

# MINUTES

## Miami-Dade County Public Schools SUPERINTENDENT'S DISTRICT ADVISORY PANEL FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES (SWD)

Minutes of September 20, 2012  
School Board Administration Building – Room 916  
3:00 P.M.

### Members Present

Rosa Maria Barbara	Ava Goldman	Elaine Silny
Lourdes Bravo	Lynn Miskiel	Miguel Suau
Elsa Clarke	Christine Reigadas	Kathy Vergara
Elizabeth Cramer	Linda Reiter	

### Alternates Present

None Present

### Honorary Members Present

None present

### School Board Members Present

Laurie Malman – Alternate Dr. Lawrence Feldman

### School Personnel Present

Jill Brookner  
Sonja Clay  
Rosalia Gallo  
Judy Marte  
Mary Paz  
Liliana Salazar

### Guests Present

Rose Painson, Parent/PLC  
Marie C. Antenor, Parent/PLC

### Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:02 pm.

### Introduction and Welcome

Ms. Chris Reigadas, Panel Chair, welcomed members and guests. Members introduced themselves. Ms Reigadas thanked Ava Goldman for securing Room 916 for our Panel. She noted that the Panel met in this room for many years and that it was so nice to be able to meet here again.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Reigadas reminded the members that the minutes of the May 17, 2012 meeting had been distributed through e-mail and she hoped that they had had time to review the minutes prior to the meeting. Miguel Suau asked to add “because of the popularity of texting with high school students” to the sentence. He noted that Michelle said that spelling was emphasized and kids today do not know how to spell [page three (3), paragraph four (4)]. Lourdes Bravo asked for clarification about the sentence: Rosa Maria Barbara asked about the website. Kathy Vergara explained that at this time Ms. Barbara was asking about web based programs offered on the M-DCPS website during the summer months as is noted in the following sentences and was not referring to the Panel website.

Ms. Reigadas asked if there were any other additions or corrections. There were none. Lynn Miskiel moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Elizabeth Cramer seconded the motion. Chris Reigadas asked members to approve the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion followed about the Panel website. Lourdes Bravo was concerned because the website had not been updated. Ava Goldman said that she would check on the status of the website. Ms. Goldman said that it was her understanding that the meeting minutes and agendas had been posted. Miguel Suau agreed to assist with the Panel webpage but stated that he had not been informed regarding what specific tasks would be required of him. Lynn Miskiel said that she remembered that this was discussed at the April meeting as well. Ms. Goldman suggested that Miguel Suau work with the M-DCPS webmaster to post current information on the website. She offered to connect Mr. Suau with the M-DCPS webmaster.

### **Agenda Items**

Funding for Special Education

Judy Marte, Chief Budget Officer

Ava Goldman introduced Judy Marte, M-DCPS Chief Budget Officer. She said that Ms. Marte is a phenomenal financial officer who works very closely with the Office of Special Education. Ms. Marte thanked Ms. Goldman and said she wanted her presentation to be the opportunity for open discussion about financial issues. She followed by stating that funding for all education has stagnated throughout the State of Florida. Exceptional Student Education funding has been stagnating for several years. In fact the funding for students whose Matrix levels are 254 and 255 has declined markedly. This decline has impacted M-DCPS funds for ESE.

Ms. Marte said that Superintendent Carvalho is committed to making certain that ESE has the maximum amount of funding. M-DCPS now is allocating units to children based on need. M-DCPS has managed to hold special education harmless over the past five years. Ms. Marte said that this does not mean that we have everything we need. Some changes have been made. For example, there has been a reduction in bus aides. Therapies have not been reduced.

Ms. Mate moved here from Massachusetts and was shocked when she learned about the low level funding allocated for education in the State of Florida. Her son is autistic and she is a strong advocate for students enrolled in special education. Ms. Marte is a liaison on the Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Committee on budgets. There are four (4) parents on the Advisory Committee who represent students with special needs. She is also on a committee similar to our Panel in Broward County.

Ava Goldman said that there is a misconception that funds for special education have been cut. Judy Marte said that there have been no wholesale cuts per FTE for the past five years.

Lourdes Bravo asked if the Federal government was planning reduce funding for special education. If so, members of this committee would be able to advocate against funding cuts. Ms. Marte explained that the Federal government has talked about sequestration. This means holding back funds. M-DCPS has been informed that this will not happen during the 2013 funding year but will happen during 2014. Elections will have an impact on this decision. Title One is looking at one million in cuts this year and one million next year. The IDEA grant is now used to meet the basic needs of school services for special education.

