

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting
Agenda Item F-3
November 18, 2014
City Commission Chambers
405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

City Commission

Mayor Jim Cason

Vice Mayor William H. Kerdyk, Jr.

Commissioner Pat Keon

Commissioner Vince Lago

Commissioner Frank Quesada

City Staff

Interim City Manager, Carmen Olazabal

City Attorney, Craig E. Leen

City Clerk, Walter J. Foeman

Deputy City Clerk, Billy Urquia

Public Speaker(s)

Abby Corbit, Outside Counsel for the City, Stearns Weaver

Carol Damian, Coral Gables Resident

Aleida Martinez Molina, Coral Gables Resident

Agenda Item F-3 [Start: 12:22:05 p.m.]

Update from special counsel regarding research related to school choice.
Commissioner Keon

Mayor Cason: Alright everyone, welcome back, this is the continuation of the Commission meeting of November 18, 2014. We are going to move to Agenda Item F-3, and the City Attorney will lead us off on this one.

City Attorney Leen: Thank you Mr. Mayor. This is an item that was placed on the agenda by Commissioner Keon and I was basically asked to look into different options and conduct research as to what are the City's options relating to both West Lab, which was an issue that came up before this Commission, and also controlled choice; and so what I did was I hired Stearns Weaver does a lot of outside counsel work for us, so I asked Abby Corbit, whose done

work in other areas for the City to take a look at this issue, and to in a sense review what are our possible options and to put together a proposed public records request that we can send to the School Board to get information about West Lab and about controlled choice. I'm going to ask her to come up and speak in a moment, the two letters are in front of you, I handed out to each of you. We are not coming here before you to ask for approval to send them out, although honestly if you tell us not to we won't, but it was more to give you an update of what we are doing to get the information so that eventually we can put before you all the options that you have and then you can make the final decision. The one thing I would note and then I would turn it over to Abby Corbit, one issue of concern based on what I've heard from what the Commission has said in the past is that controlled choice, of course which involves Coral Gables and it involves three of our elementary schools, which is really K through 8, for Coral Gables Preparatory, Coral Gables Prep, Sunset Elementary, and Carver Elementary, and the issue that I found, and I'm going to ask Abby to talk about it a little bit is that it appears that controlled choice is really only done in Coral Gables and there are no other schools in Miami-Dade County that are subject to school choice. Instead, residents basically are able to go to their home school. Now, I'm not an expert in this area and we do have a representative of the School Board too, in fact the Deputy Superintendent, so they can speak to that issue and if I'm incorrect in any way, forgive me, but first I'm going to turn it over to Abby Corbit to talk about that and then I'll turn it over to Commissioner Keon.

Commissioner Keon: To the Commissioners that we can speak because we have mentioned this a few times on the record here, but we really haven't had a discussion about it and because of the Sunshine Laws the only place we can have that discussion because it may eventually come to something that we legislate here on the dais. So we did have a Sunshine meeting where Vince and I were together with School Board Member Regalado and Fausto, I think was there and a number of people in the public. That meeting became a discussion with West Lab about adding a middle school to West Lab, which is really not our issue; that's not an issue that we as a City are at this moment are weighing in on. That is an issue between the School Board, that's a School Board issue if they decide to make West Lab a K through 8. That isn't our issue, it's not an issue we really need to discuss here, unless somebody wants to work with them on it, I'm sure you are perfectly entitled to, but that isn't the issue that I raised would really like us to talk about and us to work on. The issue that is of concern to me and I know it's of great concern to a lot of parents in our City is that they don't know when they buy a home, when they move into the City, they do not know where their children are going to go to school, because we are designated as choice, it means there are three schools: Carver, Gables or Sunset that they make application to. It appears that they are not noticed as to which school they can go to then until late in that school year or in the summer prior to entering school. That really doesn't give them if that's not the school they want to send their child to because when we look at the letter rating of our schools, they all offer different levels or they have been or they not all rated...

Mayor Cason: Different levels of excellence.

Commissioner Keon:... levels of excellence, and so we really want to ensure, thank you, that's a diplomat for you (laughter). So what's happening is that more and more parents are believing that they have to enroll their children in private schools because by the time they are noticed by the school system as to where their children will be it's too late to enroll them in the private school, so they do it early in anticipation that they are not going to get the choice that they are looking for. So we know the reason West Lab came into our discussion at all is that West Lab sits in the center of our City, right in the middle of a residential neighborhood surrounded by lots of family who are well within walking distance of that school, but yet for whatever reason the school system has maintained that school as a countywide school, although it is no longer a laboratory school for the University of Miami, it's there but the school system has chosen to keep it as a countywide school and our discussion started with, you know, we know that there are 200 children from Coral Gables addresses on the waiting list for West Lab. We know there is a need for additional seats in our City for our children to go to and we want it in our City in some proximity to our home so that children can go to school, grow up in a neighborhood and not have to travel great distances to go to school unless they have maybe some particular talent that would cause them to go to New World or whatever, but for general education of our students that children have schools, high quality schools accessible to them. Now we all know that the school district is under the State Constitution is their own governing body, we don't even, we can't even enforce land regulations with regard to schools, or anything else. So we have entered into a discussion or attempt to discuss with the school system their taking action on our behalf because we are the representative body of our residents and our citizens and we as a Commission believe that our children should be afforded high quality, free public education within close proximity to their homes. So that's what I'm asking all of you is that our position.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes, I think so.

Commissioner Keon: That is our position.

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Actually, I think it's bizarre that we are the only municipality....

Mayor Cason: More than bizarre.

