in dual enrollment and advanced placement programs, including the opportunity for high school students to earn college credit through these courses. She highlighted the significance of these programs in helping students gain acceptance to colleges and earn high school weighted GPAs.

Discussion and Questions:

- **Ms. Heller's Comment:** Ms. Heller praised MDCPS for the high graduation rates, particularly for schools offering advanced studies, which have a 100% graduation rate. She expressed support for providing strong courses and support to help students succeed and graduate.
- **Ms. DeAgostini's Input:** Ms. DeAgostini inquired about the possibility of raising public awareness about the AP program, especially regarding the role of the community in supporting its success.
- **Mr. Deveaux's Question:** Mr. Deveaux asked whether the recognition and data covered all advanced classes or if it was specific to the AP program.
 - **Dr. Rodriguez's Response:** The recognition pertains specifically to the AP program, but other advanced courses like dual enrollment and Cambridge International also offer college credit and contribute to students' high school GPAs. These programs have seen an increase in college acceptance rates. Advancement Placement is already being covered in print, radio, television, and local news to increase involvement and awareness of the district's successes.
- **Mr. Deveaux's Comment:** Mr. Deveaux suggested that identifying successful practices within AP programs could help spread best practices across MDCPS to support more students, particularly those who may struggle with the coursework once enrolled in the program.
- **Ms. Hunter's Comment:** Ms. Hunter shared insights about the demographic representation within the AP program, noting that 90% of schools with AP programs reflect the socioeconomic, racial, and special education (ESE) populations of their respective areas. She pointed out that about 15% of students in the AP program are from ESE backgrounds, showing positive results for students with disabilities.
 - **Dr. Rodriguez's Response:**
Dr. Rodriguez emphasized that when teachers are provided with adequate support to implement IEPs (Individualized Education Programs), they are able to fully accommodate and support students with disabilities in the AP program.
- **FIU Collaboration:** Dr. Rodriguez noted that Florida International University (FIU) is in agreement with the district about offering post-secondary opportunities for students after high school, particularly for those enrolled in advanced programs like AP.
- **Mr. DeAgostini's Comment:** Mr. DeAgostini stressed the importance of fostering self-advocacy among students to ensure they are able to advocate for their needs in advanced coursework and exams.
- **Ms. Ratti's Comment:** Ms. Ratti reiterated the need for mental health support for students enrolled in advanced programs. She shared her personal experience regarding her child's difficulties with accommodations for AP exams, advocating for improvements in this area. She also praised the teachers in the AP program for their dedication.

- **Ms. Heller's Comment:** Ms. Heller suggested that the district could publicize the success of not only gifted education but also the positive aspects of ESE programs across MDCPS, particularly highlighting the achievements of ESE students in the AP and other previously mentioned programs. She also expressed concern over student enrollment decreasing across MDCPS and the need to retain the students we already have enrolled.
 - **Mr. Salmasi:** Mr. Salmasi shared that the district's communication team is working to improve public awareness of the district's advanced programs. He highlighted that MDCPS programs like *Project Victory* was covered on Channel 6 news recently. He knows there is a focus on the need of Pre-K ESE enrollment to increase and the district is working towards that and making sure all advantages are being taken. He emphasized the importance of providing parents with clear and accurate information about the opportunities available to their children.
 - **Ms. Raydelin Munoz:** Shared that she is working to revitalize a transition resource fair aimed at providing parents with more information about available MDCPS services and programs for students.
- **Ms. Ratti's Comment:** Shared with the committee a recent personal experience where she was encouraging parent involvement for a Halloween event at her child's school for all students, including the ESE classrooms. Ms. Ratti shared her idea that parents may need a "shift" in how they view the available programs in MDCPS and the students who are enrolled in them is necessary to better promote the district's educational offerings.
- **Ms. Heller:** Reiterates to the committee that Mr. Salmasi and the entire ESE department is committed to bringing more of this news and information out to parents and communities
- **Mr. Salmasi:** Emphasized the importance of using all available resources to share the information, potentially with Title I resources and in-school personnel to further promote the district's advanced programs and create greater awareness among families.

