

Freddie Woodson, Associate Superintendent
School Operations

SUBJECT: REQUEST THAT THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA, RECEIVE THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION FRIENDLY WORKPLACE COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE: INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

At its August 17, 2005, School Board meeting, the School Board approved Item B-13, proffered by Dr. Martin Karp, which directed the Superintendent to develop a plan to establish Miami-Dade County Public Schools as a "Foster Care and Adoption Friendly Workplace," and improve the coordination and delivery of services to foster care children attending Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS). In response, the Foster Care Friendly and Adoption Friendly Workplace Committee was established. Staff from School Operations, Office of Labor Relations, Title I Administration, Pre-Kindergarten/Elementary Instructional Support, Adult Vocational and Community Education, School Board Attorney's Office, and the Division of Student Services collaborated to develop recommendations that specifically address a foster care friendly workplace and the improvement of services to foster care children throughout the District. This committee also included a variety of community stakeholders and organizations, such as the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court of Florida, Miami-Dade County Office of the County Manager, Educate Tomorrow, Corp., Our KIDS, Inc., Rilya Wilson Advocacy Project, Guardian Ad Litem, Department of Children and Families, teachers, school counselors and administrators.

The committee had lengthy discussions about this topic and wanted to ensure that all items discussed were included in an Executive Summary, which will be transmitted to the Board under separate cover. This is in accordance with the District's stated mission to ensure that all M-DCPS students are empowered to lead productive and fulfilling lives as lifelong learners and responsible citizens.

RECOMMENDED: That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, receive the report and recommendations from the Foster Care and Adoption Friendly Workplace Committee.

FW/KP/MEZ:jc

C-71

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Foster Care and Adoption Friendly Workplace Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HISTORY:

Dr. Martin Karp, School Board Member, introduced a Board Item directing the Superintendent of Schools to develop a plan to establish Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) as a “foster care and adoption friendly workplace” and to take actions to improve the coordination and delivery of services to foster children throughout the district. The item acknowledged that the stability provided by a foster or adoptive family could make the possibility of achieving an education more realistic for the at-risk children in foster care. School employees have already demonstrated their willingness to work with all children and are an untapped resource that can provide the supportive home environment or advocacy that allows these children to flourish. Empowering M-DCPS employees to be able to make the choice to become foster parents or Guardians Ad Litem (GAL) appears to be the logical extension to the District’s mission to ensure that all of our students are empowered to lead productive and fulfilling lives as lifelong learners and responsible citizens. It was the aim of Dr. Karp’s item that a culture of support will be created within M-DCPS that will encourage and support employees to become foster parents, adoptive parents, and GAL. Dr. Karp proposed that experienced foster parents be recruited to advise in the development of recommendations. The item also supported the development of the inter-agency agreement between Our Kids, Inc., the Department of Children and Families (DCF),

Work Force One and M-DCPS to support the needs of all dependent children attending public school. The item also encouraged the research of grants and federal funding to improve the delivery of services to children in foster care children

THE COMMITTEE:

The Foster Care and Adoption Friendly Workplace Committee was established and a variety of internal and community stakeholders met to develop recommendations that specifically address a foster care friendly workplace and the improvement of services to foster care children throughout the district. The committee was comprised of district staff from School Operations, The Office of Labor Relations, Title I Administration, Pre Kindergarten/Elementary Instructional Support, Adult Vocational and Community Education, School Board Attorney's Office, and the Division of Student Services. The committee also included a variety of stakeholders and community-based organizations, such as the Eleventh Judicial Circuit Court of Florida, Miami-Dade County Office of the County Manager, Educate Tomorrow, Our KIDS, Inc., Rilya Wilson Advocate Project, Guardian Ad Litem, The Department of Children and Families, teachers, school counselors and administrators.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE:

Employee Incentives:

The committee felt that foster parents, adoptive parents, and GAL could be recruited from M-DCPS employees, if it were made easier for them to fulfill court requirements by granting incentives such as approved leave time. The committee discussed the

additional responsibilities that foster parents and GAL assume when they agree to become a parent or guardian for children under State of Florida's supervision. As foster parents, there is an obligation to attend court hearings, be available during the day for the monthly home visits, and case worker conferences. GAL is also required to attend court hearings for the children for whom they have been assigned as guardian. According to the foster parents on the committee, personal leaves days could be depleted by the obligations that are expected of foster parents and GAL. It was agreed that if M-DCPS could offer a way for employees to be granted leave time to fulfill the required obligations; this might be an incentive for employees who are willing to assume the responsibilities of foster parents or GAL.