Commissioner Lago: But the interesting thing about it and Commissioner Keon just touched upon it for one second. When we had the Sunshine meeting we went over some of the key statistics in reference to these students and a demographic makeup of what is West Lab. We've always been under the impression that not many students that attend West Lab are Coral Gables

residents. I think the number was like 17 or 18 percent. The reason why its 17 or 18 percent is because there is close to 500 people on that waiting list to get into West Lab, because of the quality A-plus school that it is. It's considered a magnet, correct?

Commissioner Keon: I don't know that it's a magnet and I don't know what it's a magnet for-- because it's no longer a....can speak to that.

Commissioner Lago: Just the last thing. I shouldn't have asked that question. The last thing, there is close to 500 people on the waiting list and 250 or 260 of them are Coral Gables residents, so the need is there, the need is there, so that number, that 18 percent or 17 percent is not indicative of the true demographic and the true need that is required from the residents that live in the City. Now choice – when we had that Sunshine meeting, the issue of choice schools came up from some of the parents that were frustrated in regards to certain other issues that are dealing with the School Board, for example, some classrooms, a Spanish program that had been dropped, number one; number two, some classrooms which is 6 of them in Gables Prep, which are not open. That's not really what we are discussing today, obviously it's an open forum to anyone that is interested in discussing in regards to public schools, we are here to listen, but I think that's something that you need to take up with the School Board, because the School Board is the one that makes those decisions. I can't tell you why they haven't opened 6 classrooms; I can't tell you why – I can't control why the Spanish program has been dropped or not. I can hopefully write a letter and advise on behalf of the interest of the residents and state that the residents are requesting that Spanish be continued, that's a different story. I think why we are here is what Commissioner Keon has stated is to discuss whether there is an appetite to mimic what the City of Key Biscayne did in reference to, what' the name of the school?- I apologize.

Mayor Cason: MAST.

Commissioner Lago: MAST Academy.

Commissioner Keon: Well, I think to maybe talk about that as an option, but just to talk about in general the fact that we need more seats for our elementary school age children and parents need to be able to know when they move into a neighborhood where their children are going to go to school. Pinecrest is zoned, so you put in your address and you go to Palmetto, Palmetto, Palmetto, or you go to Pinecrest, Palmetto, Palmetto. Pinecrest Elementary has 9, I was told 9 Kindergartens, is that right?- 9 Kindergartens, that's how many children go there.

Mayor Cason: Let's do this...

Commissioner Lago: Craig wanted to say something.

Commissioner Keon: I just want to make sure that we are in agreement as we go forward and begin this discussion. So I know Craig at this point would like to have Abby speak.

City Attorney Leen: Yes. Abby could you come up. Ultimately, as your legal advisor and I've asked Abby Corbit to be our Special Counsel, and again she's from Stearns Weaver. My concern is whenever I hear that the City of Coral Gables is being treated differently than everyone else; I want to get to the bottom of that. I want to review it and whether you have the authority to do something about it or not, that's an open question, we have to look at the law, but whether you do or not it is good to bring that into the open, so people understand exactly what's happening, and that's what I want to look into. It may be perfectly legitimate, but maybe the reason is not justified and that's why I've asked Abby to look into it.

Mayor Cason: It may have been historical...

Commissioner Quesada: But hold on a second. I just want to mention one other thing that I've been hearing from residents as well and that is there is a certain section so the vast majority of the Gables is in this choice program with these three schools. I don't know if that's the exact term for the program, but then there is one small sliver that is not part of that choice program and they are designated to Francis Tucker Elementary School, I'm sure you are aware of that, and I've had residents approach me because it's actually just south of Miracle Mile...

Commissioner Keon: In the Craft Section.

Commissioner Quesada:...In the Craft Section...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Commissioner Quesada: I live in the area so I hear a lot of concerns when we are walking around and that they want to be part of the choice group as well, they don't want to be designated to...

Commissioner Keon: They don't, they don't want to go to Tucker.

Commissioner Quesada: So I just wanted to echo some of the things that I've heard as well and that's why that math that I printed out, I showed in front of you just so you guys can see it, so everything in brown sort of towards the centered left of the document, anything in brown is the choice of the three schools. Anything in red is automatically to Francis Tucker, if you look at the vast majority of the City of Miami, there is a small sliver, which looks like Ponce Circle Park,

Hartnett Park, south of that is about four blocks that automatically that are going to the City of Miami school, so just to keep in mind.

Commissioner Keon: That's in the Craft Section.

Mayor Cason: Tell us why we are where we are today?

Ms. Abby Corbit: Sure. Good afternoon Mayor, members of the Commission. As Craig said, we are basically trying to get to the bottom of why Coral Gables residents are largely treated differently. As you said the line for controlled choice, it's also called controlled open enrollment is the other term for it, is not to these three schools, it's not determining for the lines of the City of Coral Gables so there are parts of these three schools controlled choice zone that's not in Coral Gables and as you said there is a small portion of Coral Gables that's not in these three, they go to Tucker, but for the most part there is a lot of overlap, I actually have to be one of the citizens that's in that overlap where I live in Coral Gables and I'm within controlled choice living two blocks from Sunset Elementary actually. So basically, what we are trying to do is find out, as you said Mayor, the historical explanation for why was controlled choice assigned to these three schools originally, and why even though other schools have been removed from controlled choice within the district in recent years, these three have not, and just try to learn what the School Board is thinking and start a discussion about that. A separate issue and as you see I drafted a separate public records request with regard to West Lab; West Lab is really a different question, it's treated as a district-wide magnet and that's the way, I believe, it's always been treated. The Deputy Superintendent was telling me earlier and she'd probably speak to this, that she believes that that's a requirement of an agreement, a deed agreement with the University of Miami, but that's the kind of document we hadn't seen yet and similar documents like that, that we want to look over and really evaluate the School Board's decision on assigning that. There are a couple of different options with magnet schools; they don't have to be district-wide. Some magnet schools within the County are district-wide, but then there is a boundary where 25 to 50 percent of students are given preference for geographical area around the school, so that's sort of the middle ground that's applied to some of these.