Updates from Dr. Josee Gregoire, Executive Director, Office of Educational Services and ESE

Dr. Gregoire provided the following updates on the Early Childhood Education (ESE) programs:

- **New PreK ESE Programs for 2024-2025:**
Dr. Gregoire announced that ten new PreK ESE programs opened across MDCPS for the 2024-2025 school year. They have added six in the northern region, three in the central region, and one in the southern region of the district. Teachers in these new programs have been provided with specialized training to ensure they can meet the diverse needs of students and align with the curriculum.

Questions and Discussion:

- **Mr. Salmasi's Question:** Mr. Salmasi inquired about the recent Saturday Pre-K ESE event, specifically the Harvest Festival held on November 2nd.
 - **Dr. Gregoire's Response:** Dr. Gregoire shared that the Harvest Festival was a well-attended event aimed at engaging parents and families with activities while providing MDCPS resources and information. The event featured various activities and booths, with high school students completing community service by assisting with the event. Dr. Gregoire thanked Mr. Salmasi and Ms. Torres for their support in making the event a success.

VI. SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATES

Awards Sub-Committee: Ms. Dayana Cadaya

- **Sub-Committee's next meeting:** November 21st at 10:00 AM (virtual). This is an open invitation for all to attend.
- A "Save the Date" to members was shared for the Awards Ceremony on May 20, 2025.
- The Master Calendar has been updated with postings for upcoming meetings for the subcommittee.

Early Childhood Subcommittee: Dr. Josee Gregoire

- Reported that the Early Childhood Sub-Committee met on October 24th, where they reaffirmed their goals to support families, enhance PreK ESE programs, and promote inclusive opportunities for early learners. The committee reviewed progress in class assessments, noting a 6.0% or higher increase in scores.
- **Subcommittee's next meeting:** December 10th at 10:30 AM (virtual or in person: Room 409K in the Annex).
- Mr. Thompson shared information about Special Olympics Unified Schools, noting that MDCPS has 10 unified schools.
- Ms. Ratti asked Dr. Gregoire if she will be doing the Parent Participation Program (PPP)?
 - Dr. Gregoire confirmed that PPP will be happening, available in both English and Spanish, and will be recorded.
 - Ms. Ratti offered to speak to the group as a parent, noting that many parents reach out to her for support with their children.
 - Ms. Heller emphasized the importance of parent involvement.
 - Dr. Gregoire expressed her enthusiasm to collaborate with Ms. Ratti and welcomed her input.
- Mr. Deveaux congratulated the subcommittee for reaching out to UM-NSU-CARD to collaborate and support students and families. He mentioned the last round of teacher trainings held at a local library and suggested continuing to provide training, even to include parents, in a public setting for greater accessibility.

Inclusion Subcommittee: Ms. LaKisha Richardson Jones

- Updated panel of the subcommittee's October 22nd meeting, where the group reviewed the district's goals for promoting inclusivity in classrooms.
- Utilizing the Dyslexpert series to share information through a selected school site representative to learn how to best support students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Those teachers selected as Dyslexperts will focus on implementing strategies and enhancing student learning. The Dyslexperts are also exploring a book study featuring "7 Mighty Moves" by Lindsay Kemeny to improve reading success for students needing additional support. Dyslexpert Summit #2, focusing on resources and supports available within MDCPS for dyslexia and dyscalculia, is taking place today, November 14th.
- Outside of the Dyslexpert series, the subcommittee has partnered with several other teams, including the ASD Team, Behavior Team, and Parent Academy (via webinars), to offer additional support to parents and students at home.
- Ms. Brianna Llado, representing the InD Team and Modified Curriculum program, has started holding monthly office hours to support general education teachers working with students who are on modified curriculum/working on Access Points.

