

The League of Women Voters of Manatee County Education Issues Committee observes the **School Board of Manatee County** meetings for items of interest to citizens and to the League, and notes adherence, or lack of adherence, to good governance procedures and the Sunshine Law. The League also provides feedback to school board members.

Following are the major points from the **School Board Meeting on 3/19/2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 10:00 a.m. Ms. Messenger read the District's Vision then introduced Michael Hartman, Volunteer, who gave the invocation. Chair Choate led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Recognitions

March is School Social Worker's Month. Mr. Barber introduced the Lead Social Worker, Valerie Morrison, who described the work of the thirty-one School Social Workers divided among all of the schools in the district. Two colleagues provided poignant examples of the work of school social workers and made a plea to the School Board to increase support so that every school has a full-time social worker.

Public Comments

ML presented nominations for naming the field at Balvanz Stadium at Bayshore High School including Mr. Plaster and Mr. Green.

Reports and Presentations Summer Programs and Professional Learning Updates

Mr. Jensen, Deputy Superintendent for Instructional Services, introduced Alison Nichols, Director of Elementary Curriculum, and Shannon Fleming, Director of Secondary Curriculum, who reviewed all of the state mandated summer programs and the enrichment programs provided by the school district during the summer. These include summer reading camps, a migrant summer camp, a Title I camp, Guy Harvey Summer camps, SmARTen Up Camp, Summer Bridge opportunities, Camp Creator, Visual and Performing Arts Camp, and Drivers Education. Summer Professional Learning opportunities include a Leadership Conference, New Educator Orientation, and School Improvement Learning Week.

Consent Items - 23 items passed 5-0.

New Business: (Non-Consent Items)

Approval of the Budget Amendments for January 2024. Passed 5-0.

Approval of Advertising a Notice of Intent to Amend School Board Policies, to Include New Policies, and Setting a Public Hearing at the Board Meeting on April 23, 2024. These policies will be reviewed at the Board Workshop on Thursday, March 20, 2024. Passed 5-0

Revisions of Job Descriptions of Non-Degreed Teachers of Career Programs (No Financial Impact) This is an update to align with state requirements for those with industry experience to work with students. Passed 5-0.

School Board of Manatee County Resolution 2024-002 (General Fund). This is a resolution directing the Board of Manatee County Commissioners to place a referendum on the November 5, 2024, ballot that reads:

CONTINUED FUNDING FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH RENEWAL OF AD VALOREM MILLAGE REFERENDUM

Shall the School Board of Manatee County continue the current 1 mill ad valorem millage from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2029, for: school safety and security; recruiting and retaining teachers and staff; student achievement through more instructional time and supports; early literacy programs; career and technical education; STEM, visual and performing arts, athletics; and public charter schools; with oversight by an independent citizen committee to ensure proper use of funds?

___YES, for continuation

___NO, against continuation

Individual board members raised concerns about the scope of the referendum language, e.g. the definition of early literacy, whether to include athletics, whether to consider .75 mil, however they reached consensus and voted unanimously to support the referendum as stated above. Passed 5-0.

New Business (No Superintendent Recommendation)

Approval to Renew the Professional Services Contract with Cherry Bekaert, LLP to Provide Financial Auditing Services and Accounting Services of Fiscal Year 2023-2024, SDMC No.

20-0102-R, estimated in the Amount of \$175,800.00 (General Fund) This is the last year of a five- year contract. Passed 5-0.

Approval of Travel Expense Associated with the School Board Members' Attendance at the Florida School Boards Association (FSBA) School Finance 2.0 & More Forum, April 1-14, 2024, at the Hilton, University of Florida Conference Center, Gainesville, FL., Not to Exceed \$3,000.00 (General Fund) Passed 5-0

Updates

Instruction – Deputy Superintendent Jensen indicated that the 30-day objection period closed for the new social studies adopted materials and these will be purchased, curriculum written and professional development provided in preparation of using these materials in the next school year. The K-12 science adoption process is now underway. He announced the April 5th Arts Alive event at State College of Florida and the April 11th Manatee County Arts display at Art Center Manatee through April 26th. Current high school juniors are invited to Manatee Technical College on April 4th to receive tips for preparing for their senior year and beyond.

Operations – Deputy Superintendent Ranaldi announced an Operations Job Fair from 9-1 on April 4th; the Florida Teach-In on April 13th from 9-4; and Teacher and Para Job Fair on April 20th from 9-12 at MTC. Currently there are 97 drivers for nearly 100% coverage. The use of four electric buses is being piloted. The Drivers Choice Attendance Grants are going well. March 4-8th is National School Breakfast Week. He pointed out that on the consent agenda, Reggie Goff has been named interim Director of Construction Services, replacing Bill Horton who is retiring. He acknowledged all of the Certificates of Participation (COPS) projects are up and running for 2023-24.