City Attorney Leen: For example, so if we learn that there is a deed requirement as the Deputy Superintendent indicated, we might be able to go to the University of Miami and the School Board and ask them to release that requirement, that's always a possibility, but we need to know that information and what the exact extent of the deed requirement is in order to be able to address a situation like that.

Commissioner Keon: Did you have more Abby?

Ms. Corbit: Craig, do you want me to talk about just how that process – basically the first step that we are talking as the public records request, we just want to review the documents, see what's in there and then reevaluate other options.

Mayor Cason: Can you address the historical question, because of segregation we were forced to, we didn't allow blacks, Jews, and Hispanics into our schools?- is that the reason?

Commissioner Keon: We originally – our Dade County came under a federal integration order in the 1970's, because we didn't willingly desegregate our schools, so we were forced to, they were forced to. At that time Sunset Elementary and Coral Gables Elementary were paired with Carver Elementary and children went to Kindergarten in their home school, either Coral Gables, Sunset, or Carver, and first and second grade they all went to Carver, and then at that time it was sixth grade; third through sixth grade they went back to their home schools. They went back to Sunset and they went back to Gables, and the only grades at Carver at that time, Carver Elementary were Kindergarten, first and second grade, that was the extent of the elementary school. My children were in school at that time and it was the parents that were just prior to my being there were the ones who really worked during the – to integrate these schools and kept their children in the school, and worked hard to maintain the quality of our public schools and kept our classrooms full. During that time Sunset was slated for closure because, or consideration for closure because the enrollment had dropped so precipitously at Sunset that, I think it was _____ Moss and there were a group of people associated with the different consulates that knew there was an appetite for the language schools with people coming in and out and that's when the international school came to Sunset Elementary was really to boost enrollment in that school, and obviously it has been exceedingly, exceedingly successful, but it has really diminished also the number of seats that are available for children in that area to go to school, because now there is only one, I mean they can apply through the lottery for the magnet school, but they are not guaranteed entrance into any of those programs and there is, I think, only one grade, there is one class per grade at Sunset for the – as part of our choice program. How many years ago was the court order lifted that the other court order was lifted?

Ms. Corbit: It was a few years ago.

Commissioner Keon: It was a few years ago the court order was lifted; we are no longer under federal oversight on integration but yet in Carver then went to...

City Attorney Leen: You have to realize once there – to make decisions based on race or a protected classification, you need it basically an order from a court because that's governed by the U.S. Constitution, you can generally not discriminate based on race or any of these other protected classes unless it's a remedial order in order to combat past discrimination. Now if that

order is no longer in effect, that is not a permissible basis to make decisions any longer. You should treat everyone equally based on race....

Mayor Cason: So the question is, are we being discriminated against in Coral Gables today?

Commissioner Keon: You know, I think the issue is, are we being as well served as we should? I don't know whether its discriminated against or not, it's really a matter of are the children that live in our community do they have high quality free public schools available to them, readily available to them in their neighborhood so their children can go to school?- that's what we are questioning.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, good afternoon, my name is Ireida Mendez-Cartya, I am Associate Superintendent for the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Grants Administration and Community Engagement. First, let me thank you for the opportunity to address you today regarding this matter. School Board of Miami-Dade is a countywide school district. The State of Florida pursuant to the Florida Constitution provides, there is one School Board per County. So there are no municipal schools, OK. Unlike perhaps where other people coming from other states that their state statutes or their Constitution may be silent, in Florida our Constitution provides that there is one School Board per County. Florida Law 1003.02 provides that the District School Boards are constitutionally and statutorily charged with the operation and control of public K through 12 education. Additionally, Florida Statutes 1001.41(6) provides that student school assignments are solely the discretion and rulemaking authority of the School Board as long as it does not discriminate against the constitutionally protected class defined as race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, disability, or marital status as defined by various state statutes. Furthermore, Florida State Statutes, actually there is State Statute 1002.31 regarding controlled choice with the Florida Legislature has and encourages school districts to have school choice in the State of Florida. As a matter of fact, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, we have 52 percent of our students in some choice program in or around throughout the county. We are proud to say that Coral Gables residents have access to high quality education. All three schools that are in that controlled choice program are "A" schools. The controlled choice is a result of many years ago the desegregation order and it still remains. The attendance boundary process is analyzed on an annual basis pursuant to School Board rule where there is a committee of members from the community; city's community members can come and request modification to the attendance boundaries for each of the schools.

Commissioner Quesada: And what's that committee called?- is there a specific name?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: The ABC Committee.

Commissioner Quesada: ABC Committee. Do you know when they meet?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: It should be meeting right now.

Commissioner Quesada: Today, right now at this moment.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Not today right now, but it's currently in process.

Commissioner Keon: And how do you notify people about them?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: There is a notification process as to when it takes place.

Commissioner Keon: But how would the general public know that they could be a part of the ABC Committee?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: There is a notice process. I will get to that detailed information as how that is sent out to the masses as it relates to the community.

Commissioner Keon: Can anyone be a member of that community?- or you have to be appointed?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: They are appointed by the School Board members...

Commissioner Keon: Right.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya:...but all those meetings are open to the public, they are all Sunshine meetings. OK. In addition, regarding West Lab, there is a deed restriction in place pursuant to the agreement that we entered into with the University of Miami. The warranty deed provides that attendance will be a voluntary rather than an area based because of the laboratory or experimental nature of the school. The school remains a lab school; it has not been modified in that respect. So any modifications that would be contemplated would have to go through a discussion with the University of Miami, hence when we had discussions and we've had numerous discussions. As you know, we have an education compact with the City since 2006, and we have been working collaboratively, and there is a myriad of things that we've been discussing through the education compact, none of it was West Lab.