- The group's goals for the year include recognizing schools and staff who demonstrate excellence in inclusion.
- Mr. Deveaux offered support through UM-NSU-CARD to help recognize schools' achievements in inclusion.
- **Subcommittee's next meeting:** December 11th at 1:00 PM (via Zoom/Room 3, JRE Lee).
- Ms. Ratti asked how the subcommittee could promote the inclusion being done in MDCPS? She mentions highlighting the Peers as Partners in Learning program, specifically.
 - Ms. Richardson Jones explained further for the panel what Peers as Partners in Learning program (through Florida Inclusion Network) in MDCPS, a program that trains students to mentor and assist students with disabilities. This program, currently active in 10 middle and high schools in MDCPS, fosters a sense of belonging among students. The students who are trained and participate in the program and curriculum are awarded course credit.
- Ms. Heller praised the committee's passion for supporting students
- Mr. Thompson highlighted that Southwest Miami Senior High School, along with Miami Beach Fienberg Fisher K-8, have earned the National Unified Champion School Award for inclusive activities. Southwest Miami Senior High School was also recognized as a Unified Champion School on the ESPN Honor Roll for the Southeast USA for their inclusive practices, and he will provide an update on the date for the banner and award ceremony.

Family Engagement Subcommittee: Ms. LaKisha Richardson Jones

- Ms. Richardson Jones shared that the Family Engagement Sub-Committee has not met yet, due to a change in chair. The new subcommittee chair is Ms. Vanessa Seron.
- **Subcommittee's next meeting:** November 21st at 9:30 AM
 - Ms. Heller comments that there is a scheduling conflict with overlapping subcommittee meetings. She has requested that the timing of the meeting be reconsidered to allow her and other members to attend different subcommittee meetings.
 - Ms. Richardson Jones recognizes Ms. Heller's desire to be able to attend all the meetings and committed to discussing the possibility of rescheduling with the various teams with scheduling conflicts and bringing it back to the table. Ms. Seron and the team is considering adjustments to avoid scheduling conflicts going forward. However, there could not be a guarantee that the schedule can be adjusted for the upcoming November meeting.
 - Ms. Heller strongly encouraged the committee to consider this request.

Financial Subcommittee: Ms. Shannon Gottardi

- Mr. Gottardi reported that the Financial Sub-Committee met on October 31st (virtually), with two new members joining. The team reviewed the progress of the advisory panel and discussed subcommittee goals for the new year, including creating a budget presentation and addressing grant opportunities.
- The committee also reviewed funding sources for ESE in Florida and discussed challenges related to supporting child-find services for students attending private schools.
- **Subcommittee's next meeting:** December 5th at 12:30 PM (virtual) to prepare for the January panel meeting.

- Ms. Blanca Malagon states that she had been part of the financial subcommittee last year but had not seen the meeting information for this year. She requested to join the subcommittee.
 - Mr. Salmasi detailed that this would be made note of and confirmed that she will receive future subcommittee meeting information.
- Ms. Heller acknowledged the master schedule and requested to receive an email reminder prior to the meeting to help ensure she can attend.

Gifted Subcommittee: Ms. Raydelin Muñoz

- Dr. Rodriguez reported that the Gifted Sub-Committee is focusing on continuing their goal of increasing the identification of underrepresented students in gifted programs.
- **Subcommittee's next meeting:** December 5th at 10:00 AM (virtual/in-person, location: TBD).

Low Incidence Exceptionality Subcommittee: Ms. Natalie Tappert

- Reported that the Low Incidence Exceptionality Sub-Committee, which includes the UM Debbie School/DHH team, has set new goals for the year.
- Goals include continuing the Vocational Rehab for DHH program and expanding the use of assistive technology in DHH programs.
- The committee is also focusing on raising awareness about new state laws and offering presentations to ensure MDCPS staff and families are well-informed.
- **Subcommittee's next meeting:** December 3rd at 1:00 PM (virtual).

Mental Health Sub-Committee: Ms. Alina Rodriguez

- Shared that the Mental Health Sub-Committee has added new members from outside agencies, including the Advocacy Network and All Kids Included, as well as Mr. Deveaux from UM NSU CARD. The subcommittee has identified two primary goals for the year: to brainstorm ways to enhance self-advocacy and mental health services in schools, and to identify challenges that hinder the implementation of mental health services.
- **Subcommittee's next meeting:** December 10th at 10:00 AM.
 - Future meetings scheduled for February 11th and April 8th at 10:00 AM.
- Ms. Rodriguez stated that she will be attempting to make a change on 12/10 meeting to accommodate the other sub-committees who have meetings on the same day.
 - Mr. Salmasi: Asks Ms. Rodriguez to wait for teams to make changes to better organize the pieces of each sub-committee to plan for meetings more appropriately. There is a need to ensure there is a balance between all subcommittees and attending members.
- Ms. Heller: Suggested that the sub-committees review the master calendar to avoid conflicts with other important meetings that were already set. She mentions that there no meetings are scheduled on Fridays in December, and that those days are available.
- Dr. Rodriguez: Mentions the limit in available days to meet, as both November and December are shorter months and it was more difficult to work around conflicting available meeting dates/times.

