

MEMORANDUM

March 9, 2006

TO: The Honorable Chair and Members of The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

FROM: Rudolph F. Crew, Superintendent of Schools *RFC*

SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE UPDATE – OPENING OF SESSION

As you are aware, Florida's 60-day legislative session opened on Tuesday, March 7, 2006 in Tallahassee. The District was well-represented by staff who attended the House Education committees on PreK-12, and Choice & Innovation along with meeting with Representatives Gelber, Planas, and Rivera and the legislative aide to Representative Bogdanoff on HB 535 related to bullying. In addition, representing the Board's interests in the Capitol this year, will be the Board's state lobbying team, selected unanimously by a committee through an RFP process and approved by the Board in December 2005. This lobbying team will be in Tallahassee daily, and will continue to be joined by key District staff on an as-needed basis.

The day-to-day lobbying activities on behalf of the Board will be directed by Ms. Iraida R. Mendez-Cartaya, Administrative Director, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Grants Administration, under the supervision of Mr. Alberto M. Carvalho, Associate Superintendent, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Grants Administration, and Community Services, who will retain overall responsibility for legislative strategy. Each member of the lobbying team has been assigned specific activities related to the Board's platform, committee attendance, and briefing members of the Florida Legislature, including a continuation of weekly meetings with select members of the Miami-Dade Legislative Delegation. Additionally, a presentation to the entire Delegation outlining the District's needs is planned at the request of Delegation Chairman Gus Barreiro and others with the special education subcommittee created by Speaker-Elect Representative Marco Rubio, and chaired by Representative Anitere Flores.

The 2006 Session was opened with a joint session of the House and Senate where Governor Bush delivered his eighth and final State of the State Address. In his speech he outlined the need for more education reform, greater emergency preparedness and increased economic development as priorities for his final legislative session as Governor. Highlights of the Governor's speech are provided below.

- **EDUCATION** - Governor Bush urged the Legislature to adopt critical reforms to bring rigor and relevance to middle schools, making middle grades count more than ever for students in Florida. The reforms will require students in grades 6 through 8 to earn 12 credits in math, science, language arts and social studies before they are

promoted to high school. At the high school level the proposed reforms will add relevance by allowing students to choose a major based on their career paths and interests.

- **DISASTER RESPONSE** - The Governor outlined the state's campaign to create a "Culture of Preparedness," including a proposal for a permanent 12-day sales tax holiday for hurricane-related purchases, to coincide with National Hurricane Awareness Week held each May. Governor Bush also outlined plans for retrofitting older homes, making the building code uniform statewide, upgrading vulnerable county emergency operations centers, expanding shelter space and upgrading special needs shelters.
- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** - Governor Bush outlined his plan to continue the growth of our state's economy. Included in his plan are \$1.5 billion in tax relief for Floridians and \$630 million in economic development programs to lure high-paying industries to Florida. The Governor's recommendation includes making the 9-day "Back to School" sales tax holiday permanent for Florida residents; property tax rebates of \$100 each to 4.4 million homeowners providing a total of \$500 million in tax relief; and a 9.1% reduction in required school tax rates, saving taxpayers a total of \$570 million. With this comprehensive tax relief proposal, the cumulative total of tax relief provided since 1999 would total \$20.3 billion.

Upon the adjournment of the joint session, the House Education PreK-12 Committee met and discussed the latest version of proposed committee bill, PKT 06-01, just released on Monday. An earlier version of this bill had been reviewed by staff and comments were forwarded to Representative Ralph Arza based on a request made publicly at the Board meeting of November 16, 2005. The bill includes recommendations for secondary school reform to ensure rigor and relevance and establishes a uniform school start date. However, unlike the previous version, the revised bill also authorizes the Commissioner of Education to assign an assessment team to school districts with any school designated with a grade of D or F. The function of the assessment team, as described in PKT 06-01, is to review school performance data disaggregated by student ethnicity with the intent to provide recommendations to the school board, the Department of Education and the state Board of Education for implementing an assistance and intervention plan that will address the causes of the school's low performance.

The bill goes further to wrest control from local school boards by proposing language that would authorize the Governor and Commissioner of Education to declare any school district that has a single school designated with a grade of F for a second consecutive year as "in a state of educational emergency". The operations of such school boards would become subject to review and oversight by the Governor and the Commissioner of Education and, as such, the Governor and Commissioner may implement measures including, but not limited to: requiring approval of the school district's budget by the Governor and the Commissioner; requiring the district school board to reallocate funds until

such time as the school district is no longer in the a state of educational emergency; call for the inspection of records, information, reports, and assets of the school district; consulting with officials and auditors of the school district and the appropriate state staff officials regarding steps necessary to bring the books of account, accounting systems, financial procedures, personnel, and personnel systems into compliance with state requirements; and establishing an educational emergency board to oversee the activities of the district school board. The educational emergency board may review all of the educational operations of the school district including, but not limited to: graduation and dropout rates, personnel, management, efficiency, curriculum, instructional materials, productivity and financing of functions and operations. Any recommendations and reports must be submitted to the Governor, the Commissioner and the State Board of Education. This legislation would have serious implications for many districts and will be monitored closely.

In preparation for the opening of session, the Delegation members were presented with copies of the Board's legislative platform as well as documents which identify the District's priorities and needs and an analysis of the Governor's budget. Mr. Carvalho and his staff had numerous meeting with individual legislators to define our District's needs. Now that the 2006 session has begun, the success of the District's legislative initiatives rests in the hands of the members of the Florida Legislature of which our Delegation is an integral part. Our hope is that every member of the Delegation takes to heart our needs and requests on behalf of the children in our community.

Perhaps an early indication of the challenge ahead was revealed in Senator Villalobos' comment that Florida school budgets have been slashed for the past two years and this year's funding level should be the factor that everyone in South Florida uses to determine how they vote on the tax cut issues. Villalobos was quoted in the Miami Herald article stating, "I'm not voting for anything until I see funding for South Florida for education." With nine weeks of legislative debate ahead, we are hopeful about the impact that our delegation and its talented emerging leadership will have on the quality of education that our community of parents, children and educators expects.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Mr. Alberto M. Carvalho at 305 995-2532.

RFC/AMC:lbd
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cc: Superintendent's Cabinet
School Board Attorney
Dr. Magaly C. Abrahante
Ms. Iraida R. Mendez-Cartaya
Principals
PTA/PTSA Presidents
Employee Groups