Lourdes Bravo asked Ms. Marte to keep members of the Panel apprised of any changes. She stated that members of the Panel have been strong advocates for children for many years.

Ms. Marte continued by stating that during his first year, Governor Scott decreased allocations for education. This year he increased allocations for education. This added additional money to the base student allocation (BSA). Districts were given the opportunity to make recommendations about the allocation designations. One earmark in the budget is five hundred million dollars for technology. M-DCPS recommended that this allocation be reduced to allow Districts more flexibility. This year the Governor did not reduce funding for Exceptional Student Education.

Elaine Silny asked if M-DCPS was planning to hire more speech pathologists. She has observed that the District hires contracted speech pathologists for special education. Ms. Goldman said that M-DCPS would rather hire their own speech pathologists but there are shortages. The salary structure is more advantageous for the contracted person. Elaine Silny said she would do an e-blast to let people know that there are openings for speech pathologists.

Ms. Marte continued by noting that twelve percent (12%) of special education students statewide are enrolled in M-DCPS. Funding weights are embedded in the base student allocation (BSA). The State of Florida has not released complete information about the budget. They have released some preliminary information. More information will be released in December and January.

Chris Reigadas thanked Judy Marte for her presentation and invited her back to the meeting to provide updates.

Ms. Reigadas recognized and welcomed guest, Rose Painson. Ms Painson introduced herself as a parent and member of PLC. She said that Haitian parents of students with disabilities do not understand how to advocate for their children. They are in need of information about programs and services. Rosa Barbara said that she has spoken with Ms. Painson about her concerns on several occasions.

Ms. Barbara invited Ms. Painson to encourage parents to attend the Steps for Success Conference. This would be the perfect opportunity for parents to learn about Exceptional Student Education services. Rosalia Gallo from M-DCPS added that many of Ms. Painson's questions will be addressed by Haitian Creole speakers attending the conference. Thousands of flyers will be delivered to families. Laurie Malman said that several Parent Liaisons will be presenting information to parents. Ms. Gallo said that there will be nine (9) workshops in Creole and that there will be an Exhibitor Fair.

Lourdes Bravo said that many years ago that there was a radio announcer who distributed information for Haitian families. She suggested that it would be a good idea to contact radio stations and ask them to announce information about the Steps for Success Conference. She added that a radio program about students with disabilities would be beneficial for Haitian families. Mary Paz said that she would

provide the families with pamphlets about Exceptional Student Education programs.

Lourdes Brave made a motion recommending that M-DCPS reach out to the Haitian community to identify radio announcers that would be able to communicate information about the Steps for Success Conference through popular radio programs. Miguel Suau seconded the motion. Discussion: Ava Goldman said that Public Service Announcements regarding the Steps for Success Conference have already been initiated on the radio stations. Chris Reigadas said that it would be wonderful to have a parent representing the Haitian community on the Panel.

Chris Reigadas called the question. The motion passed unanimously.

Rosa Barbara distributed information about the Steps for Success Conference. Chris Reigadas announced that there would be an exhibitor table representing the Panel. Lourdes Bravo volunteered to assist Ms. Reigadas at the Panel table. Mary Pas said that she would also be happy to assist.

Ms. Reigadas introduced Ava Goldman, Administrative Director, Office of Innovation and Accountability - Special Education and Educational Services. Ms. Goldman's presentation was titled: Opening of Schools 2012.

Ms. Goldman thanked Ms. Reigadas and introduced Liliana Salazar, our new District Director of Special Education Programs. Everyone congratulated Ms. Salazar and welcomed her to our meeting.

Ms. Goldman explained that the Office of Innovation and Accountability includes charter programs and schools of choice; non-core curriculum; instructional technology; assessment, research, and data analysis; Title 1; information technology services; and special education and educational services.

The Office of Special Education and Educational Services includes Special Education, Student Services, and Psychological Services. In 2011-2012, the Office of Special Education and Educational Services launched two new Autism Academies serving secondary level students. This increased the number of Autism Academies to five (5) serving over two-hundred fifty (250) students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

In addition, Project Panther Life was launched in collaboration with Florida International University (FIU) under the leadership of Jill Brookner. Through this completion of this program, students with intellectual disabilities are able to acquire a post secondary certificate.