Secondary Transition Sub-Committee: Ms. Raydelin Muñoz

- Ms. Munoz reported that the Secondary Transition Sub-Committee met on October 25th to establish goals focused on improving the transition process for ESE students. The committee is exploring ways to automate the dissemination of transition-related information and seeking partnerships with community agencies for future family engagement events, as well as increase the number of members participating in the subcommittee.

- **Subcommittee's next meeting:** December 6th at 11:00 AM (virtual)
- Ms. Ratti emphasized the need for more workshops and agencies to support parents and families with graduation requirements especially for ESE, ESOL, and other students with additional needs. She also praised Mr. Deveaux for his work with parent involvement in MDCPS. Ms. Ratti shares a personal experience at a recent graduation workshop for parents that had 7 people attend, she feels she may have been the only public-school parent there.

NEW BUSINESS

- Elias Seife raised the issue of exploring the possibility of establishing an advocate to support students requiring access to controlled substances prescribed by their primary care physicians (PCPs). He highlighted challenges in medication availability and the training of personnel due to restrictive Florida laws.
 - Ms. Heller inquired if this matter had been previously brought to a subcommittee. Mr. Seife clarified that this was his first time presenting it to the panel.
 - Ms. Heller redirected the discussion, noting that the topic does not align with the committee's current agenda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **Recording Secretary Introduction**
 - Allison Mollman, the new recording secretary, was introduced to the panel.
- Member Directory: A member directory is expected to be finalized and distributed by late November.
- Ms. Heller shared that two subcommittees have yet to hold their initial meetings. Members of those teams are asked to provide updates on scheduling.
- Dr. Lisette Rodriguez shared the upcoming Choice Expo events:
 - Saturday, 12/14: 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM at MDC North Campus
 - Saturday, 12/14 & Saturday, 1/11: 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM at MDC Kendall Campus
 - Ms. Heller recommended inviting the PTA to participate. Ms. Lisette Rodriguez agreed to share event details with the organizing team.
 - Mr. Deveaux requested further clarification about the event's purpose and offered to share promotional materials through UM NSU CARD's channels.
 - Dr. Rodriguez shared that additional details and flyers are available at yourbestchoicemdcps.com. Mr. Salmasi will provide further contact information for the event team.
- Ms. Malagon suggested distributing flyers through stores and community spaces outside MDCPS.
 - Ms. Ratti stated that parents can spread the information as well and schools can spread that information, as well as using social media.
 - Ms. Malman stated that schools do put in the events in their signs and school sites –Engaging parents outside the district to showcase MDCPS as the best option, with offers to display materials at Miami Lakes City Hall and local stores (Ms. Malagon).

- Ms. Malagon expressed the importance of engaging parents outside the district to showcase MDCPS as the best option and offered to display promotional materials at Miami Lakes City Hall and local stores to that area.
- Mr. Thompson shared updates on recent and upcoming Special Olympics events:
 - Mr. Thompson shared with the panel information on the partnership with Brightline and Orlando Health, who supported the athletes who participated, as well as their travel to the event.
 - There is an upcoming event: Race for Inclusion, which is scheduled for 12/14 at 8:00 AM at Bayfront Park.
 - Publix's Torch Campaign: A significant fundraiser for the Special Olympics, previously raising over \$3 million. The campaign runs from 1/10 – 1/17.
- Ms. Ratti shared information about Give Miami Day: Early donations began on **11/17**, with the main campaign set for 11/21.
 - Mr. Salmasi reminded the panel that fundraising requests cannot be made via emails or event promotions.
- Ms. Heller shared that the next meeting is scheduled for **January 9th**.

Adjournment

Ms. Heller called for adjournment at **12:37 PM**. Ms. Kelli Hunter-Sheppard supported the motion, and Ms. Laurie Malman seconded it. The meeting was officially adjourned.