Commissioner Lago: Can you do me a favor, sorry to interrupt you. Can you define what constitutes a lab school?

Commissioner Keon: Well, I think that that's an issue that they can easily settle with the University of Miami. I don't know that they use it any more for that purpose, I was told that they no longer use it for that purpose. So that's something that's very easily – their teachers used it as where they did their practice...

Commissioner Lago: It's kind of like a residency program.

Commissioner Keon: Yes, but it's our understanding that it's no longer used that way, but that can easily be clarified through the University of Miami and dealt with the University of Miami. I also want all of us to know and the public to know that I had asked the prior City Manager to begin a discussion with the school system about this issue because we've had so many people in the community speak to us about this issue and we feel that we would need to assist our residents in finding a solution to their problems or whatever; and so, we asked Fausto to join us as our lobbyist and he has a very good relationship with the school system, Pat Salerno asked Cindy Birdsill to meet with him also, and they have been meeting for almost a year now, I think, for almost a year, to their credit and are very grateful to them for it, so it's not that we are here to have an opportunity for us to speak about it together and it's not to in any way to say that it has not been a cooperative discussion, it's so that everybody on this Commission can weigh in because of the Sunshine Laws, but they had been meeting for about a year on the different issues and how can we resolve this; and what came was the contract in Key Biscayne – Key Biscayne paid to build the additional classroom space at MAST Academy that would allow every student on Key Biscayne to attend MAST Academy if they so choose to do so. So that model has been used in the school system so there was a discussion that possibly West Lab is due to be renovated and rebuilt in this year, right?- 2015?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: 2016-17 is when the...is done; in 15-16 will be commissioning the architects, so the discussion as to adding students station is pertinent because if we were going to have potentially a larger scale project that needs to be able to be done in conjunction with the project.

Commissioner Lago: As School Board Member Raquel Regalado mentioned at the last meeting, this is a very time sensitive decision that needs to be made....

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Right.

Commissioner Lago:...by this Commission and by the City in reference to whether we are going to move forward with what Commissioner Keon has been saying. Design and construction will probably take about a year and-a-half. The bond monies are going to be allocated to design a project which may not meet the needs or the policy decision of what this Commission is looking

forward to do, so we need to make sure that before you expand or spend any dollars in reference to design, we make those dollars count, because you may be designing today may not fit our needs for the future. We may say, OK, we are going to move forward in the direction of MAST.

Commissioner Keon: So what has come back from the school system?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Let me address West Lab, the proposal from West Lab, and the correlation with the Village of Key Biscayne. In 2012 Mayor Kaplan came to the School District because there was a desire from Village residents to not have to go off the Key should they chose for a high school choice option.

Commissioner Keon: And their high school at the time that they were districted for was Coral Gables High School.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Actually, Key Biscayne residents their boundary school continues to be Coral Gables Senior High. MAST Academy continues to be a choice program even for Key Biscayne students, so with that being said the Mayor and the Village committed \$10 million to build in essence an 1100-student station building that would house first and foremost Key residents.

Commissioner Lago: How many students per grade is that?- is it 22 or...

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: It's about 150...

Commissioner Lago: No, I was saying how many dedicated Key Biscayne residents 44?- or...?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: No, its 150 per grade level and it's the conceptual, it's a 6th through 12 program. The project with Key Biscayne is a 6th through 12 program; and 150 students per each of those grade levels.

Commissioner Keon: And Key Biscayne estimates that it essentially services any child that wants to attend a public school on Key Biscayne can go there, even though its choice, it's a choice program that has been designed to guarantee choice.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Correct. Obviously the contract language with Key Biscayne provides that they have first option if there are any available seats beyond that we do not want to have an empty building when there is demand, then we would allow students that perhaps did not get into the regular magnet and that's why there are so many similarities. The Board and the Superintendent did not want to dismantle historic, well performing, district-wide magnet

program to provide just for Village students, hence the partnership to add on and make MAST Academy larger and provide the opportunity a choice opportunity for Village residents to attend that school. So hence that was the proposal that was provided to City staff and we've been working through that through a numerous number of months. Other areas that we have been working on has been on providing temporary storage for the City's trolleys for a certain number of Village trolleys, so there is a myriad of things that the administration, and I know that your Interim Manager has also been in some of the meetings that we've been working through; there is a myriad of issues that the School District has been collaborating with and working with the City of Coral Gables and on behalf of the School Board, we and the Superintendent of Schools, we want to have and continue to have this collaborative relationship. Just a point of data points: 70 percent of the students last year, 70 percent of the students that attended Coral Gables K-8 center, were Coral Gables residents. Of the students that attended Sunset, 35 percent of the student body that attended Sunset Elementary last year was Coral Gables.

Commissioner Keon: Was that the magnet?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: The school – the entire school.

Commissioner Keon: I know, but ---

Commissioner Lago: But that's handled through a lottery, correct?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: That is correct. Its controlled choice; the parents provide Option 1, Option 2, and Option 3; and I believe Commissioner Quesada, you brought up the issue of additional classroom spaces available at Coral Gables K-8, I'm sorry, Commissioner Lago, that was brought up earlier and that is really a function of shifting the fifth grade over to the Merrick Center Campus and to provide more flexibility and space at the main campus.

