

## New program will welcome students into local government

By [Eric Horchy](#) | The Suncoast News

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Set to launch next month, a new program at J.W. Mitchell and Gulf high schools will attempt to give participating students a glimpse into what it takes to develop themselves into the leaders of tomorrow.

The Leadership Corps is an academic program that plans to guide students on three tiers: Leadership Principles, Community Leadership and Global Leadership.

"The idea behind this program was to give kids not just an opportunity to hold an office, such as they do now with clubs, but to really learn what it takes to be a leader, understand what it is to be a leader and to find out what's needed," said Tiffany Bericko, a teacher at Mitchell and an organizer of the program.

Bericko, fellow instructor Vickie Dillon and Assistant Principal Fatima Delio spoke to the New Port Richey City Council during its work session last week regarding the school's plans for the Leadership Corps and also the role city government will play, as well.

Encompassed in the Community Leadership tier will be the creation of a Mayor's Youth Council.

New Port Richey Mayor Scott McPherson, who was approached this fall about the possible interaction of the program and city, said the relationship will be a good "two-way street" for local government and high school students to connect.

"I consider it to be a link between local governments and these students. As a council we can learn some of the primary concerns of today's youth and from our end we can help them by teaching about local government and the various departments involved with running the city."

While the city's set role is still to be polished and agreed upon, McPherson is proposing that City Council meet with the youth council representatives every other month and put them on regular council agendas. That could lead to a more direct student involvement for voicing feedback to city council on issues that concern them, he said.

"Our main goal for the youth council to give our students a voice to be heard and to give them some experience in local government," Dillon said the council work session.

Along with their direct interaction with city council, participants will be partaking in other service projects around the community such as clean ups, beautification efforts and other volunteer projects.

Also addressing council last week was Gulf High teacher Lizzette Nazario. Since Gulf is the one high school within New Port Richey's official city limits, McPherson was interested in having the school participate.

Nazario said that while Gulf's late start puts it behind Mitchell's progress, organizers are excited for the opportunity to continue the program's development.

Beyond the local government aspect, Fatima said, the program's Global Leadership tier will offer students unique opportunities to broaden horizons outside their normal scope.

Activities may include a Global Partnership Project with Sweden and participation in the Model UN.

"The goal is to have well-rounded students come out with not only a diploma, but a portfolio rich with experiences," Fatima said. "True service learning experiences they can move forward with in life."

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