

MEMORANDUM

July 7, 2010

TO: The Honorable Chair and Members of The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

FROM: Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools *AMC*

SUBJECT: STAFF FOLLOW-UP: BOARD MEETING OF MARCH 25, 2009, AGENDA ITEM H-17, 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

At the School Board meeting of March 25, 2009, the Board approved Agenda Item H-17 proffered by School Board Member Dr. Martin S. Karp. Agenda Item H-17 directed the Superintendent to 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. As follow up, District staff is providing the Board with the attached report entitled, "The Feasibility of Providing Additional Community Service and/or Service-Learning Opportunities for Students in Grades K-8."

After reviewing the literature on community service and service learning and conferring with the Superintendent's Advisory Council on Service Learning, staff in the Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills convened a committee of teachers and principals on February 23, 2010, to explore the feasibility of providing additional community service/service-learning opportunities for students at elementary schools, K-8 Centers, and middle schools. Committee members discussed the following questions:

- Has community service/service-learning taken place at your school?
- What are the obstacles to implementing community service/service-learning?
- Where in the curriculum would community service/service-learning occur, making possible the infusion of community service/service-learning with targeted benchmarks for student learning?
- How can obstacles presently preventing the successful implementation of community service/service-learning be addressed, making additional service activities possible?

The committee's findings and recommendations are summarized in the attached report. Action on the committee's six recommendations will be taken by District staff, as appropriate and as funding permits.

For additional information regarding community service/service-learning or the attached report, contact Mr. John R. Doyle, Administrative Director, Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills, at 305-995-1982.

AMC:jrd
M1264

Attachment

cc: School Board Attorney
Superintendent's Cabinet
Mr. John R. Doyle
Dr. Mara Zapata

The Feasibility of Providing Additional Community Service and/or Service - Learning Opportunities for Students in Grades K-8

**A Report to The School Board of
Miami-Dade County, Florida**

June 2010

**Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Curriculum and Instruction**



THE SCHOOL BOARD OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

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The Feasibility of Providing Additional Community Service and/or Service-Learning Opportunities for Students in Grades K-8

Defining and Comparing Community Service and Service-Learning

Community service is defined as well-planned, organized efforts to address a specific need in the community. Meaningful community service projects are not one-time efforts, but instead require a commitment of time on the part of students. Community service projects should match the interests and abilities of the students. Additionally, community service projects most often do not have a direct link to the curriculum and classroom instruction. Activities that allow students to reflect on their service activities may or may not be utilized.

Service-learning is not synonymous to community service. Service-learning requires a broader view of service, one that connects classroom learning with the service being provided. Traditional and often isolated community service experiences may fail to connect classroom learning to the services students are performing.

The key components of service-learning, as emphasized in the National Standards for Service-learning, are:

- Link to the Curriculum – Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.
- Meaningful Service – Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.
- Youth Voice – Service-learning provides students with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences.
- Reflection – Service-learning incorporates multiple, challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about one's self and one's relationship to society.

Service-Learning Is Educationally Significant

A national study of Learn and Serve America programs suggests that effective service-learning programs help improve students' grades, improve students' attendance in school, and help students develop a stronger sense of personal and social responsibility.

A growing body of research recognizes service-learning as an effective strategy to help students by:

- Promoting learning through active participation in service experiences;
- Providing structured time for students to reflect by thinking, discussing, and writing about their service experience;
- Providing opportunities for students to use skills and knowledge in real-life situations;
- Extending learning beyond the classroom and into the community; and
- Fostering a sense of caring for others.

Service-learning also strengthens both education and the community by:

- Building effective, collaborative partnerships between schools and other institutions and organizations;
- Meeting community needs through the service projects conducted; and
- Providing engaging and productive opportunities for young people to work with others in their community.

In conclusion, both community service and service-learning activities provide excellent opportunities for students to perform needed services in the community. Service-learning provides the additional linkage between the classroom and the service experience.

Community Service and Service-Learning in Miami-Dade County Public Schools

A community service project has been required for graduation for all senior high school students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools since the 1996-1997 school year. Since the establishment of this requirement, many worthwhile and significant community service projects have been implemented by students throughout the community.

While recognizing the excellent service rendered by students across the District, advocates of service-learning suggest that a true service-learning approach be utilized by schools, whenever possible. Advocates of service-learning note that the service performed by students should be an extension of the students' classroom experiences, not merely isolated activities. Selected elementary, middle, and senior high schools in the District have embraced service-learning through the guidance of the Superintendent's Advisory Council on Service-learning coordinated by the Office of Community Services and the Partnership in Character Education grant coordinated by the Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills.