Commissioner Lago: Let me explain to you why I brought that up, because up to yesterday evening at 8:30 at night I was receiving phone calls from parents in regards to today's meeting that one of the main concerns was the fact, again, we are not here to discuss choice in my opinion, we are here to discuss West Lab, was the issue of why are those six classrooms not open, and I didn't have an answer for them, to be honest with you. Listen, I need to drill down in regards to finding out what this issue is, but again, I recommend that they contact their School Board member and to discuss the issue with them; and they discussed with me on several points reference to the incredible facilities that are offered, the fact that we are not utilizing the six classrooms, the fact that the classrooms are retrofitted with smart boards, the fact that they are ready to go, they just can't figure out or they don't have the knowledge in reference to why these

classrooms are not open for students to use it. And again, at that point I didn't have an answer either.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Obviously you know there is a lot of shifting of the sand when the school starts; we have to make class size. We have analyzed the data, student data, and there are 16 kids on the waiting list for Coral Gables of which they will be contacted. However, in midstream, I as a parent, I wouldn't change my child midstream in the school year.

Commissioner Lago: How long have those six classrooms been open?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: I'd have to find that out.

Mayor Cason: I got another e-mail...

Commissioner Keon: Closed.

Commissioner Lago: Excuse me, I apologize, closed.

Mayor Cason: I got another e-mail from somebody asking why the Spanish programs is being eliminated?- is that correct?- and what's the answer for that at that school?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: OK. Spanish – it's truthful. OK. Spanish countywide, the School District is implementing EFL, Extended Foreign Language programs, so a certain cohort of kids per grade level, and it could be one, two, it could be three, it's a function of at that specific site how many teachers are linguistically qualified to teach Spanish. The concept of EFL is that when you are in science and you are taking a science course you are also learning the terminology in that language. The unfortunate part of our community, although and I'm part of this community, obviously and my name is Mendez-Cataya and I do speak Spanish, but I'm not linguistically qualified to teach Spanish and that is the challenge that takes place in our community. Just because teachers speak Spanish at home, they are not qualified to teach appropriately the language in a classroom; and we are having this conversation countywide with multiple municipalities. So the traditional Spanish teacher that has not been effective over time in producing linguistically qualified children, individuals that can speak Spanish, we have shifted our approach to EFL. The challenge is ensuring that we have sufficient number of EFL qualified teachers to do an effective delivery of that instruction. OK. As it relates perhaps to the middle schools, I really don't know in what grade levels these complaints came in. In the middle school it's an elective, Spanish is an elective, so it's a function of how many kids much like the college level, how many kids are actually enrolled in that course in order to justify from a budgetary

standpoint that allocation, teacher allocation. So I hope that answers your question as it relates to the Spanish teacher.

Commissioner Keon: When are children notified when you do the controlled choice and they fill out their application as to their 1, 2, 3 choice, when are they notified which school their child will go to?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Shortly before school starts.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. See it's not until summer that you actually know where your child is going to go to school, so what happens is because you are not assured a seat in the school, in your neighborhood or whatever, you then apply for public schools. I know for a long time there has been a discussion that Coral Gables has abandoned their public schools and I'll tell you that's not the fact, and I'm not saying that's coming from the school system, that is a comment that is often said, is that we don't send our children to public schools, that we tend to send our children to private schools, and one of the reasons for not sending the children to public schools is because you don't know where your child is going to go. My children all went to Coral Gables Elementary and my youngest son went to the international program at Sunset, and we could have sent those children to any school we wanted to send them to. They received an excellent education, an excellent education in our schools, and at the time that they went to those schools there weren't more than about 24-25 children at a max in their classes. It is a good school system that we need to make available to our children in a timely way so that parents know where their children are going to go to school. We know from the City's perspective that a lot of your property values and municipalities are largely affected by the schools in your neighborhoods and where your children go to school. It is one of the main factors with school age children in buying a home is where their children are going to go to school. We know from our Economic Development Department, Cindy Birdsill will tell you that when we have a very thriving downtown with a lot of headquarters and businesses here. When people move here and locate in Coral Gables either part of the attractiveness of this community is that you can live and work in the same community and so many of the people that are working downtown in these corporate headquarters live in our residential community as well, so when they are moving here they want to know about schools and where can their kids go to school; and we are looking at tuition rates now in the private schools for elementary schools, you are looking at \$20,000 a year to send a child to an elementary school. So when a company is going to move here and we want to create jobs and we want to attract businesses and we want that intellectual capacity to move into our communities, you know to say to them it's fine, but you also need to account for \$20,000 a year, you want to know where your child is going to go to school; and in the high schools it, I think it's between \$30,000 and \$35,000 a year now for high school, those are after tax dollars that you

are paying tuition. That is an exceedingly high burden to place on people that live in our City and I think it's why so many young people that would otherwise move here are moving to Pinecrest.

Mayor Cason: Let me ask you about West Lab. If it weren't for this legal agreement with the University of Miami, is there a way that it could be made a school for Coral Gables resident's preference?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: That would have to be discussions, but I think based on the experience of Key Biscayne, the Boards and our Superintendent's preference would be to have not destroy a current program that the community, that has been successful in our community for years, but to add on to it, which in itself will require some discussions with the University of Miami in order to effectuate.

Mayor Cason: Let me just point out. We pay – the Coral Gables residents right now pay \$98 million a year to the School Board, we have \$3,000 kids, we are paying \$31,000 a year of our taxes already to the School Board. The thought of adding another how much more to sort of buy space for Coral Gables residents, I think it's going to take, hit a lot of people in the wrong way. It seems to me that that school, we ought to find a way to make it available to Coral Gables residents, we are paying a tremendous amount of money. You can go to private school for less than \$31,000, that's what we are paying.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: I recognize that. The issue of being a donor City is a discussion that not only Coral Gables has, but City of Miami Beach, City of Key Biscayne, there are multiple cities in our own area, Miami-Dade County that are considered donor communities to education. As a matter of fact, Miami-Dade County as a County is a donor district to the State of Florida in supporting education statewide, and if you look at it at the national level the State of Florida is a donor state to the federal government as it relates services that we pay into and that we get back. So very common situation and there are magnet programs, you can't just look at the 3,000, is it just your 3,000 total globally?

