

Dr. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall, Board Member

SUBJECT: KEEPING ATHLETES COOL, SAFE, AND PERFORMANCE-READY IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

COMMITTEE: ACADEMICS, INNOVATION, EVALUATION, & TECHNOLOGY

LINK TO STRATEGIC

PLAN: INFORMED, ENGAGED, & EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS

Football players are exposed to intense physical exertion and frequently play in extreme weather conditions, including sweltering heat during the summer and early fall months. Such conditions can lead to heat-related illnesses and discomfort, which can affect the players' overall performance, concentration, and safety. Traditional football helmets, while essential for protection, offer limited ventilation and heat dissipation.

In recent years, we have witnessed the detrimental effects of extreme heat on our athletes during practice and games. As of June 1, 2021, there has been a statewide mandate pursuant to the "Zachary Martin Act," to require schools that participate in Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) activities to undergo training and dedicate resources for the effective monitoring of heat stress. The Act also requires schools to modify athletic activities based on heat stress and hydration guidelines and make cooling zones available in order to protect high school student-athletes from heat stroke and related illnesses. This legislation is especially noteworthy as its namesake because Zachary Martin was a football player for his high school team who collapsed after a four-hour practice in the heat of the summer. After spending a week in a coma, he succumbed to his injuries on July 10, 2017. Although Miami-Dade County Public Schools is dedicated to the reduction of heat-related illnesses, it should continue to explore the various options that will enhance our student-athlete's performance, while minimizing the possibility of exertional heat illnesses. As such, the use of air-conditioned football helmets should be evaluated and considered as a viable option.

The implementation of air-conditioned helmets offers a promising solution to address these challenges. Air-conditioned helmets incorporate innovative technology that provides a continuous flow of cool air to the player's head. This airflow helps in regulating body temperature and significantly reduces the risk of heat-related illnesses.

Air-conditioned helmets can help prevent heat exhaustion and heat strokes, which are serious health concerns for athletes. Maintaining optimal body temperature can lead to better physical and cognitive performance on the field. Players would also experience improved comfort and focus during practice and games, contributing to their overall well-being. This investment would not only be an investment in equipment but in the safety and performance of our student-athletes.

This item has been reviewed and approved as to form and legal sufficiency by the Office of the General Counsel.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. DOROTHY BENDROSS-MINDINGALL:**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, authorize the Superintendent to:

- 1) Explore the feasibility of providing athletic equipment such as air-conditioned helmets, with the purpose of preventing heat stroke and other heat-related ailments, and which may also serve to improve athletic performance among athletes during practices sessions and athletic events;
- 2) Provide an update on findings relative to the feasibility of providing such athletic equipment at the Academics, Innovation, Evaluation, and Technology Committee Meeting of January 2024.