

Mr. Roberto J. Alonso, Board Member

SUBJECT: RECOGNIZING AMERICAN HEART MONTH: EXPANDING PREVENTATIVE CARE THROUGH COMMUNITY HEALTH FAIRS

COMMITTEE: PERSONNEL, STUDENT, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN: INFORMED, ENGAGED, & EMPOWERED STAKEHOLDERS

February is recognized as Heart Health Month, a dedicated time to raise awareness about heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, heart disease claims one life every 34 seconds. Developing heart-healthy habits early in life, such as engaging in regular physical activity, managing stress, and scheduling routine medical check-ups, significantly reduces the risk of heart disease in adulthood.

Alarming, approximately 350,000 sudden cardiac deaths (SCD) occur annually in the United States, averaging nearly 1,000 deaths each day. Tragically, these statistics include individuals within our own community, including students in our district.

In 2022, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) launched the Cardiac Arrest Awareness Campaign to highlight the importance of recognizing and responding effectively to cardiac emergencies. Through a partnership with Nicklaus Children's Hospital's Project ADAM South Florida, all district schools have been certified as "Heart Safe" facilities. This designation reflects comprehensive efforts to safeguard students, including providing free electrocardiogram (EKG) screenings to over 13,000 students. These screenings aim to identify potential cardiac issues early, ultimately helping to save lives.

On June 22, 2023, School Board Member Roberto J. Alonso introduced Board Item H-8, emphasizing the importance of EKG screenings for student-athletes. These screenings are crucial for detecting heart abnormalities by analyzing the heart's electrical signals. This proactive initiative has already demonstrated its life-saving potential, as sudden cardiac arrest—a leading cause of death among athletes—can often be prevented through early detection and timely intervention.

Preventative heart care extends beyond screenings to include lifestyle modifications such as maintaining an active lifestyle, heart healthy nutrition, and managing blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Regular cardiovascular exercise strengthens the heart muscle and improves circulation, while stress management techniques, including mindfulness and relaxation exercises, contribute to overall heart health.

Community health fairs could amplify these efforts by offering free EKG screenings alongside other preventative measures, including blood pressure checks, cholesterol testing, heart healthy meal options, and educational workshops on heart health. By collaborating with local hospitals, Miami Dade College, and community organizations, these events would provide critical healthcare resources to students and families, fostering a culture of preventative care.

These health fairs would also offer educational sessions on recognizing early warning signs of heart disease, the importance of regular medical check-ups, and strategies for maintaining a heart-healthy lifestyle. By increasing access to preventative screenings and promoting heart health awareness, we can empower students and families to take proactive steps toward cardiovascular well-being.

This board item proposes that the Superintendent of Schools, in collaboration with the Office of Community Engagement and local healthcare providers, partner with community organizations to host health fairs centered around heart health awareness. These events should provide free EKG screenings for students and families, alongside other preventative health tests. Educational workshops would underscore the importance of proactive heart care and its critical role in reducing the risk of heart disease.

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

**ACTION PROPOSED BY
MR. ROBERTO J. ALONSO**

That The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, request that the Superintendent of Schools:

1. Explore a partnership and collaboration with local hospitals, Miami Dade College, and community organizations through the Office of Community Engagement, to host health fairs focused on heart health awareness and preventing heart disease. If feasible, these events should provide free EKG screenings, access to cardiologists, endocrinologists, dental and vision services, and other preventive healthcare resources for students and families. Educational workshops should also be included to emphasize the importance of heart-healthy eating and its role in preventing heart disease.
2. Explore a partnership with Miami Dade College Medical Campus to involve medical students from the nursing, vision, and dental programs in providing free preventative healthcare services to students and their families. This partnership should allow for expanded preventative health services at no cost to students and families at Miami Dade College campuses in the North, Central, and South regions.
3. If deemed feasible, present recommendations for hosting these health fairs including potential timelines, required resources, and community partnerships along with a detailed plan of action for activities and workshops at the Personnel, Student, School & Community Support Committee Meeting on March 12, 2025.