

# Education Alert

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

**Date:** October 29, 2001  
**To:** The Honorable Bob Graham, United States Senate  
The Honorable Bill Nelson, United States Senate  
**From:** Merrett R. Stierheim, Superintendent of Schools  
**Re:** **School Repair Funds**

The Senate Appropriations Committee included \$925 million for Emergency School Repair in their FY 2002 appropriations bill, but also made legislative changes to the program that will prove harmful to urban school districts. The Senate's FY 2002 language removes the requirement of a set-aside for the poorest school districts, and also adds a match requirement that would be burdensome to those districts.

**BACKGROUND:** The school repair program was first authorized in FY 2001, and included \$1.2 billion for urgent renovation and repair, as well as IDEA and technology upgrades. Under this program, states are required to set aside the aggregate Title I share of all school districts with either 30% or 10,000 students living in poverty, and to hold a competitive grant process with those funds only for the districts that contributed. While a State is not required to distribute a certain amount of funds to any particular district, the set-aside requirement certainly narrows the number of applicants included with large urban districts, and increases the likelihood of an award for the poorest districts.

The reservation for poor schools is removed entirely in the new Senate language. The language also requires that local districts provide a share of the cost of the projects in the grant, up to 40% depending on the district's percentage of children living in poverty. This provision requires school districts with stretched resources to divert money from other areas in order to receive a grant for needed repairs.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Miami-Dade County Public Schools respectfully requests your advocacy to support reinstating the language for high-poverty school districts from the FY 01 appropriations bill, and remove the new match requirement for school repairs included in the FY 02 appropriations bill (S. 1536).

1. While school construction funds in the appropriations bill are greatly needed, the removal of an aggregate set-aside for the poorest school districts is a major flaw. It would eliminate any priority for districts that need major assistance, as well as priorities for rural and Indian schools.
2. The required match, even on a sliding basis, harms districts and is contrary to the goal of providing federal funds to the districts that need the most assistance. Most large urban districts will be required to provide a 10-30% match; since the need is greatest in these areas, the size and scope of projects will force central-city districts to provide the greatest amount of funds from their own budget.
3. The FY 01 language in the existing Emergency School Repair program (P.L. 106-554) is preferred to the new language in the Senate's FY 02 appropriations bill (S. 1536).

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.