

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Board Member

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SUBJECT: WATER SAFETY CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION & TECHNOLOGY

LINK TO STRATEGIC

BLUEPRINT: RELEVANT, RIGOROUS AND INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is committed to the education, health, safety, and overall welfare of its students. In doing so, the District has consistently leveraged both its responsibility within its walls of learning and relationships throughout the community in ensuring student learning and equipping them with life-long critical thinking, decision-making, and life-long safety skills. Such learning and skill development have involved the provision of opportunities for students to not only learn to swim, but acquire critical life-long, and life-saving skills for water safety. In Miami, whose land mass is significantly surrounded by water, learning swimming and water safety skills can be the difference between life and death.

Sadly, the latter was felt in the recent heroic, yet tragic loss of one of M-DCPS' own promising students when 17-year-old Cristian Burgos drowned after rescuing a 9-year old boy and the boy's mother from drowning off Virginia Key Beach. A senior and soccer player at Booker T. Washington Senior High School, Burgos got caught in the strong rip currents as he rescued the mother and son, and after having to be pulled to the shore himself. The sting of death and tragedy would again befall a child and two youth in South Florida. Kendall Flowers, a 17-year old Miami Southridge Senior High School student died while swimming with a group of other teens in a lake after school. Petrona Coria Reimundo, another 17-year old, and 5-year Karla Morales Ruiz also drowned in Palm Beach County in an accident while swimming at the deep end of a pool. It appeared that neither victim could swim.

A recent Red Cross survey found that sixty-one percent of children, including more than half of all teens, were not "water competent" as measured by a child's ability to, in this order: step or jump into the water over their head; return to the surface and float or tread water for one minute; turn around in a full circle and find an exit; swim twenty-five yards to the exit; and exit from the water. Water competency extends to one's ability, if in a pool, be able to perform basic swim safety skills and is influenced by conditions in the aquatic environment, such as water temperature, movement, depth, clothing, and distance. As a result, skills demonstrated in one aquatic environment do not necessarily transfer to another.

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The survey found that nearly ninety-four percent of parents expect that their child will engage in some sort of water activity during the summer. In Miami-Dade, due to the weather, this number increases exponentially, as children have access and engage in some sort of water activity year round. However, nearly two-thirds or sixty-one percent of parents reported that their child could not demonstrate all five basic skills that could save their lives in the water. Of these, sixty-five percent were parents of children (ages 4-12) and fifty-one percent are parents of teens (ages 13-17).

Failure to provide appropriate and equitable water safety education has resulted in high numbers of drownings among children and youth between the ages of 4-17. A silent crisis in communities across the country, nearly 4,000 drowning deaths occur annually in the United States. In fact, every day in the United States, two children die from drowning and dozens more are hospitalized as a result of non-fatal drowning incidents. Unfortunately, in the last decade, more people have drowned in Florida than any other state (USA Swimming). In Florida, drowning is the:

- Number one cause of injury death for children between 1 and 9 years old.
- Second for children under 1 years old.
- Third for youth between 10 and 14 years old.

Sadly, drowning is a leading cause of injury death for people of all ages in the state of Florida.

Across the nation, drowning is the leading cause of unintentional death among children ages 1 to 4 and is the second leading cause of death for children ages 5 to 14, which especially impacts African American children who have a drowning rate significantly higher than that of whites across all ages, with the widest disparity among children 5 to 18 years old. Further, forty-five percent of Hispanic/Latino, and 40 percent of Caucasian children having little to no swimming skills. Additionally, between the years 2011-2016, drowning caused seventy-one percent of deaths of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who wandered or eloped from a safe setting. Despite aforementioned statistics, through proper education and training, as well as appropriate precautionary measures, drownings are preventable.

The Board has recognized the preventative benefits that education, information, training, and awareness have on teaching students how to swim and reducing drownings for children and youth in Miami-Dade County, and the value gained as they enter into adulthood throughout the course of their lives. For over four decades, M-DCPS has provided students with water safety and swimming instruction through various programs, partnerships, and initiatives such as the Learn to Swim Program. The Board has approved several agenda items addressing this important issue. At the School Board Meeting of June 16, 2010, School Board Member Dr. Larry Feldman successfully proffered School Board Agenda Item H-13 recognizing Miami Children's Hospital Summer Splash Safety and Drowning Prevention Day. At the School Board Meeting of July 16, 2014, School Board Member Dr. Marta Perez successfully proffered School Board Agenda Item H-6 promoting Water Safety, as well as an item promoting Water Safety Month at the May 16, 2018 School Board Meeting.

Presently, M-DCPS has an opportunity to strengthen its commitment to and resolve in providing swimming and water safety instruction. Through the adoption, development, and implementation of intentional, targeted curriculum and related strategies, M-DCPS can ensure that all students have access to learning that may ultimately save their lives. The provision of swimming and water safety education will provide students in M-DCPS to become “water competent” and the opportunity to attain their optimal level of understanding regarding issues of water safety through a carefully planned program of study. Through participation, students will acquire and develop requisite skills and a sense of knowledge and understanding that promote and encourage lifetime competence.

School Board Policy 2220-Courses of Study provides for a program of study pursuant to “State law and rules, Board policies, and District administrative directives and procedures.” Within this policy and related process, “*school staff and other personnel are encouraged to submit to the appropriate District curriculum specialist suggestions for improvement of specific courses of study and recommendations for courses or programs that may be added to the approved curriculum.*” Thus, this item contemplates both a recommendation for consideration of swimming and water safety instruction at the district level, as well as support for those that are being legislatively proposed in the Legislature.

This item has been reviewed by the Board Attorney’s Office 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 M-DCPS curriculum and programs that focus on the teaching and learning of swimming and water safety in grades PK-12;
2. research and identify best practices in the delivery of PK-12 swimming and water safety instruction;
3. determine the feasibility of adopting, revising, and/or developing PK-12 curriculum and programs that teaches awareness of activities that lead to drowning and/or symptoms of “dry drowning”, as well as swimming and water safety instruction;
4. seek both financial and programmatic partners to support the PK-12 swimming and water safety instruction;
5. amend the Board’s 2020 legislative platform to support the programs and the provision of funding for PK-12 swimming and water safety instruction; and
6. provide an update, inclusive of any policy, program, partnership, and curriculum recommendations to the School Board no later than the School Board Meeting of March 2020.

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