Commissioner Lago: Let me tell you why – I'm happy that the Mayor brought those numbers up, because when you look at your paycheck at the end of the week, 40 percent of the tax dollars that you pay go toward the School Board, and I think it's around 40 or 39 percent, 41 percent, I apologize, that's a pretty significant portion. Right now my daughter goes to private school inside UM, so we are paying 41 percent of our taxes to go to private school, I mean to public schools, and then obviously we've got to pay for private school education. I would love nothing more like Commissioner Keon would be to send my daughter to West Lab. My brother-in-law went to West Lab, then obviously had to leave because he had to go to high school, he's in law school now, and he's a product of public school education. So we have a little bit of an issue.

One of the main issues that I encountered and it was interesting to see because I was unprepared to answer it when we walked door-to-door when we got elected was, not only where am I going to send my kids, not only I can't get my kids into the school, I have three kids and I send them all to three different schools. How are we going to address that issue? One of the gentlemen that told me that is a Baptist executive. He goes, I believe in public school education, but what do I do in regards to this issue? I don't see an answer right now in reference to our discussion.

Commissioner Keon: I don't think that there is an answer. I think it's a continued discussion.

Commissioner Lago: I think that we as a City, but we need to make a point to hopefully in the near future set some timelines, because as she had mentioned at the beginning of our discussion, the bond dollars are already dedicated in reference to the schools, so these projects are going to get done, the renovations at Coral Gables Senior High School, the renovations at West Lab, at Ponce, they are all going to get done, they've already been allocated. Why not take, I think its \$6 million that we have at West Lab allocated as per the bond dollars, and make sure that we use that to the best, the most fruitful use. How much is it?- was I wrong about that?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: The total allocation I'm not sure of, but we can't modify...

Commissioner Lago: I'm not saying modify.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: OK.

Commissioner Lago: What I'm saying is and this was discussed by the School Board member here on the dais, if the bond dollars are allocated for that school, if there is going to be something done, I mean obviously I'd rather push that design money in the correct manner, if you are going to design something completely different than what you have proposed, I think it's a waste of taxpayer dollars to spend the money.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: The time is now to have this discussion in order to be able to leverage, because the cost of making any modifications can be somewhat mitigated because there is going to be some bond, so you would be leveraging the bond dollars that are already appropriated for the renovations and some of that can do with the general common core areas that you would be building, so they go hand in hand; and let me just – I misspoke when I said just before school starts parents are notified, actually the lottery is done in May and June, what is notified right before school is those kids that chose not to attend, the parents that chose not to attend may advise the school so then we go on the waiting list and start calling other kids. So I just wanted to clarify that on the record.

Commissioner Keon: But still the initial notification of parents that have been accepted into the lottery is not until the summer.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: May or June.

Commissioner Keon: So it's really July. What I keep hearing from people is that it's almost July before I'm notified. And I wanted to say to you that we are all aware in our system of government taxes are not a fee for service, taxes are the shared cost of government. So yes, there may be some donors, there may be some receiving types or whatever, but what we really want to make sure of is that we are treated equally or in the same manner as every other municipality throughout our County. We want to know that no more poverty should ever be a barrier to attending a good school, neither should affluence. So that every child in every municipality is entitled to the same high quality public education as every other child, and they are entitled to know this, so I think one of the big issues we are dealing with here is, in addition to the number of seats, it is a decision by the school system to continue this model of choice when we really believe that a zone model is probably serve our community and our residents far better than the choice program that you have currently in place. So I think one of our questions to you is, our request to you is to, in going to a zone doesn't mean that its only children from the City of Coral Gables that are affected. We have a larger, do they still call them feeder patterns?- is that still what they are called?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Feeder patterns still exist.

Commissioner Keon: OK. And that's what the ABC, the boundary committees look at is, there is a feeder pattern and that feeder pattern may go outside of your municipal boundaries include other neighborhoods as well, and ours does. So I'm not only asking you this on just behalf of the children that live in Coral Gables, but for our feeder pattern, because these are the children that our children will go to school with, and so we are not asking for exclusivity with regard to this choice issue, it should be for all of our children, these are our neighbors, these are our children that our children will grow up with, either going to go to school with, it's going to play sports with, it's probably who they may chose a spouse partner sometime in their life, but you know what, if we want a good community our community doesn't end at our boundaries, it is for this whole area that you move away from this choice program and you go to a zone program like they have in Pinecrest, and like they have throughout the rest of the County, so that I would like you to discuss. I mean is that something – I'm asking you to agree with me.

Mayor Cason: Yes we agree...

Commissioner Quesada: Yes somewhat, but again I come back to the issue of – and I guess I have to take this up with the Attendance Boundary Committee, which I was looking actually at the next meeting is December 4th, which I will be at. Really what it comes down to is again, that sliver of those residents in the Craft Section instead of being pushed into that zone in the City of Miami; obviously it's based on the feeder patterns. I'm learning all this for the first time, so I'm going to look into the feeder patterns.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: There is a process, as I said the ABC process. I will relay the message, however there has to be formal communications so let me recommend that the City send a letter to the Superintendent requesting that the boundaries or the controlled choice as it relates to these three schools be looked at and be addressed, reviewed by the ABC process, which is the appropriate process; and I just want to make two final points or reiterate two final points. One, the Coral Gables residents have access to three high quality public education schools. All three schools in that controlled choice program are "A" schools, and we are very proud of that, OK, that's one; and two, we would like to continue the dialogue through the education compact from administration to administration and work on a process or an outcome that we both can be very proud of.

