

***Board OKs ads on Palm Beach County school buses
By Marc Freeman, Education Writer, December 9 2004***

The promise of \$3 million is turning Palm Beach County school buses into advertising vehicles. Up to six commercial ads and two public service announcements will begin appearing next month on the interiors of the school district's 750 buses, under a five-year contract approved 5-1 by the School Board on Wednesday night. School Board Chairman Tom Lynch called it a "tremendous idea" to raise money for a district stung by \$90 million in budget shortfalls in recent years. Putnam County has had the ads since last year and Miami-Dade public schools approved them in October.

But board member Sandra Richmond says the deal sends the wrong message to students. "I'm opposed to the exploitation of children," she said. "They are a captive audience." Richmond said she may have warmed to the idea had the board embraced her proposal to use the ad funds for more bus driver training and "bonuses for safe driving." "We need to [specify the] money for school bus safety," Richmond said. "There's a time right now where we really need to focus on this."

There have been two major crashes in the past 30 days involving county school buses, including a Nov. 11 wreck in The Acreage that killed Royal Palm Beach student Diana Kautz. The School Board majority, which agreed to decide later how to spend the ad proceeds, also rejected another proposal by Richmond to allow parents to keep their kids off buses if they don't want them exposed to the ads. Under the contract with Miami-based School Bus Media Inc., a district committee will screen the ads before they are put up. For example, the district may ban ads for junk food because of child obesity concerns.

The board, with Debra Robinson absent, also decided to display the ads at its meetings so the public can get a glimpse. The company has said it would not sell ads for tobacco, alcohol or condoms. The district projects it will make \$198,618 on the sale of ads next year, based on a 25 percent cut of the overall ad sales. Revenues are estimated to soar to \$933,666 in 2009, the final year of the contract. The deal can be renewed twice for three-year periods. Ads might not stop with the insides of school buses. A controversial proposal to allow ads on the outside of school buses appears to be heading to the state Legislature next year. Florida law prohibits advertisements on the outside of school buses, so as not to distract other drivers. Only a few states permit ads on the exterior of school buses. National transportation officials warn the ads could create distractions and lead to accidents because the buses may no longer be as visible and recognizable to all motorists. The School Board became sold on the interior ads after running a trial program since July that placed public-service announcement placards called "buscals" inside 20 buses. In other business,

board member Paulette Burdick failed to gain support for her proposal to establish an "Indoor Air Quality" committee of teachers, parents, an American Lung Association representative and others. Burdick wanted the committee to review environmental policies and programs in the wake of complaints at Royal Palm School west of Lantana and other schools.

"This would give us the reassurances and safeguards for our teachers and our students," Burdick said. Lynch said district professionals were already on top of the issue and that au pour another committee is not necessary.

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