Recommendation:

Release time – Request the Superintendent through labor negotiations explore the possibility of the following suggestions: These negotiations should include all bargaining units.

- Employees who are currently licensed foster care providers shall be allowed up to two (2) hours of release time each month to fulfill the legal obligation of their status as foster care providers (e.g.) court hearings, monthly home visits, and case worker conferences.
- GAL will be allowed the same privilege of up to two (2) hours for court appearances.

Training for juvenile court contacts, foster parents, teachers and administrators:

Juvenile Court Contacts: Annually, the principal of each school is required, to assign two juvenile court contacts. One administrator and one member of student service is appointed by the principal. At present, there is no required training is provided for these assigned contact persons. The committee decided that children under State supervision would benefit if these juvenile court contacts were informed about the issues that surround these children. The contacts could help the staff in their school become more sensitive to the needs of these children and ensured that the delivery of services are being met and consistent. The juvenile court contacts are also the logical point of contact for outside agencies. For the training, M-DCPS could invite other agencies such as Educate Tomorrow, Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc., DCF and other interested agencies to become part of the training. The training should be an annual event in order to provide update information.

Foster Parents: The committee discussed training for foster parents. Foster parents need to understand how to navigate the school system and advocate for the children under their care.

Teachers and Administrators: The committee discussed the possibility of M-DCPS offering classes for teachers and administrators that would promote sensitivity for foster children. These classes could also discuss the unique needs of children under State supervision. The courses could be offered for teachers through the Teacher Education Center (TEC) for instructional personnel and Management Academy for administrators.

Our Kids, Inc. Case Manager. The full case managers responsible for providing a System of Care for Dependent Children must be able to advocate for children in their

care. It was discussed that an annual training should be provided by M-DCPS to ensure that all case managers are fully informed about the ways to advocate for their client and how to navigate the school system.

Recommendation:

Request the Superintendent provide training for the following:

- Annual training for Juvenile Court Contact.
- Provide opportunities for professional development and for instructional and administrative personnel.
- In cooperation with Our Kids, Inc., providing annual training for foster parents, full case managers, GAL, and other organizations working with dependent children.
- Provide courses through the Parent Academy for foster parents and relatives acting as a parent for a child under the states supervision.

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) Program:

The committee wanted to ensure that children under state supervision were able to attend the VPK programs within M-DCPS. It is often difficult for foster parents to get the information and then to enroll children after the deadline and therefore, are not eligible or placed at the bottom of the waiting list. The committee felt that it was important that children under state supervision could be processed for eligibility at any time during the school year and receive priority placement on the waiting list.

Recommendations:

- Children under State supervision will be given the first available positions (19th) on the waiting list for all M-DCPS VPK programs. As vacancies occur in VPK classes, foster children will be offered

each available slot. This provision will be in addition to foster children being granted the same opportunity as all children to register for and be an active participant in each school's VPK lottery drawing.

- Children under State supervision can be processed for eligibility anytime during the school year and be placed on the waiting list.
- Request the Superintendent, negotiate with Miami-Dade County that will require Child Development Services (CDS) to pay for child care for the children under State supervision from the time of dismissal from the VPK program until child care begins in the afternoon.

Uniforms:

The committee was made aware that the regular clothing allowance for children in foster care is only \$300 per year. Often the cost of a school uniform may be 1/3 of the total allowance. When children are moved from school to school, another uniform often must be purchased. A discussion followed on what M-DCPS could do to ensure that the clothing allowance was not totally expended on school uniforms. Some suggestions included, researching the possibility of providing a voucher; securing a grant; and/or obtaining community sponsorships that would pay for the school uniforms for foster children. It was unclear on how many students this would include and the fiscal impact. The committee felt that additional analysis was necessary.

Recommendation:

Request the Superintendent, submit to the School Board by July 20, 2006, a cost analysis of providing school uniforms to children in foster care.

Promotion of foster care and adoption friendly:

The committee discussed the various ways to encourage the many work cultures within M-DCPS to become foster care and adoption friendly. Sometimes school system employees are not aware of the various initiatives undertaken by M-DCPS. There was discussion on how to get the word out to the various stakeholders and employees of what M-DCPS was trying to accomplish in establishing a foster care and adoption friendly workplace. The following ideas were discussed:

- designate a month to promote foster care and adoption;
- develop fliers;
- provide posters; and
- produce a brochure.

Recommendations:

- Designate a month to promote adoption and foster care to all employees.
- Produce promotional materials that will be distributed to all employees during the foster care and adoption month.