Commissioner Keon: I'm very happy to have our administration continue to meet with the administrative people from the school system and I know it's your preference that it not involve elected officials, but we as elected officials are giving direction to our administration as to what path they are going to go, and so in order to do that we have to meet here on this dais and be able to openly discuss this issue. So I would hope that the school system doesn't view that in any negative facet, because it's the only opportunity that we have to speak together and to allow our public to address us and everything else. Now I know there was the issue of the public records request and you know a public records request can be a very burdensome thing on a school system, and I think that we would like to talk to you as to if we can agree on the record that whatever documents we are requesting will be provided to you, to us by our attorney, then I don't know that we need to do a public records request that is a much arduous process.

Mayor Cason: Let me say that we tried to get some data on how many Coral Gables residents in a couple schools, we were stonewalled by the schools on public records request, which I thought was outrageous.

Commissioner Keon: Yes. We've had a hard time getting information.

City Attorney Leen: What we could do is we could take these and put these into e-mails to you, maybe less formal, more of a review than an investigation, more of a review of just what is the information.

Commissioner Keon: What would you prefer?

City Attorney Leen: We could e-mail you and maybe Walter Harvey and with the letter that you just suggested perhaps Abby could work with Carmen to put together a letter, could be from one of them requesting what you have asked, something like that, would that be OK?

Commissioner Keon: Yes. I mean on the record would you prefer to have it work that way than a public records request?

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: Either or, if it's done through a public information request we will comply with state statutes and provide. We have a compact and I know sometimes it may be time consuming and staff consuming, but we will comply.

Commissioner Keon: I know when we are going to the schools or looking at schools or talking to the schools they are very, very hesitant to talk to anybody, they don't really want to talk to anybody. So I mean I'd rather....

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: There is protocol between the principals and the district offices so that is why there is a liaison between the governmental entities and that would be my office.

Commissioner Keon: Right – but I think it's things like if you just say how many kids are in the school, it's like we can't tell you. We will hold off on our public records request, is that right?

City Attorney Leen: What I was thinking. I will send you, or Abby or I will send you and Walter Harvey, just an e-mail talking about what we discussed today and then we'll just tell you the information we would like, and then you tell us what you can do, and then we'll see how that goes.

Commissioner Quesada: I'm going to draft a letter that you requested and then I guess I'll share it with you and you can give your input.

City Attorney Leen: You can draft that letter but you we should probably seek the information.

Commissioner Quesada: Of course. Of course.

City Attorney Leen: So we'll go forward with that, but we'll do it in a less formal way.

Commissioner Keon: Right – and Commissioner Quesada, do you want to go the ABC meeting?- because if more of us end up there it may be an issue. It would have to be public notice, so I'd really rather just defer to you to do that and come back and talk to us.

Commissioner Quesada: What I'm going to try is summarize basically what I heard at the meeting today, put in the letter in a formal manner and obviously you guys will be communicating the informal matter.

Commissioner Keon: But if you are going to go to the meeting there is no need for all of us to go or any of us to go, so I'd rather that you go.

City Attorney Leen: We can notice it.

Commissioner Quesada: I think we should notice it because you and Commissioner Lago have more experience in this than I do.

Commissioner Keon: OK.

Commissioner Lago: I'd like to attend if possible.

Commissioner Quesada: We'll notify it as a public meeting.

Ms. Mendez-Cartya: It's a public meeting...

Commissioner Keon: We have to notify if more than one of us may be there.

City Attorney Leen: Commissioner Quesada, you would be fine if the Commission is OK with that, it would be fine for you to send the letter on behalf of the City, but I would recommend that you show it to the Manager, myself, and you are the one that would send it based on the Commission's...

Commissioner Keon: But I would like to see one from the City actually that's a consensus.

Commissioner Quesada: I was proposing from the City, I'm just going to summarize what we discussed at this meeting. If anyone who remembers it a little differently from what I'm saying just correct it based on what you thought of this meeting.

Commissioner Keon: Right – but I would like them to continue the discussion on....

Mayor Cason: West Lab and zoning. Alright – thank you, thank you very much.

Commissioner Quesada: Thank you so much.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you so much for being here, appreciate it. Thank you.

Mayor Cason: We have two speaker cards, if you still want to speak; we have discussed some of this. Aleida Martinez.

City Attorney Leen: So Commissioner Quesada is going to draft a letter, we are available to help you, you'll give it to us, we'll circulate it, it will come from the City, is that what we are going to do?

Commissioner Lago: Yes.

Commissioner Quesada: My only timeframe is, I would like to get it out this week considering the meeting, next week is almost a wash because of Thanksgiving.

City Attorney Leen: Then you and perhaps other Commissioners will be going to this meeting and we are going to publicly notice it.

Commissioner Quesada: Perfect. Thank you so much.

Commissioner Lago: Public speakers?

Mayor Cason: Carol Damian wanted to speak and Aleida Martinez Molina, if you still would like to speak, please come.

Ms. Damian: Hi my name is Carol Damian, I'm actually here on another matter, but I couldn't resist this anecdotally. I'm a resident of Coral Gables and last year my daughter with my two grandchildren left Coral Gables. Both my children went to Coral Gables Elementary and to Ponce, and when my grandchildren started to reach school age a few years ago, they started to apply to Coral Gables Elementary. When the first one couldn't get into preschool, Kindergarten, First Grade, they gave up and unfortunately he did tests to get into Sunset. When my granddaughter reached that age she had the same exact experience and so at the end of the day my two children grew up here, went to those schools, we've lived here 50 years, and one of the reasons that we value Coral Gables was the school system, and so when my daughter and her children left Astoria Avenue within walking distance of me to move next to Sunset I was broken-

hearted and I'm still furious. Although they are getting a very good education, they were lucky to get into Sunset, but still – so anecdotally I'm one of those people that were affected.

