**Blue Scholars Initiative**

**Fact Sheet**

**Description**

Blue Scholars Initiative is a Miami, Florida-based registered 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to engage, educate and empower public school fourth-graders through hands-on and virtual marine science education, with a focus on Miami’s iconic Biscayne Bay. Founded in 2019, Blue Scholars is a free environmental education program serving youth from participating Miami-area Title 1 schools and community-based organizations who might otherwise never have the chance to connect with the marine environment.

Blue Scholars engages students in marine biology, ecology and watershed concepts, providing a better understanding of, and connection to, the marine ecosystem and the impacts caused by humans. In the classroom, along the shoreline and from boats, students investigate the rich biodiversity of the ocean, conduct citizen science and develop a passion for the environment, inspiring our next generation of ocean stewards.

The organization also offers programs for the public through regular community-based beach cleanups, tree plantings, fundraisers and special events, often partnering with other local non-profit organizations.

Blue Scholars was co-founded in 2019 by two South Florida natives and longtime advocates for the marine environment: Adam Steckley and Doug Brown.

For more information, please visit: [www.bluescholars.org](http://www.bluescholars.org)

**Schools & CBOs being served by Blue Scholars Initiative**

Schools and CBOs being served by Blue Scholars include Meadowlane Elementary, Palm Lake Elementary, Leewood K-8 Center, Dr. William A. Chapman Elementary, Henry S. West Laboratory School, Miami Beach South Pointe Elementary, Overtown Youth Center, Overtown Optimist Club, Breakthrough Miami and The Home Team.

**Educational Programs**

During the pandemic, Blue Scholars Initiative has offered daily virtual marine science education to fourth- and fifth-graders in 45-minute lessons, which are aligned to the State of Florida’s Next Generation Sunshine State Standards for Science. In addition, Blue Scholars’ social media platforms and website provide weekly educational information for virtual learning.

Prior to the pandemic (and soon to begin again) Blue Scholars took students aboard large pontoon vessels from marinas in the north, central and south Biscayne Bay to study the marine environment up close. These hands-on trips enable students to examine mangrove forests and seagrass meadows, watch pelicans diving for fish, dolphins and sea turtles surfacing for air, and eagle rays gliding through quiet shallows.

The children actively participate in discussions about the flora and fauna of Biscayne Bay, the marine food chain, photosynthesis and the importance of the nurseries provided by mangroves and seagrass. Species are identified and recorded by the excited budding marine scientists for further discussion. Climate change and sea level rise are discussed, and students learn of the importance of water quality in sustaining marine life. The children take water samples to measure temperature, pH, salinity, dissolved oxygen and turbidity.

Miami’s downtown skyline serves as a backdrop to every lesson on the water, ever reminding students of the influences of human development and resulting pressure on the marine environment.

**Public Programs**

Blue Scholars Initiative hosts a number of public programs and events throughout the year in concert with other non-profit organizations focused on protecting the environment and marine education. These include beach cleanups, tree plantings and awareness events which shine the spotlight on the importance of protecting the ocean.

**12 Days of Biscayne Bay** - Each December, Blue Scholars launches The 12 Days of Biscayne Bay to highlight hands-on actions that individuals, families, neighbors and communities can take to support Biscayne Bay and its surrounding watershed. Video presentations cover topics such as being a more conscious consumer, rewilding the landscape, organizing cleanups and letter-writing campaigns, and avoiding single-use plastics and reducing fertilizer and pesticide usage.

**8 Days of World Oceans** – From June 1-8, 2021, Blue Scholars will host The 8 Days of World Oceans in collaboration with ocean-based organizations around the world. Each day, regional experts will focus on a specific ocean of the world and address the major environmental issues and solutions needed. Together with the presenting organizations, Blue Scholars will broadcast daily messaging through social media posts, e-newsletters, web blogs and publicity to advocate for the oceans and inspire a global audience to take action.

The week will culminate on June 8th, World Oceans Day, with messaging from Blue Scholars Initiative and a montage of the seven previous days of video presentations. An online “Pledge the Ocean” form will be used over the course of the campaign with one act submitted by each presenter.

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