Legal – Mr. Dye acknowledged the end of the legislative session and will plan reviews over the next months. While he is on vacation for two weeks, his law partners will be available on his behalf.

Superintendent Remarks – Dr. Wysong thanked the board for their unanimous support of the millage resolution. He reminded everyone that because of the Sunshine law, neither he nor staff can be a conduit between or among the board members. Among the consent items there were instructional purchases for elementary robotics, patient simulators, innovation through imagination. He thanked Mr. Horton for his service and expressed his confidence in Mr. Goff to have the new schools ready for August 2025. There are five more media renovations approved as well as a statewide mutual aid agreement with other parts of the state during emergencies. The Thursday workshop will be on policies then turn to operational presentations in preparation for the 2024-25 school. Three school board properties are on the upcoming Manatee Board of County Commission's Land Use Meeting agenda.

Board Comments

Ms. Foreman congratulated Mr. Goff and thanked Mr. Horton. She noted on the consent agenda there is an opportunity for two students to get a prepaid scholarship when the school district sends out information about the program. She wished everyone a restful and happy Spring Break.

Ms. Messenger thanked Mr. Horton for his service and Mr. Goff for his willingness to step in. She said she is proud of this board and proud to be a part of it.

Mr. Tatem said the JROTC ball was encouraging. He reminded everyone that “we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers” and stressed Safety Over Secrets. He encouraged everyone to vote and reminded that you must re-register to vote by mail. He made a statement about where to drop off mail in ballots. He promised the district is keeping an eye on charter schools that are struggling financially. He also thanked Mr. Horton and congratulated Mr. Goff.

Ms. Spray added her thanks to Mr. Horton and expressed her confidence in Mr. Goff. She reminded all of the dedication of retirees and expressed gratitude for their service. She said she is busy going to tennis matches and a lot is going on after school. She reinforced Safety Over Secrets and acknowledged the young man who was shot recently.

Mr. Choate thanked the staff for putting all of the agenda items together, especially the consent items. He also thanked Mr. Horton for his service. He expressed his gratitude for being included on Dr. Wysong’s visits to schools and enjoyed hearing the responses to the questions the superintendent asks. He asked everyone to be safe and smart during Spring Break.

Meeting adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

In regard to instructing citizens on voting, Mr. Tatem needs to give accurate and complete information. As a person of authority, his constituents will accept what is said as correct, therefore his information must be correct. What he stated was misleading about what to do with mail in ballots (VBM) on election day. [LWV note: Per the Manatee County Supervisor of Elections website – If you received a vote by mail ballot for the election, but decided instead to vote in person, you may surrender your VBM ballot at the polling place. A poll worker will cancel the VBM ballot and issue you a regular ballot. You may NOT drop off a vote by mail ballot at the precinct on election day to be counted. You must drop off your VBM ballot at the Supervisor of Elections Office on election day. For complete information go to <https://www.votemanatee.com/Vote-By-Mail-Early-Voting/About-Vote-By-Mail>]

When considering a change in the title of the millage referendum ballot language, it would have been helpful to show to the viewing audience, the screen that could be seen in the chamber. We suggest that when references are made to information on the chamber

overhead screens during deliberation, that they be made available to the viewing audience as well as is done during formal reports and presentations.

We commend Chair Choate's diplomatic redirection of a fellow board member when their comments wandered off topic.

We appreciated Ms. Messenger's suggestions to the chair to break up the multiple aspects of changes to the referendum resolution item into separate motions.

Ms. Spray's question about athletic camp opportunities during an academic presentation seemed misplaced, and she will benefit from asking what information is provided through the Peachjar for parent notifications about a multitude of summer opportunities including athletic camps.

Mr. Tatem is observed to have a habit of repeating or restating his thoughts at least twice, and often three times during his presentations. This unnecessarily prolongs the meetings.

We thank Mr. Tatem for the inclusion of "sisters" as he referenced the ROTC ball.

We agree with Ms. Foreman that the topics and dates of the upcoming School Board Workshops should be posted as well as stated during the board meetings.

This report is sent to the members of the School Board of Manatee County, as it has been since LWV observations began, and to League of Women Voters of Manatee County members, and subscribers to our mailing list. This report is published by The Bradenton Times.

School Board of Manatee County meetings are typically held on the second Tuesday at 10 AM, and on the fourth Tuesday at 5 PM. Meetings are live streamed on Manatee Schools TV, and can be viewed on local cable including Spectrum Channel 646 and Frontier Channel 39. Meetings can also be streamed on the School District of Manatee County App, available for Apple TV, Roku, and Amazon Fire TV devices.