

Education Alert

Legislation of Vital Concern to Miami-Dade County's Students

Date: April 28, 2003
To: Florida House Delegation
From: Merrett R. Stierheim, Superintendent of Schools
Re: **SUPPORT AND STRENGTHEN H.R. 1350 – IMPROVING EDUCATION RESULTS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 2003**

Miami-Dade County Public Schools supports key reforms in H.R. 1350, the Improving Education Results for Children with Disabilities Act of 2003, reauthorizing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The House should vote to **support the bill with an amendment making full federal funding mandatory**, and defeat amendments that would dilute reforms or divert funding through vouchers.

BACKGROUND: To serve 42,000 local students with disabilities, Miami-Dade County Public Schools must devote significant local/general revenue resources to comply with burdensome IDEA requirements. H.R. 1350 provides substantial administrative relief, significantly strengthens services for students with disabilities, and returns to a focus on achievement and education outcomes. The legislation would:

- Expand authority to local school districts regarding the use of federal funds, and reduce unnecessary administrative requirements.
- Improve due process provisions and provide flexibility in the design of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) as well as IEP meetings.
- Simplify discipline procedures, enabling districts to eliminate a dual discipline system provided there is no cessation of educational services for students with disabilities.
- Increase authorization levels to fully fund the federal share over a seven-year period, with approximately \$2.4 billion each year from fiscal years 2004 through 2010.
- Not force public schools to fund vouchers for children with disabilities, diverting funds to unregulated private schools with no guarantee that necessary disabilities services are provided.

However, H.R. 1350 makes IDEA funding increases discretionary rather than mandatory, and thus the local cost of IDEA compliance may continue to siphon education funds that should benefit all students.

RECOMMENDATION: Miami-Dade County Public Schools respectfully requests your advocacy in support of H.R. 1350 to **support reforms in the current legislation:** to simplify discipline procedures, increase program flexibility, eliminate unnecessary administrative requirements, and modify due process procedures to improve delivery of educational services and eliminate the adversarial relationship between parents and local school districts. Further, we ask that you **support an amendment to make IDEA funding mandatory** and **oppose any amendment adding voucher provisions to IDEA**. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.



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