

MINUTES

Parent Subcommittee on District and School Budget Priorities
Family and Community Involvement Advisory Subcommittee
Miami-Dade County Public Schools
1450 N.E. 2 Avenue, Room 916 & Zoom Meeting
Miami, FL 33132
Monday, February 22, 2021

Members Present: Mr. Eddy Barea, Chair, Ms. Beverly Heller, Dr. Nancy Lawther, Mr. James Lopez, Ms. Maria Norton, Ms. Laura Philpot, Ms. Karen Rivo, Dr. Lisa Robertson, Mr. Elias Seife, Ms. Meriel C. Seymore.

Members Excused Absent: Mr. Scot Evans, Ms. Isabelle Exume, Ms. Zoraida Serret.

Others Present: Mr. Jerold Blumstein, Ms. Martha M. Diaz, Ms. Milagros Hernandez, Ms. Mina Hosseini, Ms. Leigh Rauk, Mr. Ron Steiger, Ms. Sara Walkup, Mr. Antonio White.

I. Welcome and Introductions: Mr. Ron Steiger, Chief Financial Officer, called the meeting to order. He welcomed committee members and staff.

Mr. Barea proposed a motion for the acceptance of a new member: Ms. Mina Hosseini. Mr. James Lopez seconded the motion.

II. Approval of Minutes for January 25, 2021: Mr. Barea, asked for the approval of the minutes for the January 25, 2021, Parent Advisory Subcommittee meeting and the minutes were approved.

III. Legislative Update: Mr. Barea opened the floor to Dr. Nancy Lawther, Chair, she informed the committee about Senate Bill 48. The bill consolidates the current voucher program into two groups. The McKay and Gardiner scholarships are now locked together with all their eligibility criteria under the new McKay-Gardiner scholarship program. The other group includes three other scholarship programs: Tax Credit scholarship program, the Hope scholarship which was presented three years ago for children who were bullied and the Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES). Now all the eligibility requirements are leveled out into one under the Family Empowerment Scholarship. She explained that The Tax credit scholarship program that was limited to students with families that were at 185% of the Federal poverty rate, since they will now be part of the Family Empowerment scholarship and the requirement for that group is that the student's family is at 300% of the Federal poverty rate this will make more students eligible for the new FES. Also, the eligibility requirements have changed for students, now they don't need to have previously attended a public school to be eligible and a sibling of a McKay-Gardiner or Family Empowerment scholarship student will be eligible without ever having attended a public school.

They are calling the Family Empowerment Scholarship a public-school option program, to the extent that they will provide \$750 in transportation expenses to a child who wishes to attend another public school. Those with the Family Empowerment Scholarship will get 97.5 % of the regular FTE payment and the remaining 2.5 % goes to the nonprofit companies that are managing the system. The change in funding mechanism this year is that the money is going directly into the state coffers before being distributed back to students via the nonprofit organizations. Dr. Lawther commented that for a long time this was considered unconstitutional, in fact, in 2006 the original version of the Family Empowerment Scholarship was ruled unconstitutional because Florida's constitution says that you may not distribute funding to any religious institutions. Another funding difference is that the funds are not only for sending a child to school but also allowed to be used for home schooling, dual enrollment students, to buy computers, to buy textbooks, etc. She continued explaining that the funding is basically a debit card and parents can withdraw from it with oversight by the nonprofit managing the scholarship funds to ensure that they are properly spent.

Another provision in this bill is that the teacher salary allocation will also be shared with private schools. The question on this is academic accountability because private school students are not obligated to take state standardized tests and the qualifications of teachers in private schools may be very different.

The committee presented a motion to request for Accountability on Senate Bill 48. The motion was made by Mr. James Lopez and seconded by Mr. Elias Seife. The motion passed unanimously.

The committee discussed, provided comments, expressed concerns and questions and concerns were addressed by Dr. Lawther.

IV. Governor's Budget for FY 2021-22: Mr. Barea opened the floor to Mr. Ron Steiger, Chief Budget officer. He began by telling the committee that the 2021-22 governor's budget is out. This budget has all districts going up by \$200 per student and Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) is at \$232 per student. The effect on MDCPS is a loss of \$1million. He mentioned that losing \$1million despite dropping 10,000 students is good news. Unfortunately, the governor drastically reduced the number of kids that they had and there were big categorical increases. For example, the teacher salary increase (which was going up by \$5 million), mental health assistance, school recognition and other categorical. Once you take into consideration all the categorical increases it ends up being a \$20 million decrease for us. The reason it is not higher than is due to the Funds Compression and hold harmless funding formula. Our delegation is working with the house and senate to avoid the proposed removal of the hold harmless from the Funds Compression formula because the only district that will be losing money is MDCPS.

Mr. Steiger mentioned that from the House and Senate it is going to be a relative difficult year even if they hold education somewhat harmless because of the big increases in charter schools and the scholarships programs, because a loss of students for MDCPS is a loss of dollars. Also, they are going to have a cost increase of around \$28 million in health insurance.

V. Stimulus Funds: Mr. Ron Steiger, Chief Budget Officer, informed the committee of the CARES Act stimulus funds signed into law between April and June of 2020, they called it the ESSER 1. They have \$119 million for MDCPS and charter schools in ESSER funds. The Department of Education (DOE) had a lot of restrictions on the use of these funds. They amended those restrictions and by the end of February it will be close to 60% spent on COVID-19 related expenses. They hope that by the end of this fiscal year almost all those funds are spent. He spoke about another stimulus signed into law in December, they called it ESSER II. They don't have the details of what their allocation would be, they will know withing the next 30 days. He commented that it could probably be \$450 million, a lot of it will be going to the charter schools. Probably Miami Dade Schools will be receiving \$365 million. The school system has a lot of needs. The students have fallen behind with the online learning and getting them back up to speed is going to cost a lot of money. They need summer school and tutoring. The district will be investing heavily into getting our students back up to speed. They already started Saturday Academy, and Spring Break Academy is already in the works. These programs are going to be funded with ESSER 1. Summer school is starting this summer and moving into next summer. All the things that they need to get students back up to speed is going to cost a lot of money, probably more than \$300 million over a two-year period and ESSER II will be used for this.

Mr. Steiger addressed the following four issues for which these federal funds will potentially be used: 1. Academic Regression 2. Technology needs. MDCPS has given out over 100,000 devices that were previously used in classrooms to students. When they come back, they will not all be in working order. 3. Physical Improvements to make our schools feel safer. There are a lot of parents and students that are nervous about going back to school. We will make investments in the next 18 months to make our schools more virus free. 4. We are going to continue doing all the cleaning and purchasing PPE, like we have been doing. As soon as we know what the allocation will be and how we can spend the funds we will have these conversations. He mentioned the \$1.9 trillion stimulus that President Biden proposed and the various ways the money could be used if this bill passes through Congress. He will update the committee next month depending on what happens.

VI. New Business: The committee approved Monday, March 22, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. as the next meeting date.

VII. Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.