


## MEMORANDUM

February 12, 2018

**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: BOARD MEETING OF DECEMBER 6, 2017, AGENDA ITEM H-11, PREVENTING, EDUCATING, AND RAISING AWARENESS OF HOW TO PROTECT AGAINST SEXUAL PREDATORS/SEXUAL MOLESTATION**

At the School Board meeting of December 6, 2017, the Board approved Agenda Item H-11, proffered by School Board Vice Chair Dr. Martin Karp and co-sponsored unanimously. This item authorized the Superintendent to 1) explore the best mechanism to implement a program where students at the elementary, middle and high school grade levels receive instruction on identifying warning signs of inappropriate adult behavior that can lead to sexual molestation, and recognizing, stopping, and reporting sexual misconduct; 2) institute a districtwide campaign on the importance of speaking out should one become or suspect someone is a victim of an act of sexual molestation; 3) review, and as legally appropriate, revise adult/child communication protocols; 4) explore creating a class in The Parent Academy where parents are taught how to help their children identify signs of inappropriate adult behaviors, use evasion techniques, and recognize changes in children's behavior which would result from victimization; and 5) provide a report to the School Board no later than February 21, 2018.

The Division of Student Services is coordinating the District's efforts to protect our students against sexual abuse through the education of students, parents, and other stakeholders on recognizing the signs of abuse as well as knowing how to advocate on behalf of victims. The Division of Student Services' website includes curriculum programs and resources that school counselors and classroom teachers are encouraged to use to teach students about recognizing inappropriate behavior and ensure that students always feel safe and comfortable. The site has recently been updated with additional resources and links to programs which can assist in our sexual abuse prevention efforts.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) has partnered with several community agencies to create awareness as the foundation of prevention of sexual molestation or inappropriate adult behavior which can lead to abuse. Each April, the Division of Student Services collaborates with Amigos for Kids to support Blue Ribbon Month, a campaign that raises awareness about the importance of preventing child abuse. This collaboration includes the promotion of school-wide activities to recognize the signs of abuse and emphasize the importance of reporting. Additionally, nearly 2,000 third graders from across the District are invited to attend the annual "There's No Excuse for Child Abuse" rally held at the Dade County Auditorium.

The District's ongoing collaboration with Sandy Hook Promise in the delivery of their *Know the Signs* programs has also been a mechanism that encourages dialogue with students on how to report abuse and seek help. Sandy Hook Promise's *Say Something* assemblies, which have taken place in all secondary schools in the District, teach students how to

recognize the signs in an individual who may be a victim and to be an “upstander” by saying something to a trusted adult in order to get the person assistance. In addition to the student assemblies, M-DCPS has participated in Sandy Hook Promise’s *Say Something* Call to Action events, which engage the entire school community in this important effort to “say something.” Recently, M-DCPS was awarded the national 2017 Say Something Week School District Grand Prize Award for our efforts to promote the *Say Something* message and keep our District safe. Sandy Hook Promise will be presenting this award to our District at the School Board meeting of March 21, 2018.

As part of our District’s focus on the prevention of sexual molestation, the Division of Student Services is expanding its partnership with another of the District’s trusted partners, Lauren’s Kids, in secondary schools. Lauren’s Kids’ *Safer, Smarter Schools* abuse prevention curriculum now includes lessons for students in grades K-12. This abuse prevention curriculum is developmentally appropriate and arms students with the skills necessary to avoid sexual abuse. Each of the lessons is aligned with the Florida Standards. The Division of Student Services is also working with Lauren’s Kids to enhance counselor trainings as a means of ensuring that counseling professionals across the District integrate this curriculum at every grade level.

Additionally, the Division of Student Services and Lauren’s Kids are collaborating with The Parent Academy to create a course for parents that aligns with the *Safer, Smarter Schools* lessons that students will be receiving. The course will equip parents with information on how to recognize changes in children’s behavior that would result from victimization. Further, this course will assist parents in creating a Family Safety Plan and will help families access Lauren’s Kids’ parent toolkit resources which reinforce safety concepts for children.

School Operations and the Office of Human Capital Management have also collaborated to raise awareness of student sexual abuse and assist employees in recognizing and reporting inappropriate behavior. The Office of Professional Standards has developed *Ethics Matter*, a series of training designed to educate staff regarding ethical guidelines and expectations within an educational setting. Topics rotate each month, and principals are asked to secure a monthly time to provide this training to their staff.

November’s topic focused on appropriate employee-student relationships and outlined the protocols for communicating and interacting with students. As part of that month’s training, principals and school staff were asked to review School Board Policies 3210, *Standards of Ethical Conduct*; 3210.01, *Code of Ethics*; and 3213, *Student Supervision and Welfare*. In addition, the training addressed specific behaviors employees are encouraged to avoid when communicating with students, particularly through means of email, text messages, and social media. These behaviors align with specific language included in School Board Policy 7540.04, *Staff Responsible Use of Technology, Social Media, and District Network Systems*, which states “staff members are discouraged from ‘friending’ students on Facebook or other similar websites/applications, other than for the limited purpose of communications necessary to further education objectives” and indicates that “staff may be disciplined or subject to legal action for violations of this policy”.

February’s *Ethics Matter* topic focuses on employees’ obligation to report suspected child abuse. A component of the training discusses signs of sexual abuse in children and provides employees with information on how to report it.

School-based and district employees will revisit the ethical conduct expected of them regarding the use of technology when interacting with students during June's *Ethics Matter* training. The session will incorporate review and discussion of the aforementioned School Board policies, as well as School Board Policies 7540.01, *Technology Privacy*, and 7540.05, *Staff Electronic Mail*.

In addition to *Ethics Matter*, principals and assistant principals received in-depth training through their respective regions and the Office of Civil Rights Compliance on their roles in maintaining a harassment/abuse-free learning environment and addressing breaches that may occur. As part of the training, which was provided in January, school-based administrators reviewed numerous protocols and school board policies related to ethical behavior, including Policy 5517, *Anti-Discrimination/Harassment (Students)*, and Policy 5517.02, *Discrimination/Harassment Complaint Procedures for Students*.

To continue raising awareness of sexual abuse and its prevention, the Office of Communications has been working with the Division of Student Services to create a districtwide campaign on the importance of being an "upstander" and speaking out should one recognize the signs of victimization in someone they know. This campaign, #OKToTellMDCPS, will be shared through our District's social media platforms, the District's *Connection* newsletter, and radio as well as print outreach. As part of this campaign, the Division of Student Services will be providing the Office of Communications with links to articles and resources to educate stakeholders on the protection of children against predatory behavior.

This districtwide campaign will begin in February, but there will be an expanded effort to engage schools in the campaign during the month of April when schools are asked to take part in Child Abuse Prevention/Sexual Abuse Prevention Month, also known as Blue Ribbon Month. Sexual abuse prevention activities, a focus on Lauren's Kids' resources, and a vigorous promotion of #OKToTellMDCPS will be included in this year's Blue Ribbon Month activities guide for schools.

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.

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cc: School Board Attorney  
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