

Dr. Steve Gallon, III, Board Member

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SUBJECT: REVIEW AND ENHANCEMENT OF MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETIC PROGRAMS

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. However, over the past decade, there has been increased focus on the importance and value of interscholastic sports at the middle school level.

Middle-school students experience significant developmental and cognitive change. Therefore, it is important for students to be active and feel that they are a valued part of their school and wider community--as it helps students develop and foster new friendships and discover their individual strengths. School sports are also a great way for middle schoolers to get involved and develop healthy habits, teamwork, confidence, time management, and a sense of belonging.

Further, interscholastic sports at the middle school level provides a great avenue for engagement and the cultivation of essential attributes that are crucial in not only school but also in life. Involvement in extracurricular activities, such as sports, holds importance for students of all ages, but for middle schoolers, it carries even greater significance.

Lastly, as it relates to student athletes' competition and exposure to college recruiters in middle school, it has become increasingly common for student-athletes to receive scholarship offers in middle school as early as the 8th grade. Coaches, trainers, and athletic directors at the middle school level have increasingly become an invaluable resource for college recruiters. Coaches who see young athletes' skills and work ethic up close may recommend standout

players to college scouts. A viable, successful, and supportive middle school interscholastic program is an integral part of this process.

School Board Policy 2431 -*Interscholastic Athletics*, reflects the commitment of the School Board, Superintendent, and district. However, as it relates to the interscholastic sports at the middle school and K-8 grade levels, there are opportunities to improve and strengthen the framework, investment, and support of sports for middle school students in M-DCPS. Currently, M-DCPS has 105 schools in its middle school athletic program. This includes 50 middle schools and 55 K-8 Centers. Sports offerings are divided into three seasons—Fall, Winter, and Spring. The sports that are currently available are Cross Country, Soccer, Volleyball, Swimming, Softball, Track and Field, Bowling, Wrestling, Flag Football, Basketball, Tennis, and Golf.

The expansion of private and non-traditional school choice options has also created increased competition as it relates to enrollment due to both their flexibility in athletic participation for middle school students and larger investments in middle school athletic programs. Such qualities and offerings often prove a valuable marketing and recruitment tool for such schools. For M-DCPS to compete in both the student enrollment and athletic competition space, a review of interscholastic programs for middle school students in M-DCPS should be conducted. For example, the amount allocated to support middle school athletic programs has remained unchanged since 2015. In addition to funding, there are other areas that may be reviewed to determine opportunities for improvement, restructuring, and systemization.

This item seeks to direct the Superintendent to conduct a comprehensive review of the middle school athletics program in M-DCPS; convene a working group of stakeholders for middle school sports including but not limited to district staff, principals, coaches, parents, and relevant community persons, and that may include high school and instructional staff as appropriate; review and analyze the allocation of funding for middle school interscholastic sports to determine current funding levels and school program deficiencies that are linked to inadequate funding; explore and secure partnerships, including but not limited to County, municipal, and other community partners, and adopt strategies to produce additional revenue to support enhancements to middle schools and K-8 interscholastic athletics programs develop a written plan and program to ensure continued and consistent review and solicit input from stakeholders for middle school sports on at least an annual basis, and prior to the commencement of fall sports for each succeeding school year; review applicable policies and procedures, including School Board Policy 2431, *Interscholastic Athletics*, and if appropriate, initiate rulemaking to amend applicable policies and procedures; and report back to the School Board no later than May 30, 2025.

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

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

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

1. conduct a comprehensive review of the middle school athletics program in M-DCPS;
2. convene a working group of stakeholders for middle school sports including but not limited to district staff, principals, coaches, parents, and relevant community persons, and that may include high school and instructional staff as appropriate;
3. review and analyze the allocation of funding for middle school interscholastic sports to determine current funding levels and school program challenges and deficiencies that may be linked to inadequate funding;
4. explore and secure partnerships, including but not limited to County, municipal, and other community partners, and adopt strategies to produce additional revenue to support enhancements to middle schools and K-8 interscholastic athletics programs;
5. develop a written plan and program to ensure continued and consistent review and solicit input from stakeholders for middle school sports on at least an annual basis, and prior to the commencement of Fall sports for each succeeding school year;
6. review applicable policies and procedures, including School Board Policy 2431, *Interscholastic Athletics*, and if appropriate, initiate rulemaking to amend applicable policies and procedures; and
7. report back to the School Board no later than May 30, 2025.