

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 May 14, 2024**.

### **ITEMS OF INTEREST**

The meeting began at 10:01 a.m. Chair Choate read the district mission statement and introduced Mr. Nelson, minister at Young Life Manatee County and Chaplain for the Manatee High School football team to give the invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance followed.

**Student Celebrations:** Mr. Barber, Executive Director of Communications, introduced the Math Superstars Program which has been funded by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) since its inception. Allison Nicholas, Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction, celebrated the 2024 Elementary Math Superstars. Teams from thirty-two schools competed in the annual competition. Liam Durbal and Jude Polhamus, both 5th grade students at Gullett Elementary, took first place with a perfect score. Other 2024 Math Superstars Final Results include: tied for 2nd Place Freedom Elementary and McNeal Elementary; 3rd Place Anna Maria Elementary; and tied for 4th Place Bayshore Elementary and Willis Elementary. Following a short video of the program, Todd Richardson, Principal of Gullett Elementary, was presented the trophy and praised the teachers and students; he was honored to receive the trophy for first place.

**Recognitions:** Mr. Barber explained a new program which was created to recognize staff members. During Teacher Appreciation Week last week, 16 employees were celebrated for having 40 years or more with Manatee County: Linda Carnes and Pat Barber had 50 years, Edward Hobbs, Jason Brinson, Bernitha Washington, Melvin Wilson, Noah Frantz, Barbara Stacho, Linda Agresta, Willie Lowry, Dr. Debra Shannon, Estelle Sailes, Sylvia Wilson, Carole Barsena, Karen Washington, and Lisa King all have 40 years or more with the Manatee County School District.

As part of this program, Dr. Wysong and his cabinet went to each work site to recognize employees with 25 or more years of service to the school district. Employees with over 25 years received a gold lanyard and superintendent's pin. For those with 15-24 years a silver lanyard and pin, 5-14 a bronze lanyard and pin and finally those with 0-4 years received a blue lanyard and pin. By the end of the year all 6,000 employees will be recognized, and the program will begin again next year. Mr. Barber and Dr. Wysong both wished there was more

funding for more generous recognition but being a public sector employer funds are not nearly as substantial as those in the private sector.

**There were no Public Comments.**

**Twenty-four consent items were approved 5-0.**

**New Business – Non-Consent Items**

Rachel Sellars, Executive Director Business Services, presented Budget Amendments for March 2024 which were approved 5-0.

Three adjustments to, and position changes to Food and Nutrition Services, were approved 5-0.

Dr. Wysong explained two new positions for school leadership. The Executive Principal position will enable a principal in a region to work as a lead with other principals, which will increase their leadership expertise without leaving the principalship. A similar position for Assistant Principals was also created. Both positions were approved 5-0.

A new position of Coordinator, Aviation Maintenance Technical School, will enable the program between Manatee Technical College and Sarasota Airport to have a person to oversee the mechanics program. It was approved 5-0.

Mr. Eric Di Silvesto was approved 5-0 to become a member of the Citizens Financial Oversight Committee.

**Instructional Update:** Mr. Derek Jensen, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, congratulated all the graduating seniors. State assessments continue this week along with testing for Advanced Placement and Advanced International Certificate of Excellence (AICE). More than 95% of students have completed Progress Monitoring (PM3) and a report will be ready for presentation at the May 28<sup>th</sup> meeting. May 24<sup>th</sup> is the last day for students for the school year; May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> will be half days for students. Manatee Technical College has over 1,700 students which is a 55% increase over last year. At the job fair on April 20<sup>th</sup>, 40 new teachers were hired. Additional job fairs for all positions will take place throughout the summer.

**Operations Update:** Mr. Willie Clark, Executive Director School Support Services, reported for Mr. Rinaldi, Executive Director of Operation, that Operations were gearing up for the summer as buildings are empty which presents an opportunity to do additional work at the sites. Food and Nutrition will serve meals at 64 sites this summer. There will be the annual 'Bus Send-off' on the last day of school, and he invited all board members to be there early; the bus drivers appreciate being waved off.

**Legal Update:** Mr. Dye said they are still in negotiations with Artisan Lakes (Moccasin Wallow Road area) to acquire a site for an elementary school in that area. Mr. Dye said he has also

been working as general counsel with staff in the last few weeks; he is not looking for it to be permanent.

**Superintendent's Remarks:** Dr. Wysong enjoyed the breakfast this morning with the long-time employees; he said he learned much from them and their connections to the community and each other. He thanked the board for approving the twenty-four items on the consent agenda. He noted that Mr. Grimes, Principal at Prine Elementary, will become Principal at Johnson K-8 school, Josh Bennet will become Director of Exceptional Education, and Shannon Flemming, current Director of Secondary Curriculum, will be the new principal at Manatee High School. Ms. Flemming graduated from MHS and is excited to return as the principal.

The new "Let's Talk" tech piece will enhance communications with families; they will be able to click on a live link to contact a teacher, school, etc. rather than having to cut and paste. Dr. Wysong also thanked the test coordinators at each school site stating it is a thankless job that is behind the scenes but is so necessary. He visited McNeal Elementary and engaged with pre-K students who were on a nature walk looking for items that began with the letter 'R (he found some too!)' – these students will be the class of 2036. He went to Rogers Garden Elementary to visit two students who drew pictures and sent them to him.

#### **Board Comments:**

**Ms. Foreman** – She said she filled in for Mr. Tatem at the Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP) meeting and was concerned that the enhancements used for graduation are still based on a formula used in 1999; if today's demographics, etc. were calculated, our funding in 23-24 would have been \$12,000,000. She came away from the conference with concerns about financial fraud protection, which she discussed with Ms. Sellars, and she is very pleased with how Manatee County is positioned. She attended the Sugg MS Future Farmers of America (FFA) banquet and is impressed with the greenhouse, classroom space, etc. which was far greater than expected. She met with Serge Jorgensen, a private security contractor, and is preparing for a shade meeting on our security status.

**Ms. Messenger** appreciated the recognitions and is looking forward to all the graduations this week.

**Mr. Tatem** said in light of the very warm weather ahead his safety tip was to drink water in the morning; if you wait until you are thirsty, it is too late. He was happy to report that on his recent school visits 100% of the parents he spoke with were happy with their respective schools.

**Ms. Spray** proudly reported she has a new grandbaby. She attended the Southeast High School International Baccalaureate (IB) pinning for incoming students and it was an impressive event. She recognized people who were retiring. Ms. Spray said parents still had a lot to do to improve the way children respect people in schools.

**Mr. Choate** congratulated all seniors and thanked the principals and staff who have spent considerable time planning the graduation ceremonies. He thanked Mr. Chapman and his staff who initiated and implemented the recognition program for employees. He also noted that

Manatee is listed in a recent news article as one of the top 15 counties that have low numbers of dropouts by giving them opportunities to get credits needed for graduation.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:23.

### **GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE**

We caution the Board to be aware that their microphones are always on during meetings. The side-bar conversation that took place between Mr. Dye and Mr. Tatem regarding “how to appoint a successor” to Mr. Tatem’s seat was inappropriate.

LWV Note: To put this conversation in context, link to the article: <https://lwvmanatee.org/how-to-become-a-candidate-for-manatee-school-board-district-5/>

We commend the Board for their appreciation for the Superintendent and district staff for creating a program to recognize employees’ years of service.

The meeting was efficient and focused. We offer a friendly reminder to Chair Choate to officially open the meeting in accordance with Robert’s Rules of Order.

Superintendent Wysong and district staff continue to impress with their thorough and inclusive reports on district happenings.

---

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 and WSLR News.

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.