

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 28, 2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 5:01 PM. Richard Tatem read the district's vision statement and introduced Pastor Ralph Hoehne of The Source Church in Ellenton to give the invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Recognitions

Mr. Barber, Executive Director of Communications, introduced Dr. Paul Gansemer, Director of Adult, Career and Technical Education, to give some background on The American Boat & Yacht Council which named Freddie Fowler of Manatee Technical College (MTC) its 2023 Educator of the Year in the area of marine service technology instruction. MTC Assistant Director, Justin Erickson, described the acclaim the program has garnered and stated that the program is up for the highest national accreditation.

"Freddie's repeated nominations by both students and the administration highlight the remarkable influence of his teaching," reportedly said Sarah Devlin, Accreditation Director for the ABYC Foundation, who oversees the Marine Trades Accreditation Program (MTAP). "Manatee Technical College serves as an exemplary model, showcasing a program that successfully aligns its curriculum with job opportunities at the local, state, and national levels."

Public Comments

There were no Public Comments.

Reports and Presentations

1. *2023-2024 End of Year Assessment Results* were presented by Mr. Derek Jensen, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Progress Monitoring 3 and End of Course results feed into School and District Grades, which will be released later in the summer. Some key considerations include that the state will use some different data and different calculations, e.g. the FLDOE does not use data from ESOL students who have been in the country for less than two years. Mrs. Foreman asked if there were calculations comparing public versus charter

school results; those breakdowns per school will be forthcoming. This will be the first year to see K-2 performance results compared to districts around the state. Ms. Messenger sought clarification about the assessments in K and first grade, and whether the students will take the same exam in both years. The response said they do but as the tests are adaptive, the questions may be different. Chair Choate asked about the data between PM 2 and PM3, which Mr. Jensen said could be provided.

Mr. Jensen showed tables of student performance comparing PM3 2023 and PM3 2024 at both district and state levels in ELA Reading, Math, Science, Biology, Civics and US History. He discussed acceleration in math at the middle school level as a factor in the 8th grade math assessments. Mr. Choate asked if they could report back on how many charter schools offer acceleration in math courses. Mr. Jensen noted the areas of strong performance improvements compared to 2023 data and to the statewide data. He also described the areas for focus for continued improvement.

The focus was on District PM3 performance for 2023 vs 2024 for ELA Reading (KG-2nd Grade, 3rd-5th Grade, and 6th-10th Grade); PM3 Math (KG-2nd Grade, 3rd-7th Grade, 8th Grade), Algebra 1 & Geometry (7th, 8th Grade and Overall), Spring Science & Biology Results (5th, 8th, and overall) and Spring Civics & US History Results (Overall) compared to State data. School Board members asked questions throughout the presentation to obtain clarity on testing results. There was improved performance illustrated in reading results. Math PM3 results showed improved performance in KG and 2nd grade. There was a drop in 1st grade PM3 results year over year and this is still being evaluated. PM3 8th grade Math results in Algebra & Geometry are impacted by the district's commitment to accelerating proficient students in these courses. This is also shown by the District having a higher percentage of 7th and 8th graders in these courses as compared to the State. The Sciences will be a targeted area for next year, with consistent performance in Civics, and an increase in performance shown in US History. The timeline was reviewed when FLDOE office reports, school grades, and Federal Index results will be released.

[LWV Note: The presentation slides showing the assessment results can be found here: https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2643325/5-28-24_Spring_PM3_Assessment_Results_School_Board_Presentation.pdf]

2. The *ARK Adventures STEM Pilot Program* was described by Ms. Allison Nichols, Director of Elementary Curriculum. This program aligns with the district's Strategic Plan. It was a five-week pilot program in the Extended Day Enrichment Program for fifth graders at four elementary schools: Bashaw, Bayshore, Freedom and McNeal. The ARK Education Initiative and SDMC partnered on this initiative. The students were given a Real-World Design Challenge to build a model of a tiny house that could be used as a temporary dwelling, creating architectural blueprints, physical models, and finally to build a 3D virtual model. Students worked in teams throughout the program. The four teachers who oversaw this after-school enrichment volunteered for the training and execution of this program.

The ARK Education Initiative was founded in 2021 by Cathie Wood, CEO of ARK Invest. ARK is a nonprofit organization that works to improve education through technology-enabled innovation. The goal is to provide students with skills and knowledge to become tomorrow's leaders by combining technology, engineering design, career exploration, and a problem-first approach to learning.

Consent Items

The Consent Agenda included 23 items that were approved 5-0.

New Business: (Non-Consent Items)

Approval of the Reclassification of the Job Description and Position of Manager, Security to Supervisor, Security (General Fund). Dr. Wysong explained that due to a need to meet new statutes (HB1473) requiring increased security measures with Manatee district schools, the supervisory role of this position has changed. Approved 5-0.

Approval of Student and Adult Meal Price Increases for School Year 2024-2025. Approved 5-0.

Ms. Thoma, Director of Food and Nutrition Services, explained that Manatee County has a large student population that qualifies for free and reduced meals. There are 14,000 students in the school district who pay for meals in full and 21 schools where all students eat free. The price increase is being driven by a 19% increase in supply costs, 10% increase of labor costs, and balance of meals that have not been paid for due to lack of parents not applying for meal benefits or leaving an unpaid balance at the end of the school year. Unpaid balances have grown exponentially nationwide as the two years of COVID free meals expired so many families did not apply. Average unpaid debt in year prior to COVID was \$40,000, now it is double that. Once students graduate with an unpaid debt, this debt of approximately \$8,000 is passed on to the district's General Fund. There is a yearlong effort to encourage parents who cannot pay, to make application for free and reduced lunches. Donations are accepted, and involve a process routing those through the district. ESSER funds were applied for last year and granted this spring and will help pay off the current meal debt. Breakfasts are free for all students. Public schools make meals and send them to charter schools that participate in the district food service program. No child goes hungry at lunch, no child is ever denied a meal if they cannot pay.

