

Ms. Maria Teresa Rojas, Board Member

**SUBJECT:                               SPORTS PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**COMMITTEE:                       ACADEMICS,       INNOVATION,       EVALUATION       & TECHNOLOGY**

**LINK TO STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT:                       RELEVANT, RIGOROUS AND INNOVATIVE ACADEMICS**

For many of our students, playing a sport is a way to stay healthy, to socialize with their peers, or simply just to have fun. However, a parent of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), may have concerns about how a child's diagnosis may impact his or her capability to contribute and participate in sports activities. Autism creates specific challenges when it comes to sports, but it also opens up to some exciting opportunities.

Autism often goes along with lowered muscle tone and problems with coordination. As a result, autistic children may have a tougher time playing well. Most children with autism may have sensory challenges that make loud noise, bright lights, and temperature extremes difficult to handle.

Traditional team sports, like soccer and basketball, often are difficult for students with ASD. In addition to physical dexterity, they require somewhat developed verbal and non-verbal communication skills. For example, in soccer and basketball, players communicate during a game by verbally speaking with one another. Sometimes these messages are also communicated through hand gesture, eye glances, etc. Even young children on traditional sports team seem to pick up on these unspoken cues and perceive what they are supposed to be doing. However, these subtle communication skills may be difficult for a student diagnosed with ASD.

That is not to say that children with ASD cannot contribute and participate effectively in traditional sports. In fact, they do so quite successfully. Definitely, if an ASD student has an interest in participating in a traditional sports team, whether during school hours or after school, appropriate strategies may be developed to successfully guide him or her. Certain sports activities where each member of the team contributes individually may also be appropriate for an ASD student. Some examples are bowling, swimming, tennis, or gymnastics. Track, golf, and karate are also individual sports where while you may be part of a group, you participate as an individual. Furthermore, while traditional team sports may not be suitable for the student, there are other alternatives that can positively keep a child active and involved.

Therefore, this agenda item directs the Superintendent of Schools to provide the Board a report by January 31, 2020, outlining those sports activities and programs available for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, including potential collaborations with other municipalities and the County, any recommendations for possible enhancements in the delivery of activities and/or programs, during school hours or after.

This item has been reviewed and approved by the School Board Attorney's office as to form and legal sufficiency.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY**

**MS. MARIA TERESA ROJAS:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, direct the Superintendent of Schools to provide the Board a report by January 31, 2020, outlining those sport activities and programs available for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, including potential collaborations with other municipalities and the County, and any recommendations for possible enhancements in the delivery of activities and/or programs during school hours or after school.