

Dr. Steve Gallon III, Vice Chair

**SUBJECT: AMENDMENT TO SCHOOL BOARD POLICY 2431,
INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS**

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC

PLAN: SAFE, HEALTHY, & SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is committed to students' participation in interscholastic sports. In doing so, it recognizes athletics as a mainstay of school districts, schools, and more important, the learning and life experiences of students. In fact, research has shown that athletics, specifically at the high school level, provides a vehicle that improves students' citizenship, sportsmanship, self-discipline, physical and emotional wellness, and their grade point averages.

In the development, implementation, and enforcement of policies governing high school athletics, M-DCPS has worked with the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA), the governing body of high school athletics in the state of Florida. For nearly a century, the FHSAA – through the cooperative efforts of its member schools – has provided opportunities for high school students in Florida to participate on a fair and equitable basis in interscholastic athletic programs that produce vital educational benefits.

As with the FHSAA, M-DCPS remains committed to policies and practices that support and promote the same spirit of fair and equitable participation and competition. In fact, School Board Policy 2431, Interscholastic Athletics affirms that “All high schools shall be members of and governed by the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) rules and regulations.” This is reflected in School Board Policy despite the fact that Florida Statute 1006.20(1) states that “membership in the FHSAA is not mandatory for any school.”

There is a presupposition that public schools will be members of the FHSAA. In fact, this runs counter to Florida Statute 1006.20(1) which states that “the FHSAA may allow a public school the option to apply for consideration to join another athletic association.” Thus, School Board Policy 2431 which inherently mandates school membership in FHSAA does not align and in fact may even contravene Florida Statute.

M-DCPS' relationship with the FHSAA has been widely discussed in the past several years and subject to Board action. At the School Board Meeting of December 19, 2018, the Board unanimously approved School Board Agenda Item H-11 Revised as proposed by School Board Member Dr. Steve Gallon III which directed the Superintendent to review district schools' compliance and alignment with FHSAA by-laws and guidelines for classification of member schools, review and discuss findings with a Task Force comprised of principals, athletic directors, and coaches, as well as members of the District Athletic Advisory Committee and Greater Miami Athletic Conference, and provide guidance and direction to ensure appropriate alignment with School Board Policy and related guidelines stipulated in FHSAA.

These actions were followed by significant reclassification changes made by the FHSAA in alignment with those called for by the Board. A record seven high school football teams went to the Florida High School Athletic Association football championships and all seven returned home winners, capturing 7 out of 8 possible titles.

Additionally, at the School Board Meeting of February 12, 2020, the Board again unanimously approved School Board Agenda Item H-8 Revised. This item called for a review of the financial costs of schools' participation in FHSAA postseason competition and/or state championship series events, the revenue received from the FHSAA for participating in such events, and resulting deficits, that may result to a school for said participation. This item also called for communication with the FHSAA to explore and request verification from the Chief Auditor, where needed, a review of the existing revenue sharing criteria to address such deficits, where they may exist. Lastly, it also called for the Superintendent to make recommendations to the Board, where appropriate, on any changes to policy, participation, and/or 2020 legislative platform to ameliorate any and all financial deficits and/or inequities that may result in a school's participation in postseason competition and/or state championship series events.

The findings did in fact reveal that M-DCPS' schools' participation in FHSAA postseason competition and/or state championship series events posed financial liability to the schools and often resulted in financial deficits after participating.

In addition, in 2020, with onset of the pandemic, a further need to review M-DCPS' relationship with the FHSAA was raised as a result of their decision regarding schools' start day for fall sports in light of the COVID-19 pandemic which had broken records of confirmed cases in Florida--- which placed the state among the highest in the nation. Miami-Dade County would also lead the state in these numbers.

Despite FHSAA's obligation to consider the health, welfare, safety, and fair and equitable participation of students throughout the entire state, at its meeting of July 20, 2020, it voted 10-5 to "protect" and maintain its original fall sports calendar with a start date of July 27, 2020--a decision that would even go against the recommendations of its own established Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) which recommended an extension due to rise on COVID-19 cases in the southern part of the state.

This decision would give rise to concerns from school districts across the state such as those in South Florida and Central Florida as well as those in the Tampa Bay area, Southwest Florida, Duval County, Marion County and Northwest Florida counties Escambia, Santa Rosa and Leon.

In fact, a survey found that 359 of the 396 public schools in Florida had delayed the start of fall sports practices.

After the fallout of the original decision, the FHSAA would reverse course after tremendous protest from member schools and districts, and call an emergency meeting which would result in an 11-4 vote to extend the start date for fall sports. The initial decision of the of the FHSAA to not delay the start of fall sports resonates concerns regarding the potential and future role of the FHSAA in matters that would jeopardize the health, safety, and welfare of our students, and its ability to appropriately consider diverse and unique regional factors of school districts across the state.

Lastly, at its meeting of August 12, 2020, the School Board would vote unanimously to review the current relationship between M-DCPS and the FHSAA as it relates to competition, finance, revenue, and related operational impact that provides for the health, safety, and overall welfare of students; meet with FHSAA to review status of pending issues and requests approved by the Board that have not been responded to; contemplate partnerships with other school districts and/or corporations that may promote a more fair, equitable, safe, and beneficial program of activities or structure for interscholastic sports; work with legislators to review current statute and consider new or amended legislation regarding interscholastic sports in the state of Florida; contemplate and review the feasibility and legality of being a part of an existing and/or newly established association for interscholastic sports; and provide an update to the Board, inclusive of any and all short and/or long term recommendations regarding its relationship with the FHSAA and/or the future association of interscholastic sports in M-DCPS.

Recently, at its meeting of February 28, 2022, the FHSAA voted to establish a new classification system for football. This new system was established via a 9-7 vote, with many expressing concerns that the process was not clear, inclusive, and did not provide an ample time or opportunity for real, meaningful input. Subsequently, there was a resurrection for calls to allow schools to withdraw from the FHSAA. As districts and schools are not bound to membership in the FHSAA and should have an opportunity to review and consider such matters, School Board Policy 2431 should also be aligned.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to initiate rulemaking to amend School Board Policy 2431 to both align with Florida Statute 1006.20(1) stipulating that membership is not required, thereby enabling schools, in collaboration and consultation with the District to determine membership in the FHSAA by May 30, 2022.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. STEVE GALLON III:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, direct the Superintendent to initiate rulemaking to amend School Board Policy 2431, *Interscholastic Athletics* to both align with Florida Statute 1006.20(1) stipulating that membership is not required, thereby enabling schools, in collaboration and consultation with the District to determine membership FHSAA by May 30, 2022.