Since 2007, curriculum-based service-learning has been an important component of the Partnership in Character Education grant program implemented in a number of the District's elementary, middle, K-8 Centers, and senior high schools. The success of the character education grant and its service-learning component is evident by the four Promising Practice Awards received by the District in 2009 from the Character Education Partnership. Three of the Promising Practice Awards were presented to elementary schools, where service-learning has been effectively implemented.

The importance of students' service to the community continues to gain support in the District. On March 25, 2009, The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, approved item H-17 proffered by School Board Member Dr. Martin S. Karp directing the Superintendent to convene a committee to explore the feasibility of implementing community service and service-learning at elementary schools, K-8 Centers, and middle schools in the District.

The feasibility of expanding service activities was addressed at the January 14, 2010, meeting of the Superintendent's Advisory Council on Service-learning coordinated by the Office of Community Services. Following this exploratory meeting, the Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills convened a second committee to specifically explore the action items delineated in Board Item H-17.

The committee was primarily composed of principals and teachers. To promote discussion and a range of opinions, some committee members were selected because of their successful experiences in implementing community service/service-learning, while others were selected because they had little or no experience with school-based service activities.

Prior to the meeting, committee members were asked to consider the following questions:

- Has community service/service-learning taken place at your school?
- What are the obstacles to implementing community service/service-learning?
- Where in the curriculum would community service/service-learning occur, making possible the infusion of community service/service-learning with targeted benchmarks for student learning?
- How can obstacles presently preventing the successful implementation of community service/service-learning be addressed, making additional service activities possible?

Committee Findings

The committee met on February 23, 2010. The meeting agenda (Attachment A) and the members of the committee (Attachment B) are provided for your information.

It is important to note that the committee primarily focused its attention on the merits of the service-learning model, not on the community service model.

The meeting began with a presentation that stressed the concept and definition of service-learning supported by Learn and Serve America, a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service¹ and the National Youth Leadership Council.²

The remainder of the meeting was guided by the questions previously provided to committee members. A summary of the committee's major findings and recommendations follow.

1. Has community service/service-learning taken place at your school?

Committee members described a wide range of service projects that have been implemented in schools across the District. Most of the projects described fit the community service model, with a few projects serving as examples of service-learning since these activities were connected to classroom learning. In further discussing the concept of service, committee members noted that teachers and administrators often do not understand the concept of service-learning and how it differs from community service. The committee felt that a common definition of service-learning needed to be established by the District.

2. What are the obstacles to implementing community service/service-learning?

¹ The Corporation for National and Community Service is an independent federal agency created to connect Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and their nation.

² The National Youth Leadership Council is an organization that for more than 25 years has led a movement that links youth, educators, and communities to redefine the roles of young people in society. That movement is service-learning, and it empowers youth to transform themselves from recipients of information and resources into valuable, contributing members of a democracy.

The committee recognized the value of community service activities; however, the committee clearly preferred the service-learning model. The committee identified several obstacles to implementing a true service-learning model in the District, including the following:

Lack of understanding of service-learning, as opposed to community service

As previously noted, many teachers and administrators erroneously view community service as being synonymous to service-learning. Furthermore, with the many instructional pressures teachers face, they may not choose to embrace service-learning. If teachers do not understand service-learning reinforces classroom instruction, they may view it as an additional burden.

Administrative support needed for implementation

Teachers often report that they do not feel they can carry out service projects if they do not have the full support of the school's administration. If administrators or teachers do not understand that service-learning is an extension of curriculum and instruction, they may hesitate to support it, especially in light of the many pressures brought to bear on schools with high stakes testing and other accountability measures.

Funding for service-learning projects

For teachers who want to engage in service-learning projects that require students to leave school grounds, student transportation and field trip restrictions can become obstacles. Funding is also necessary for materials and activities associated with service projects.

Accountability Pressures

In light of high stakes testing and accountability, teachers and administrators may feel that implementing service-learning will interfere with the time scheduled for test preparation.

3. Where in the curriculum would community service/service-learning occur, making possible the infusion of community service/service-learning with targeted benchmarks for student learning?

The committee agreed that service activities need to begin in the elementary grades, preferably in kindergarten. At an early age, students need to learn to identify the issues and services needed in the school and community.

The committee agreed that the social studies benchmarks most strongly support the concept of community service/service-learning. However, they also noted that civic responsibility is not tied to one specific curricular area. Promoting a sense of responsibility throughout the curriculum would help students develop as caring, nurturing, and productive citizens in society. Finally, when discussing successful implementation and curricular infusion of community service/service-learning, the committee was adamant about the need for support

from the District, including having a staff member available to provide assistance with implementation.

4. How can obstacles presently preventing the successful implementation of community service/service-learning be addressed, making additional service activities possible?

