

School Community Relations Committee (SCRC) Meeting

Minutes

Date: December 19, 2025

Time: 8:30 AM

Location: Coral Gables- Police and Fire Building – 2151 Salzedo Street

A. CALL TO ORDER

B. ROLL CALL

- Winnie Chang -present
- Cecilia Slesnick -present
- Sandy Dimitris- *absent*
- Joshua Goodman –present
- Andy Gomez- present
- Mary Palacio-present
- Sharon Watson -*absent*
- Sam Joseph- present
- Miguel Vias- not present

C. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – November 14, 2025

All in favor of approving Minutes for meeting held on November 14, 2025

D. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Estelle Lockhart from Ponce Middle School, Advocacy Chair, as well as a proud parent at South Miami Middle. Also, part of the Education Committee for the Chambers.

- Developed a 1-page summary of each of the 11 schools highlighting important areas.
- Will discuss and provide additional details.

E. NEW BUSINESS

E.1 Miami-Dade County Public Schools Update (Facilitated by Mari Tere Rojas, School Board Chair)

- School Board Chair was not present at the meeting. However, Marlene was present via Zoom.

- Brief synopsis of meeting held on December 15 was a resolution, where Board Chair Rojas recognized the retirement of Miami-Dade County Public school's former Chief Communication Officer, Ms. Vivian Santiesteban-Pardo. She honored her many years of service and dedication. She leaves a lasting positive impact within the school's district.
- H-3: Chair Board Rojas designate January 2026 as National Mentoring Month in Miami-Dade County Public School. This is a yearly proffered item. She has a list of several National Mentoring monthly events that are recognized at the National level.
- On behalf of Board Chair Rojas, she extends warm wishes to all, happy holidays to all.

Board member Goodman commented:

- Grateful the Board Chair Rojas was present at the recent event held with Senator Calatayud.
- Regarding the School of Hope legislation referenced by Senator Calatayud, members of the school board, including Board Chair Rojas, acknowledged the item and its potential implications for the district. The board expressed an interest in better understanding how the legislation could impact traditional public schools, particularly in areas related to facilities use, co-location, funding, and local decision-making authority.

Doug Clark -office of intergovernmental affairs provided comments:

- H-4, item proffered by Board Member Geller and further mentioned by Doug. Board has acted with this item to prioritize the pursuit of statutory and rule amendments for both the Board of Education's rules and legislation. Action taken on this item is prioritize the pursuit of statutory and rule amendments for both the Board of Education's rule and the legislation. Continue meetings with legislative bodies and provide updates. Actively involved in all aspects of this legislation.
- Actively involved in all aspects of this legislation and discussed further details; also, currently tracking over 150 bills that have been filed.

Board member Joseph commented:

- Audits for School District Budget will be implemented as of next year; perhaps this stems from Schools of Hope. He referenced a recent quote: "school districts tend to be the largest wasters of taxpayers funds in the state" and it's up to the state to ensure money is being spent properly.
- Co-locations schools within the Gables will too be affected.

- Board member Slesnick further elaborated on the different categories of co-location schools' and emphasized the importance of educating stakeholders to ensure a clear understanding of how these schools are funded. Traditional public schools are funded by the state and local property taxes. Charter schools, however, operate within a more complex framework; while they are publicly funded, they are independently managed and often run by private, nonprofit organizations, receiving public funds and, in some cases, federal funding based on student enrollment. Additionally, it is further explained that private schools are primarily funded through tuition, private donations, and endowments, rather than public funding.
- Board member Goodman provided statistics for co-locations.
- Doug Clark elaborated on details related to the legislation regarding co-locations.
- Liaison Granell inquired if the SCRC has plans to further educate the children and parents via different community meetings.
- Chairperson Chang referenced various outreach efforts the SCRC has undertaken to engage the community, including hosting information tables at the farmer's market, literacy festival as well as holding town halls several times a year to connect with parents.
- Board member Joseph agreed that various events should continue throughout the year and emphasized the importance of calendaring these events to ensure their effectiveness.
- Board member Slesnick made suggestions on how to organize these events. Additional recommendations were discussed by additional board members.

E.2 Coral Gables Civics Education Project

- Social studies scores have decreased.
- Coral Gables should be more engaged and enthusiastic in Civics. It is important to strengthen civics education in schools while also exploring additional external methods. It is important to have as a municipality a more enhanced curriculum by bringing civics and social studies back into the classrooms by ensuring the city gets involved.
- Project Citizen was a good powerful curriculum that was implemented throughout the county.
- A nonprofit organization known as Kids Voting was established to educate children about the electoral process with the goal of increasing future voter turnout.
- It is important to have a minimum of three town halls a year.
- Need more people involved politically.

Chairperson Chang shared several proposed ideas and concepts:

- Consider the possibility of inviting students to the SCRC meeting or other similar entities at their respective schools or the event where Coral Gables honors the teachers for their accomplishments
- Bringing in local candidates to participate in a mock election, allowing students to engage in a simulated voting process.

Board member Joseph commented:

- Working with the clerk's office on a Family Voting initiative and through the mayor's office of Miami-Dade County where they will set up voting booths for children that will be manned by high school students.
- Also looking into the possibility of a shadow commission where the youth will engage in topics that are important to their community.

Board member Slesnick commented:

- Each family has their own moral compass.
- Youth Advisory Board: interested in knowing if there are additional advisory boards, communication is crucial.
- Engaging in society's concerns is important to the community. While political views may differ, respecting diverse perspectives is essential.

Board member Lam commented:

- Coral Gables Women's Club is having a Children's festival on February 7. This might be a good opportunity for the SCRC to have a booth.

E.3 K-12 Gables Area Public School Guide

Comments provided by Board Member Goodman:

- Presentation shared with the team titled Coral Gables: An Education Destination which highlights the 11 area public schools. Estelle Lockhart worked on putting together the presentation.
- A thorough comprehensive guide organized by Estelle Lockhart, such guide answers questions and concerns such as "what are the different kinds of schools?" etc., this can be distributed throughout the year, at schools and business.
- In next year's election, there are four elected officials- the school board member, two state senators, and the state representative who currently represent the Coral Gables area. All are seeking re-election, and none have declared opponents.

Estelle Lockhart commented:

- Reach out to Miami Lakes and other municipalities to have a better understanding of their programs at their respective schools.
- School's websites need extensive work with a few exceptions. Basic information is missing from some schools.
- Most of the information compiled for the presentation was by talking to individuals.

Chairperson Chang commented:

- Coral Gables Literacy Laureate – this item will be voted on during January.
- Several nominees were mentioned.

F. OLD BUSINESS

G. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ana Lam commented:

- Crystal Academy hosted Santa with the kids; fire truck brought Santa. Children had a wonderful time.
- Those interested in learning CPR for children, adults, and for pets, Ms. Lam will arrange it with the fire department. There is a fee associated with certification.

Mary Palacio commented:

- Will provide updates on disability board and will provide additional comments.

ADJOURNMENT

Next meeting: January 15, 2026. Draft additional dates for 2026 were agreed upon, members typically meet every third Friday of every month.

Meeting adjourned at: 10:15 am.