

Dr. Martin Karp, Board Member

**SUBJECT: GIVING THE WORLD OUR STUDENTS BY FURTHER
PROMOTING COMMUNITY SERVICE AND SERVICE
LEARNING IN THE ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE
SCHOOL GRADES**

**COMMITTEE: INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE & COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT**

**LINK TO DISTRICT INCREASE STUDENT EXPOSURE & UNDERSTANDING OF
STRATEGIC PLAN: GLOBAL ISSUES AND ECONOMY**

In today's world, we must not lose sight of the need to develop the whole child. We must play a greater role in helping our younger children to think beyond themselves by supporting volunteering and civic engagement at an early age. The purposes of this agenda item are to emphasize the importance of "action," establish community service requirements and support service-learning for younger students, research grant funding, and explore partnerships with organizations such as Hands On Miami, The League, and City Year.

In high school, students are required to participate in community service projects or complete service hours. While a number of service oriented clubs exist in some elementary, middle and K-8 schools, other schools may have few, if any, opportunities for children to volunteer. Like most educational experiences, the earlier students are introduced to something, the greater the likelihood of this having a more significant impact and becoming a part of a student's way of life. Therefore, this item seeks to introduce students at younger ages to engage in service to the community with a learning component.

Obstacles to further increasing community service at the lower grade levels have typically included transportation, costs, and limited time during the school day. However, enabling children to volunteer at an early age can be accomplished while avoiding these obstacles. One example is Operation Paperback where students collect used books in good condition and send them to American troops deployed overseas with thank you cards enclosed in the books. Students can combine their efforts with learning about where the troops are located and about the people and places they are helping, and how they are making our country a safer place. A second example is creating treat bags for residents of nursing homes and children in hospice care. A representative from the home can visit the classroom and expose children to the different opportunities to help the elderly.

A third example is Suitcases for Foster Children where suitcases are collected at school and picked up by an adult volunteer who is responsible for their distribution. Students can learn about children their age and how they are supported by agencies that care for them in the absence of their parents, and learn about the challenges these children face. Enclosed in the suitcases are letters of encouragement.

At a time when the State of Florida is ranked 49th in community service, and Miami-Dade County is ranked last among big cities in community service, creating and promoting volunteer opportunities for young people is essential.

Several volunteer programs for younger children currently exist including Kids Care Clubs, the Youth Involvement Program, Partnership in Character Development Program, and Service-Learning. Websites are available with ideas and implementation strategies. Developing a District webpage of activities could provide additional ideas for students and educators.

Having opportunities to be heard and to partner with adults in improving schools and communities can help young people master developmental tasks. Additionally, these opportunities can encourage youth to form stronger commitments to school and community and to act as agents of social change.

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
DR. MARTIN KARP:**

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

1. Explore a community service and/or service-learning requirement in elementary, middle and K-8 schools by convening a committee that will analyze the feasibility of infusing community service and service-learning within existing curriculum; and,
2. Research available grant funding to further support community service in our District; and,
3. After the conclusion of the Legislative Session, provide an update on the outcome of HB 157 and SB 450, which require the Department of Education to encourage service-learning and provide for department assistance to school districts that elect to implement service-learning activities; and
4. Recognize April 2009 as Florida Service-Learning Month