The committee identified District support as the key to the successful implementation of community service/service-learning. They expressed a need to be kept aware of legislative concerns, organizational changes, and grant availability that would impact efforts to support service activities. Teachers feel it is important to have someone at the District level to oversee professional development and school-site support of community service/service-learning; preferably, this individual should be someone with classroom teaching experience and experience implementing service activities. Professional development for administrators was also cited as important.

Committee Recommendations

The following recommendations were provided by the committee at its meeting on February 23, 2010.

1. Both the community service and service-learning models provide excellent opportunities for students to perform needed services in the community. However, service-learning is the preferred delivery model for service projects and activities.
2. Curriculum-based service-learning at elementary schools, K-8 Centers, and middle schools should be encouraged, but not mandated. Service-learning is a teaching methodology that must be clearly understood, embraced, and internalized by the teachers utilizing it in their classrooms. To require service-learning would be counter-productive.
3. A District-wide definition of service-learning should be outlined and disseminated. The definition should clearly distinguish between service-learning and community service.
4. Professional development on service-learning should be provided for teachers and administrators in order to obtain “buy in” at both levels.
5. As funds become available, a District-level infrastructure should be created to provide schools with the support needed to implement service activities. This support should include a staff member who will: a). provide professional development for teachers and administrators; b.) assist schools with the identification of age-appropriate service activities; and c). provide school-site support for schools implementing service activities.
6. Grant funding should be sought to support the establishment of a District staff position to support community service/service-learning and to provide support for teachers and schools implementing service activities.

7. The District's leadership, including the School Board and Superintendent, should develop a statement of support for community service/service-learning which encourages schools and teachers to embrace and support service activities at all grade levels.

Submitted by:

Curriculum and Instruction, Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills

June 2010

Committee Meeting Agenda (Attachment A)

The Feasibility of Community Service/Service-learning at the Elementary and Middle School Grade Levels

February 23, 2010

Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills – Curriculum & Instruction

Agenda

- Brief Introductions

Who is here?

- Service-learning Presentation

Getting on the “same page” with our understanding of community service/service-learning

- Presentation of the School Board Item H-17
- Group Discussion

Guiding Questions:

1. Has community service/service-learning taken place at your school?
2. What are the obstacles to community service/service-learning?
3. Where in the curriculum would it occur, making possible the infusion of service projects along with learning?
4. How can those obstacles presently preventing service-learning be addressed to make it possible at your school?

Committee Members (Attachment B)

District

Dr. Mara Zapata, Instructional Support Specialist, Division of Social Sciences and Life Skills
Committee Chair

Miami Dade College

Joshua Young, Director, Center for Community Involvement

Fulford Elementary School

Erika Urbanik, Assistant Principal
Leah Cullins, Teacher
Nicole Potsane, Teacher

Charles R. Hadley Elementary School

Mary Menchero, Principal
Sandra Hernandez, Teacher
Yaumara Perez, Counselor

Springview Elementary School

Mayte Dovale, Principal
Alina Hermida, Teacher
Olga Siddons, Counselor
Jill Vizcaino, Teacher

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Elementary School

Rodolfo Rodriguez, Principal
Tangela Johnson-Miller, Teacher
Estrella Mellon, Teacher
Virginia Sanchez, Teacher

Miami Lakes Middle School

Joaquin Hernandez, Principal
Marly Hernandez-Bouza, Counselor
Eveles Villalobos, Teacher

MacArthur South – Young Men’s Preparatory Academy

Beatriz Herrmann, Community Liaison
Janis Klein-Young, Teacher

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION POLICY Federal and State Laws

The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida adheres to a policy of nondiscrimination in employment and educational programs/activities and strives affirmatively to provide equal opportunity for all as required by law:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended - prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, or national origin.

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 - prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender.

Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), as amended - prohibits discrimination on the basis of age with respect to individuals who are at least 40.

The Equal Pay Act of 1963, as amended - prohibits gender discrimination in payment of wages to women and men performing substantially equal work in the same establishment.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - prohibits discrimination against the disabled.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) - prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in employment, public service, public accommodations and telecommunications.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) - requires covered employers to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to “eligible” employees for certain family and medical reasons.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 - prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions.

Florida Educational Equity Act (FEEA) - prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, gender, national origin, marital status, or handicap against a student or employee.

Florida Civil Rights Act of 1992 - secures for all individuals within the state freedom from discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, handicap, or marital status.

Veterans are provided re-employment rights in accordance with P.L. 93-508 (Federal Law) and Section 295.07 (Florida Statutes), which stipulates categorical preferences for employment.

Revised 9/2008