Approval to Purchase Scribbles Software Subscription, SDMC No. 25-0044-RG, Estimated at \$501,031.00 for Five Years (Multiple Funding Sources). Approved 4-1, with Ms. Spray dissenting.

This is a renewal purchase of software that involves technology for digitizing student and alumni academic records and providing transcripts for a fee to those requesting a transcript. Ms. Spray expressed concerns about technology changes, cyber security, and what happens to the data if something happens to the company. She was informed there are safety

processes in place and vendors go through a thorough screening process and if there is degradation in service, the contract could be reassessed. Mr. Scott Hensen, Chief Technology Officer, explained the security of the data and indicated this contract provides for long-term savings.

New Business: (No Superintendent Recommendation)

Approval of the Re-Appointment of Member Bernard A. Wagner to Audit Committee. Approved 5-0.

Approval of Internal Audit Reports including the Transportation Department Audit Report and Position Control Post Audit Review (PAR) Report. Approved 5-0.

Updates

Instruction – Mr. Derek Jensen, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, said summer learning programs start next week. Many summer learning opportunities exist for students: reading, STEM, credit recovery, the Guy Harvey experience, visual and performing arts camps, and driver's education were cited as some examples. Professional learning for teachers begins this week.

Operations – Mr. Ranaldi, Executive Director of Operations, stated Human Resources has completed all hiring from the spring job fair. There are about 60 instructional vacancies left. More job fairs for instructional and operational jobs are coming up with May 30 virtual job fair for teachers and June 20 Operations job fair 9-noon at Wakeland. The early morning bus wave by the superintendent and the board members on the last day of school was much appreciated by the drivers and aides.

Food services start their summer food program, which includes 35 community stops, and 16 mobile stops. Details are on the website. He thanked them all for the support and looks forward to getting a lot of work done over the summer.

Legal – Mr. Dye said legal is under control.

Superintendent Remarks –

Dr. Wysong thanked the Board for approving 23 consent items to keep routine matters going. He highlighted a few of those, such as career and academic grant opportunities. He indicated Dr. Hayley Rio at Harvey Elementary will also serve as the planning principal for the North Middle School. Mr. Todd Richardson at Gullett Elementary will also serve as the planning principal for East K-8 school. He mentioned enjoying his first graduations in Manatee County. He did a year-end review at Bradenton Kiwanis, visited McNeal Elementary graduation and surprised a student with a Superintendent's Coin, who had achieved a perfect score in all three assessment areas. He visited Sheriff Wells to finalize some safety and security plans for next year, such as having a law enforcement officer on every secondary and K-8 campus. Teachers worked their last day today but many are returning next week for summer programming and professional learning. There will be meetings about how to help more students reach the finish

line of graduation. He is looking forward to the final data coming from the DOE. Principals will be meeting in small groups to discuss best practices. He indicated they are well into planning for the 2024-25 school year with a focus this summer on instructional leadership, documenting best practices and key learnings from this year.

Board Comments

Ms. Messenger recognized all levels of staff, because it takes everyone to have a successful year: teachers, custodians, and many more.

Mr. Tatem attended graduations and saw them go smoothly and acknowledged it takes many to pull that off. He attended Memorial Day ceremonies and a parade over the weekend and claimed about 200,000 WWII vets are still living and encouraged people to talk to them because they won't be around much longer. Safety tip: Think for yourself and stop people from making poor decisions when they say "Hold my adult beverage...." and what comes after isn't good.

Ms. Foreman enjoyed all the graduations, the weather cooperated which was fortunate. The Florida School Board Association conference is coming up next week and she is looking forward to additional time together. She commended Savannah Anderson from Southeast High who qualified for the Chicago National Debate program placing in the semi-finals, which is no small feat.

Ms. Spray enjoyed the graduations, and commented only one student who wore heels that were not acceptable, which was an improvement over last year. She appreciated being recognized by a student. She mentioned upcoming summer graduations at Southeast and MTC. She congratulated all those who retired, many of whom have served for more than 20 years, and she thanked them.

Mr. Choate said graduation was great. He thanked staff for preparing for the meeting, appreciates their work. He knows teachers will still be doing something over the summer. He congratulated the Parrish Community High School girls' softball team for their recent second 5A-State Championship. He believes in parental and school choice and there are a lot of schools to choose from yet he really believes the school district is the best choice. He is excited about the future. He congratulated Superintendent Wysong on a successful first year.

Meeting adjourned at 6:51 PM.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

We appreciate the adjustments made that allowed Ms. Spray to be understood more clearly.

Board members asked clear and important clarifying questions in regard to the preliminary student assessment results and about the food service program.

Mr. Choate brought up an issue that may need clarification and further investigation regarding alternatively placed students' scores being included in the zoned school's accountability results and to share the findings with the public.

Mr. Choate's comment about paying for school lunches after COVID, while he indicated he understood because it impacted his family, could have been stated in a manner that demonstrated more empathy.

At the end of the Superintendent's first year, School Board Members are commended to have selected Dr. Wysong, who has become engaged in the district in such a thorough and positive manner.

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.