

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Vice Chair

**SUBJECT: PARENTAL AND RELATED STAKEHOLDER NOTIFICATION
REGARDING SCHOOL INCIDENTS**

**LINK TO STRATEGIC
BLUEPRINT: INFORMED, ENGAGED, AND EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS**

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is committed to ensuring the safety and security of its schools, employees, community members, and most important, its students. This has been and must always remain a priority of the School Board and the District. This commitment also includes ensuring that when serious incidents do occur, parents and/or related stakeholders such as teachers and school staff are notified through appropriate and timely channels.

The issue of school safety and security has been elevated because of the tragedy that took place at Marjory Stoneman Douglas Senior High School on February 14, 2018. Consequently, the district, state, and nation have increased proactivity in the provision of attention, resource, and strategy to improve school security and student safety. Parents and related stakeholders have equally and commendably become increasingly informed and engaged in such matters when it comes to the safety and security of their children. They also expect to be informed in a manner as timely as possible when serious incidents such as those that are likely to appear on local television and/or social media occur.

Mass communication and/or notification technology such as School Messenger has enabled schools and the district to communicate with parents in an expedient manner. However, with the velocity of information transmitted via social media, mobile devices, and the internet, new challenges have arisen in competing to quickly convey information regarding serious school incidents before other means for communication have done so.

Although the District has developed and implemented procedures and practices to notify the Board, parents, and related stakeholders regarding serious incidents at schools, instances in which such notification is not appropriate and/or timely require a review of current policies, procedures, and practices, and an opportunity to make revisions, adjustments, and/or improvements, where needed.

Recently, there appears to be an increase in serious incidents at schools in which parents and/or related stakeholders are made aware through local and/or social media despite school and district administrators being aware and in some instances, fully informed. Receiving information through unofficial channels creates unwarranted anxieties and in some cases inaccurate narratives regarding an alleged school incident. It also erodes the confidence and assurance that parents have in our district's and schools' communication approaches and strategies when it comes to being notified about serious incidents occurring in schools.

School Board Policy 9120, Public Information Program, states *“that the School Board shall inform the public on matters regarding policies, finances, programs, personnel, and operations.”* One of the most key public groups to a school district is parents. Although the policy stipulates that the “principal is responsible for routine school announcements to the parents of the school,” it further stipulates that “news releases concerning the school system must be cleared through the Office of Public Relations...” Most critical to this matter is that responses to the media regarding school related matters such as serious incidents may be given “upon approval by the Office of Public Relations.” While this is a prudent, pragmatic approach to ensuring the provision of accurate and responsible information, oftentimes it may prove to be inefficient in the fact that parents and related stakeholders may learn about serious incidents occurring at schools through the local and/or social media, and in some cases, without hearing, in a timely manner if at all from the school or district. The goal is to establish practices, procedures, and where needed, policies that ensure the timely notification to parents and related stakeholders about serious incidents that occur in schools.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to review existing procedures, practices, and policies that govern notification, through general and/or legally considerate statements, to parents and related stakeholders about serious incidents in schools; ensure that such notifications occur prior to the evening television news cycle and prior to the end of the day in which the incident occurred, as appropriate; and initiate rulemaking or amendment to School Board Policy to govern the same.

This item has been reviewed by the School Board Attorney for legal sufficiency.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. STEVE GALLON III:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, direct the Superintendent to:

1. review existing procedures, practices, and policies that govern notification, through general and/or legally sufficient statements, to parents and related stakeholders about serious incidents in schools;
2. ensure that notifications regarding serious incidents at schools are sent prior to the evening television news cycle and no later than the end of the day in which the serious incident occurred, as appropriate; and
3. initiate rulemaking or amendment to School Board Policy 9120 to ensure timely notification to parents and related stakeholders when serious incidents occur at schools.