Graduation rates for M-DCPS students with disabilities increased from thirty-six (36%) in 2006-06 to fifty-seven (57%). Since 2005-2006, drop-out rates for students with disabilities have decreased from ten percent (10%) to six percent (6%). Jill Brookner noted that M-DCPS ranks at the top of other districts that are similar in size to M-DCPS.

Ms. Goldman reported that timeline compliance rates on state performance indicators have improved to ninety-six (96%). She was pleased to report that M-DCPS was designated by the Florida Department of Education as a school district meeting special education requirements. There are twenty (20) indicators and compliance is critical.

New initiatives for 2012-2013 are the creation of the Thena C. Crowder Early Childhood Diagnostic and Special Education Center and the inauguration of two additional secondary level Autism Academies for students with ASD. An additional SPED Service Centers was established at Laura

Saunders Elementary School. Information was distributed about the Pre-Kindergarten Diagnostic Centers and SPED Service Centers.

Plans are to expand VSA programs to increase school participation and offer professional development for teachers and artists as well as provide performance customized for students with special needs in collaboration with the Adrian Arsht Center.

Other plans are to launch project ACCELERATE to target former M-DCPS students ages twenty-two (22) to twenty-five (25) and to establish Project CREST in collaboration with FIU. This will be a post-secondary preparation program for standard diploma students with disabilities.

Project BRIDGE will be a transition program in culinary and industrial arts for secondary level students with special needs.

Goals are to strengthen partnerships with the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, UM CARD, The Children's Trust, University Partners, and the Miami Health Department.

In addition, plans are to enhance wrap around services to help students with disabilities foster positive peer relationships and to enhance post-secondary preparation and access for all students.

Chris Reigadas congratulated Ms. Goldman for all the wonderful new programs and thanked her for her informative presentation.

Ms. Reigadas announced that the Panel Steering Committee met on July 27<sup>th</sup>. She reviewed the minutes of the meeting. Members attending asked for more information about implementation of the IEP. She asked Ms. Goldman to arrange for a presentation on this topic at the January 2013 Panel meeting. She also asked Rosalia Gallo to present an overview of the summer Training on Inclusive Practices at the October meeting. Ms. Goldman is planning to invite Peter Gorsky from The Children's Trust to speak at the November meeting. Ms. Reigadas would like the December meeting to be a working meeting dedicated to presentations by Committee Chairs. Panel members were in agreement with this plan.

Ms. Reigadas asked members to suggest ideas for the February, April, and May meetings. The Awards Banquet is scheduled for May 9<sup>th</sup>. There will be no meeting following the luncheon. The last meeting of the year will be May 30, 2013. This will be an election meeting.

Ms. Reigadas distributed committee sign-up sheets and asked members to participate on at least one committee.

## **Committee Reports**

### **Awards Committee**

**Kathy Vergara/Jill Brookner**

Kathy Vergara distributed a report about the Awards Ceremony for those who are interested. Ava Goldman suggested the Panel present an award to the school that made the most progress for implementing inclusive practices. Rosalie Gallo agreed that this was a wonderful idea. Rosa Barbara made a motion to establish an annual award for the school makes the most progress in implementing inclusion. Elsa Clarke seconded the motion. Ms. Reigadas asked for discussion. She then called the question. The motion passed unanimously.

**D/HH Committee****Lynn Miskiel/Linda Reiter**

Lynn Miskiel announced that Linda Reiter from M-DCPS would be the new co-chair of the committee. Sonya Clay, Executive Director, Division of Special Education will assist. Their goal is to have meetings as various places around the county.

**Education/Inclusion Committee****Trini Lora**

No report – Ms. Lora was absent.

**Employability Committee****Lourdes Bravo/Jill Brookner**

Jill Brookner reported that the Employability Committee functions as a sub-committee of the Association of Agencies (AOA) as well. The first Transition Task Force meeting was today. The committee plans to investigate opportunities for students with significant disabilities. This presents a challenge for all Transition Specialists. One suggestion is for M-DCPS become a vendor for adult education services for these students. These are very exciting ideas. Judy Marte asked if she could be part of this committee.

Ms. Marte said that she had just learned about the Medicaid waiver. Rosa Barbara said that she had been appointed by Governor Scott to advocate for the Medicaid waiver as chair for the Family Care Council and that she would be happy to assist Ms. Marte with this process. Discussion followed.

