Office of School Board Members
Board Meeting of December 17, 2025

December 17, 2025

Ms. Luisa Santos, Board Member

Co-Sponsors:
Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas, Chair
Ms. Monica Colucci, Vice Chair
Mr. Roberto Alonso
Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall
REVISED AT DAIS BY BOARD ACTION
Ms. Mary Blanco
Mr. Danny Espino
Dr. Steve Gallon III
Mr. Joseph S. Geller

SUBJECT: **R.O.A.D (ROUTES OPENING ACCESS TO DREAMS) TRANSPORTATION FRAMEWORK**

COMMITTEE: **PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: **INFORMED, ENGAGED, & EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS**
EFFECTIVE & SUSTAINABLE OPERATIONAL PRACTICES

School transportation in the U.S. faces mounting operational and growing service disparities that demand urgent attention. As highlighted in the 2025 *State of School Transportation Report*, districts across the country are struggling with workforce shortages, outdated systems, and declining ridership, all of which compromise access and reliability.[1] Although transportation remains a critical enabler of student attendance, opportunity, and outcomes, many systems are burdened by aging fleets, inefficient routing, and a lack of real-time data infrastructure, making it difficult to adapt to changing student demographics or school choice dynamics.[2] Without sustained investment and improvement, school transportation systems risk becoming a bottleneck in the nation's efforts to deliver high-quality, accessible public education to all.

Miami-Dade Public Schools (M-DCPS) has the responsibility and opportunity to lead by creating a model for access-oriented school transportation. An efficient and data-driven transportation system aligns with priorities outlined in our Strategic Plan, Pillar I: Relevant, Rigorous, & Innovative Academics, Pillar 2: Safe, Healthy, & Supportive Learning Environments, and Pillar V: Effective & Sustainable Operational Practices.[3]

M-DCPS has demonstrated commendable efforts to modernize and sustain its transportation operations despite significant challenges. In alignment with efficiency and resiliency goals, M-DCPS has invested in alternative fuel vehicles. such as electric buses, as part of its fleet modernization strategy.[4] The district also maintains a hazard reporting mechanism that allows for the request of reviews of unsafe walking conditions.[5] At the same time, recent state data identifies several areas where further progress is both warranted and achievable, offering a clear path for continues advancement.

[1] HopSkipDrive. (2025). *State of school transportation, accessible public education n: 2025 report*. https://www.hopskipdrive.com/state-of-school-transportation
[2] Ibid.
[3] Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (n.d.). *2021–2026 Strategic Plan: Infinite possibilities*. https://strategicplan.dadeschools.net/#!/fullWidth/7282
[4] Blue Bird Corporation. (2023, April 4). *Blue Bird delivers 20 electric school buses to Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida*. h,ttps://www.blue-bird.com/blue-bird-delivers-20-electric-sc,hool-buses-to-miami-dade-county-public-schools-in-florida/
[5] Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (n.d.). *Hazardous walking conditions form*. https://forms.dadeschools.net/webpdf/7537.pdf
[6] §1006.25
[7] Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (2023). *Transportation Services Handbook*, p. 13

Data from the 2023-24 School District Transportation Profiles reflect a low number of students transported, lower than average bus occupancy, and higher than average cost per student transported. Additionally, the cost per mile and per student transported is one of the highest in Florida. These figures show an opportunity for improvements in operational efficiency. The average age of a bus in the M-DPCS fleet is 12 years, with a significant portion of vehicles exceeding the state's recommended 10-year replacement cycle – making it harder to adhere to 1006.25 maintenance standards.[6] [7]

District	PreK–12 enrollment	Students transported	% Students transported	Daily Buses (FEFP)	Miles per transported student	Avg. bus occupancy	Cost per Student	Cost per Mile
Miami-Dade	337,719	~40,300	12%	818	38.6	44.2	~$2,525	$9.16
Broward	251,408	~61,800	25%	872	28.7	66.3	~$1,700	$7.69
Orange	207,695	~54,600	27%	533	29.2	96.0	~$1,850	$7.77

Data reflect 2023–24 FEFP-reported transportation metrics from the Florida Department of Education.

These trends point to an urgent need for optimization and reform. Research underscores that unreliable or inaccessible transportation increases student absenteeism, particularly among those attending non-neighborhood or choice-based schools. [8]

In addition to broader operational considerations, the district's transportation strategy should carefully account for the needs of exceptional student education (ESE) populations and students enrolled in magnet or choice programs. M-DCPS transports approximately 8,400 ESE students, nearly 30% of all transported riders. [9] Though these students are legally entitled to transportation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), their high representation underscores the importance of reliable and adequately resourced specialized services. [10] Ensuring timely pickups, appropriately equipped vehicles, and trained drivers remains essential to maintaining service quality.