Commissioner Keon: You know my own children who went to these same schools and I've lived here for 40 years, my children moved to Pinecrest because they knew they would really have a choice because they could chose, they knew the school their kids would go to, or they could chose a private school, then it that sense it was a real choice.

Mayor Cason: Thank you Carol.

Commissioner Lago: Thank you Ms. Damian.

Ms. Martinez Molina: Good afternoon Mayor, Commissioners, and everybody else who is here. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak, my name is Aleida Martinez Molina, I'm a parent, I'm a 20-year resident of Coral Gables, my children are being raised here. I have two boys 12 and under, Abuelita and Abuelito live here in Coral Gables, Tios and Tias live here in Coral Gables, and we are very upset about the situation here. Frankly, we are one of the lucky ones; my kids got into Coral Gables Elementary, and one has graduated on and has gone to the IB program at Ponce, and the youngest one is a fourth grader and he's doing quite well. The reason I'm here today and like most other parents at Coral Gables Elementary, or Coral Gables Preparatory Academy, excuse me, we work and we are pretty busy people, but I just could not believe the fact that the City of Coral Gables was contemplating donating, I don't know what the term is, funding another what \$2-\$3-\$4 million dollars for the benefit of allowing our City's residents to be able to attend their City schools. I don't know what information the County has, but I'm at the school, I'm at Coral Gables Preparatory Academy and I can tell the school is under-enrolled, OK, that means that there are at least 120, as best as I can count, seats that are available in our "A" school, it's a lovely school with fabulous teachers, wonderful families, administrators, Ms. Mendiola who know the kids personally, they know them by name, I can't say enough wonderful things about this school and it is under-enrolled. It is not because folks don't want to go to Coral Gables Elementary or Coral Gables Preparatory Academy, it's because they can't get in. I'm several years out of the process, so I don't know exactly how it works, but folks there is capacity, OK. If Miami-Dade County Public Schools has monies allocated through bond projects to improve schools, makes schools bigger, better, that's wonderful, and the West Lab school perhaps they might need to, I would suggest work on their budget, OK, but again, Coral Gables has capacity and if anything Coral Gables Elementary because the enrollment is down needs funding in order to maintain the quality programs and basically the teachers for crying out loud. I have e-mailed some of the Commissioners and the Mayor about the Spanish situation, quite frankly that was the straw that broke the camel's back to realize this does not affect my children, mind you, my children are fortunate because they are a little older, but the younger kids

going to Coral Gables Preparatory Academy, as I understand it, will not be able to take Spanish, if they are gifted, excuse me. This EFL program, it is some time of extended foreign language, there are many, many competent Spanish teachers in Miami-Dade County, I'm sorry, I don't know how to say this, I don't buy into the argument...

Commissioner Keon: The Mayor can help you he is very diplomatic.

[Laughter]

Ms. Martinez Molina: Thank you. About as laughable as Miami-Dade County Public Schools phasing out Spanish is the comment that Miami-Dade County does not have sufficient qualified Spanish teachers to teach our children proper Spanish. Conceptually, I get what the story is, but I'm sorry I'm not buying it. I see it at my school and the EFL teachers, quite frankly, are not as qualified as the regular Spanish teachers, but hey that's my own empirical observation. Also, I'm at a loss as to this choice issue. I don't know who it's serving, perhaps other than academic or academia or the charter companies, because our kids simply cannot get in as Mrs. Damian pointed out. Our own experiences are that our families cannot get it. Comparisons to, and I'm going to jump from topic to topic or issue to issue, comparisons with Key Biscayne; Key Biscayne has never had a high school and I can understand why Mayor Kaplan would want the parents instead of just driving by and waving to a wonderful facility to which many of his constituents couldn't attend, it made sense what the School Board did visa vie Key Biscayne, and Key Biscayne also have a different tax base and they can afford it, that's wonderful, wonderful for them. Again, Coral Gables we have capacity, we have seats here, so I don't know what the answer is, I'm not an administrator, I'm not a politician, but this proposal to spend more of our City's monies on one particular school seems wrong to me.

Commissioner Keon: I don't think that that's a proposal yet. It's a discussion item.

Ms. Martinez Molina: Even a discussion to me is just – I really don't understand it and again, I thank you for giving me the opportunity and the only reason I'm here today is because we have tried to speak with the School Board and we get no responses from our representatives or the powers that be, so out of frustration we are taking your time for which we thank you.

Mayor Cason: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Keon: Can you leave us your name and contact information. We have created a database of about at least 100 people by now, at least 100 people.

Commissioner Lago: Commissioner, I had a long conversation with her last night over the phone...

Commissioner Keon: If you'll give it to Danette.

Commissioner Lago: I have her information.

Commissioner Keon: We have a database of at least 100 parents that have raised the same issue that we are trying to stay in touch with to at some point bring all of these people together to join us in this discussion once we have...

Commissioner Lago: Maybe we'll have potentially had a second Sunshine meeting like the one that Commissioner Keon...

Commissioner Keon: We'll have a town hall meeting or something where everybody can come forward and have this discussion. It was my understanding that the reason that the classrooms at Gables or Gables Academy were open was because they hadn't been able to accommodate the middle school component for that grade level and so...

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Motion...

Mayor Cason: Vice Mayor makes the motion, Commissioner Lago seconds it.

City Clerk

Commissioner Quesada: Yes

Commissioner Keon: Yes

Vice Mayor Kerdyk: Yes

Commissioner Lago: Yes

Mayor Cason: Yes

(Vote: 5-0)

Commissioner Keon: Fausto has really been coordinating the meetings between our City staff and the School Board administration and helping out...

[Note: Recording stopped at this point]

[End: 1:28:39 p.m.]