Elaine Silny recommended that information about the Medicaid Waiver be announced at the Steps for Success Conference. Lourdes Bravo said that it is important for parents to be informed about the Medicaid Waiver early. She has had much experience with the Medicaid Waiver through the years.

Lynn Miskiel asked about children who are deaf or hard of hearing and the Medicaid Waiver. Lourdes Bravo explained that children who are deaf or hard of hearing do not fall under the Medicaid Waiver. Ms. Miskiel said that frequently children who are deaf or hard of hearing are on regular diploma track.

It was suggested that Lourdes Bravo join the Transition Task Force. Ms. Brookner invited Lourdes to join. Rosa Barbara said that she also like to attend to represent students who are participating in the general curriculum. Miguel Suau said that he would like to join the committee as well.

Ms. Brookner reported that M-DCPS ended the school year with thirty-eight (38) students employed. This is absolutely fabulous. All of these students have been transitioned to Vocational Rehabilitation. Chris Reigadas helped establish ten (10) job openings with TJ Max. Ms. Brookner extended many thanks to Ms. Reigadas for her support.

Ms. Brookner was delighted to report that overall M-DCPS is doing an amazing job preparing students with disabilities for employment. Stadium Fairs always set aside slots for M-DCPS students.

Rosa Barbara said that the video produced though the Employability Committee is now in Governor Scott's office. Everyone is very excited about the opportunities that may open as a result of this.

Ms. Brookner asked to broaden the scope of the Employability Committee and change the name. There are three different committees with similar names and this presents much confusion. In addition to the Panel's Employability Committee, there is the Transition Task Force made up of agencies and transition specialists and there is the Employability Sub-committee of the Association of Agencies (AOA) Committee. The recommendation was made to change the name to the Panel Secondary Transition Committee. Panel members agreed with the name change.

**Attendance Boundary Committee (ABC)****Yolanda Herrera**

Chris Reigadas announced that Yolanda Herrera will continue as the representative and Kathy Vergara would be the alternate.

**Family and Community Involvement Advisory Committee****Chris Reigadas/Miguel Suau/Rosa Barbara**

Liliana Salazar reported about the content of the meeting since Ms. Reigadas was unable to attend. She said that most of the business conducted by the committee was regarding elections. Everyone was invited to attend the Steps for Success Conference. Chris Reigadas sent a letter to the committee about the conference.

**Other**

As chair of the Nominations Committee, Lourdes Bravo announced that she received a letter from Rosa Maria Barbara requesting to transition from Agency Representative to Parent Member. Lourdes Bravo moved that Panel members approve a recommendation to Superintendent Carvalho to change Rosa Maria Barbara's membership classification from Agency Representative to Parent Member. Miguel Suau seconded the motion. Discussion: Everyone was in agreement. Chris Reigadas called the question. The motion passed unanimously. Ms. Reigadas will send a letter to Superintendent to officially make the change. Ms. Barbara will discuss the appointment of a new representative from the Family Care Council with Council members.

Lourdes Bravo announced that the Educators for Inclusive leadership Council will meet on Tuesday, October 2, 2012 at 6:30 pm at Casa Bacardi, University of Miami. The mission of this Council is to create issue awareness for our elected officials at the local and state level and to create advocacy.

Chris Reigadas announced that the By Laws Committee has met via e-mail. Next the committee will meet and will bring recommended changes back to the Panel.

Rosa Maria Barbara reminded everyone about the 2012 Steps for Success M-DCPS PreK – 12 Special Education Conference. The committee began working on conference in February. They changed the focus from transition to addressing families with students in all grades. Ms. Barbara thanked everyone on the committee for their outstanding contributions. There will be fifty-two (52) exhibitors and presentations in three languages.

Ms. Barbara asked parents to please inform parents and encourage them to attend the conference. They are offering free breakfast and child care. In addition, they will have door prizes. Food Trucks will come at the end of the conference and the key note speaker will be Superintendent Carvalho.

Chris Reigadas announced that Rosa Barbara's daughter, Mariana Barbara will be our student representative. Ms. Barbara said that Mariana is very excited and wants to present her special project to the Panel.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

**Next Meeting**

The General Membership meeting is scheduled for October 18, 2012 at 3:00 pm in Room 916 of the School Board Administration Building.

Respectfully submitted:

Kathleen C. Vergara