

## MEMORANDUM

September 25, 2020

**TO:** The Honorable Chair and Members of The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

**FROM:** Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools 

**SUBJECT: STAFF FOLLOW-UP: SCHOOL BOARD MEETING OF AUGUST 12, 2020, AGENDA ITEM H-8, INTERNET SAFETY DURING THE PANDEMIC**

At the School Board meeting of August 12, 2020, the Board approved Agenda Item H-8, proffered by School Board Member Dr. Martin Karp and co-sponsored by School Board Chair Ms. Perla Tabares Hantman and School Board Members Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Ms. Susie V. Castillo, and Ms. Mari Tere Rojas. This item requested the Superintendent to address issues pertaining to Internet safety during the COVID pandemic in an effort to prevent sexual abuse.

Now more than ever, Internet safety is of paramount importance. As teaching and learning move to the virtual world due to the school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure our students remain safe from online predators and other cyber threats. Because Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), thanks to the vision of the School Board, has been at the forefront of technology integration since 2012 and has become a national model in the transition to blended learning, we have taken a series of measures over the years to ensure our students navigate the online world safely and securely.

When online tools are acquired and implemented across M-DCPS, every effort is made to ensure the safety and security of students and teachers. Whether placing online resources behind the District's secure portals, enabling content filtering on devices, licensing secure, advertisement-free content, or providing curriculum resources and professional development that address Internet safety and digital citizenship, the goal is to provide a safe online learning environment for teachers and students to communicate and collaborate.

The following protocols have been in place in the District to ensure the safety and security of students and teachers when using mobile technology or accessing online resources and communication platforms:

- Student and teacher resources reside in one secure location, the M-DCPS portal. M-DCPS users are required to log in with District-issued credentials, providing an extra layer of security for students and teachers when accessing and using our instructional resources.
- Microsoft Advanced Threat Protection protects our students' email accounts from e-mail phishing attempts and blocks sources with low reputation scores.

- Internet content accessed through the District's network and portal is filtered to block access to web content that may be deemed offensive, inappropriate, or dangerous.
- District-issued mobile devices are configured to pass through the District's content filter whenever and wherever the student accesses the Internet – even while off campus.
- Our video conferencing solutions for distance learning (Zoom and Microsoft Teams) have been configured to restrict external access and deny unauthorized users from communicating with students.
- Teachers have access to Digital Citizenship Pacing Guides which incorporate resources from Common Sense Media and contain lessons that address the various aspects of online behavior and safety.
- For the past six years, many of the technology-related professional development activities for teachers delivered by the District have included information on digital citizenship and online safety.

In addition, the following resources are currently available to teachers, students, and families to address this important issue:

- Internet safety is currently one of the Comprehensive Health Education's 12 required component areas for K-12 instruction under Florida Statute 1003.42 (2) (n). Instruction includes self-protection from computer crime and predators.
- Internet safety-related resources aligned with the Florida Department of Education's Comprehensive Health Education Elementary and Secondary Toolkits supplement the M-DCPS Health Education curriculum. These resources for grades K-12 focus on raising awareness of security risks as well as strategies to maximize personal safety while using the Internet to protect oneself from computer crime and predators.
- Internet Safety is embedded in M-DCPS Physical Education (Grades K-8) and Personal Fitness (Grades 9-10) classes through specific standards.
- Lauren's Kids Foundation, an M-DCPS partner, provides teachers with a prevention and personal safety curriculum for grades K-12 called Safer, Smarter Schools. This foundation offers materials for classrooms, administrators, guidance professionals, and parents to help children avoid traps predators set and seek help from trusted adults whenever necessary.
- Digital Health and Safety resources for grades K-12 are posted weekly on Microsoft Teams Rooms for M-DCPS teachers to share with students. One example is the Blueprint for Building Safer, Smarter Families (Grades K-5). This is an interactive activity pack to help families teach elementary school children the basics of personal safety and the strategies needed to prevent abuse.
- EVERFI, an M-DCPS partner, delivers free digital resources that help K-12 teachers equip students with critical skills related to Internet safety. Examples of these include Prevention First Health Curriculum (Grades K-12) and Digital Literacy Curriculum for Wellness Safety (Grades 6-9).
- Through a partnership with The Monique Burr Foundation for Children, the District provides a comprehensive, evidence-based curriculum for elementary

school students called Child Safety Matters (Grades K-5). The program educates and empowers children and all relevant adults with information and strategies to prevent, recognize, and respond appropriately to bullying, cyberbullying, all types of abuse, and digital abuse dangers.

- Through its Virtual Campus, The Parent Academy provides a course on online safety with tips for parents on how to keep their children safe while using the internet.
- Week of Welcome, the week-long orientation designed to help prepare families for the 2020-2021 academic year that commenced August 24, included four modules/resources (available in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole) that focused on online safety. These resources can be accessed through the Week of Welcome website at [miamiweekofwelcome.com](http://miamiweekofwelcome.com). These modules were accessed over 42,500 times between the launch of Week of Welcome on August 24 and August 30, the day before the first day of school. Resources related to online safety will remain active for families to access via the Week of Welcome website.

As teaching and learning evolve and new instructional technology tools become available, the District will continue to revise existing protocols and curriculum resources to ensure that students access these tools safely and securely.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Ms. Marie Izquierdo, Chief Academic Officer, Office of Academics and Transformation, at 305 995-1451, or Mr. Eugene P. Baker, Chief Information Officer, Information Technology Services, at 305 995-3754.

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