Likewise, students attending choice-based programs face added complexity. Magnet school transportation is provided only to students who live within the program's designated transportation zone, with eligibility based on verified residence, routing feasibility, and available funding. The district's Department of Transportation should conduct a review of magnet school transportation service zones to identify opportunities that increase magnet student ridership. Each region will prioritize schools with the greatest need for analysis that can result in an immediate impact on the students' magnet transportation. As the district advances its strategic commitment to "ensuring access, equity, and opportunity for all," special attention to ensuring transportation is not a barrier to choice will be a key consideration.

To meet the transportation needs of a diverse and dynamic student population, we must be data-driven, equity-centered, and operationally bold. Research on absenteeism and access, district-level inefficiencies, industry best practices, and stakeholder feedback all point to the necessity for a new vision: *R.O.A.D. (Routes Opening Access to Dreams) Transportation Framework* for M-DCPS. This framework is built on five core pillars, each designed to advance reliability, access, and responsiveness across the district's transportation system.

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[8] Laura M. Hopson, A. D. Lidbe, M. S. Jackson, E. Adanu, X. Li, P. Penmetsa, H. Y. Lee, A. Anderson, C. Obuya & G. Abura-Meerdink (2022). *Transportation to school and academic outcomes: A systematic review* (p. 8-12). *Educational Research Review*. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2022.2034748

[9] Florida Department of Education. (2023). *2023–24 School District Transportation Profiles* (pp. 22–24)

[9][10] IDEA, 34 CFR § 300.34

1. **Increase Student Access to Educational Opportunity Through Reliable Transportation:** Students must have access to consistent, timely, and safe transportation that enables full participation in core instruction and extracurricular programming. Effective communication with families, including accessible tools for real-time updates and route information, is essential to ensuring students can take full advantage of these opportunities.
2. **Improve Operational Efficiency and Route Optimization:** The district must reduce miles per transported student, increase average bus occupancy, and modernize routing systems to deliver cost-effective, scalable service that meets changing student demographics and attendance patterns.
3. **Promote Resiliency and Innovation:** The district must future-proof its transportation system by investing in low-emission vehicles, expanding multimodal partnerships, and implementing smart routing technologies that align with operational goals as supported by industry standards.
4. **Grow Ridership for Students with Complex Transportation Needs:** Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students and those attending choice programs must be supported through responsive eligibility policies, specialized routing, and school-level coordination to reduce transportation-related barriers.
5. **Stabilize the Transportation Workforce:** M-DCPS must strengthen driver recruitment and retention by addressing compensation, scheduling, and professional development to ensure we have a consistent and reliable workforce.

This item has been reviewed and approved by the General Counsel's Office as to form and legal sufficiency.

ACTION PROPOSED BY
MS. LUISA SANTOS:

The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, reaffirm its commitment to supporting the needs of every child by adopting the "R.O.A.D. Transportation Policy Framework," as described in this item, and directing the Superintendent to:

1. Conduct a comprehensive review of current student transportation practices aligned to the *R.O.A.D. (Routes Opening Access to Dreams) Policy Framework,* including but not limited to:
    a. A cost-benefit analysis of current eligibility thresholds, courtesy busing, and walk zone policies to determine how they impact access to foundational, magnet, and choice-based education programs; and
    b. An operational review of current routing efficiency, including but not limited to analysis of average bus occupancy, total miles traveled per student, on-time performance, scheduling structure, and opportunities to reduce non-service travel through more effective route design and vehicle assignment, along with a root-cause analysis and corrective action plans to address any operational issues; and
    c. A workforce capacity assessment that evaluates the district's recruitment, compensation, retention, and training practices for all transportation department employees (including but not limited to school bus drivers, school bus aids, dispatchers, trainers, mechanics, etc.)

alongside a review of national and peer district benchmarks; and

d. A review of the district's current transportation fleet and infrastructure, emissions output, and existing partnerships with municipalities or public transit providers; and
e. A communications and engagement review that catalogs how families, schools, and drivers receive transportation updates, request support, or submit feedback; and
f. An assessment of district capacity to build and maintain an internal interactive dashboard that reports operational metrics (on-time performance, missed routes, driver vacancies), equity indicators (ridership by student subgroup), and efficiency benchmarks (fuel usage, fleet composition); and
g. Evaluate the facility, technology, and staffing investments required to support implementation of the above priorities, and the estimated capital and operational resources needed to do so.

2. Present findings and recommendations aligned with the five policy pillars at the Fiscal Accountability and Government Relations Committee meeting on April 15, 2026.