

MEMORANDUM

June 11, 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 JANUARY 15, 2020, AGENDA ITEM H-11, VIRTUAL REALITY AND COMBATING BULLYING AND OTHER BEHAVIORS THAT PLACE STUDENTS AT RISK

At the School Board meeting of January 15, 2020, the Board approved Agenda Item H-11, proffered by School Board Member Dr. Martin Karp. Agenda Item H-11 authorized the Superintendent to: 1) explore effective virtual reality curriculum, and determine whether implementation of such options is beneficial in our District; 2) research whether effective virtual reality curriculum is available in combating sexual abuse and molestation, internet solicitation, and human trafficking, and determine the viability of introducing virtual reality programs in our schools; and 3) provide a response by the June 2020 School Board meeting.

Virtual reality (VR) technology is a new and very engaging educational tool that our District is currently using to expand the learning experiences of our students, particularly in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) as well as Career and Technical Education (CTE). However, a review of the research has determined that this technology's use as an anti-bullying tool is in its infancy stages. Although the use of VR is viewed as a supplement to traditional teaching strategies through its ability to transform students into active participants, the power imbalance, fear, and distress associated with bullying cannot be readily simulated.

There are only a few examples of VR programming being implemented for bullying reduction efforts. The study and review of these products is just beginning, and their effectiveness has not yet been documented. There is some concern among experts about the effects that the exposure to simulated bullying events may cause. There does not appear to be any VR curriculum on the topic of sexual abuse, molestation, internet solicitation, or human trafficking. Local experts believe that it would be inappropriate and traumatizing to simulate those scenarios with students.

Additionally, some children also experience headaches, dizziness, and eye strain when using VR. This adverse physical response may be exacerbated when it is coupled with an emotional response, as is likely with scenarios involving bullying. Although there is some promise in creating and teaching empathy to students through the use of VR educational experiences, it does not seem to be a viable option for Miami-Dade County Public Schools' bullying prevention efforts at this time.

The Division of Student Services will continue to monitor the research and availability of VR resources to supplement current programming. The District-mandated bullying prevention curriculum has recently been updated and aligned with other social-emotional curricula that support teaching empathy and reducing social exclusion. The District has also continued to expand partnerships with organizations such as Sandy Hook Promise, The Melissa Institute, and the Anti-Defamation League to proactively address bullying and social exclusion in our 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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