

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 June 11, 2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chair Choate. Ms. Messenger read the district mission and introduced Reverend James Golden, former school board member and chair, for the invocation which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Recognitions / Student Celebrations - Mr. Chapman introduced the Parrish Community High School State Champion Softball Team. This is the second straight class 5A state championship and the school has only been in existence since 2019. Coach Erin Spivey introduced each team member. Coach Spivey was Florida Softball Coach of the Year last year. The team had a collective GPA of 3.8 and for the second time, was named academic team of the year for the Florida. The team entered and exited to the song “We Are the Champions.”

Public Comments – There were no public comments.

Consent Items – Twenty-eight items were approved 5-0.

New Business: (Non-Consent Items – Superintendent Recommendation)

With no discussion the following items were approved 5-0: *Approval of Budget Amendments; Approval to advertise Notice of Intent to Revise Code of Student Conduct; Approval to advertise Pupil Progression Plan and a Public Hearing on Proposed Amendments to July 23, 2024 meeting.*

Approval of New Job Description and Position of Teacher of Varying Exceptionalities – through Project Edge Grant. The Superintendent explained that the position would be looking for someone certified in ESE and career and technical. Approved 5-0.

Approval of Service Level Agreement with Manatee County Radio System – inter-operational between county and school district for emergency situations. Motion to approve: 3-2 (Spray and Messenger opposed). Paul Damico, Chief of Safety and Operations, explained the reason for the increase cost in response to Ms. Foreman’s question regarding the cost of radios doubling. The radios have provided exceptional use and service (P35 radios). Mr. Ranaldi, Assistant Superintendent for Operations explained he is working with the County to monitor the cost of services for the next year. The radios are in the hand of every bus driver and guardian. Police can be a bus stop immediately once called. Sheriff, fire, EMS, cities and county are getting the same increase in cost of phones. There has not been a cost increase in three years. Motorola who makes these phones also provides service of the school security systems and it has also increased about 20-30%. Mr. Dye, Board Attorney, has not yet looked at the

contract. Ms. Foreman moved to table the motion until it is reviewed by counsel, seconded by Ms. Spray. Mr. Dye said the issue was cost and that doesn't appear to be a legal issue. Mr. Choate clarified that the cost of the radio also included service to inter-connected with county systems. Dr. Wysong said this could be tabled as long it is brought back to June 25th meeting, but must be done before the end of fiscal year 2024. Ms. Sellars stated it had been legally reviewed by the school district attorney on April 11th. Ms. Messenger said the county actually has a monopoly on the system and Mr. Ranaldi responded that the county has three times the number of phones the school district does. Motion to table failed 2-3 (Tatem, Choate, Messenger dissenting)

MOU between school district and MCR Health to provide sports and school physicals to students – approved 5-0. Ms. Spray expressed concern that there were others who would have bid on this. Assurances were given by Dr. Wysong that this is an option especially for families with limited resources and not a sole source. The School District and MCR Health have other MOU's involving the Community Schools. Ms. Scarborough, Executive Director of Secondary Schools, gave information from the high schools of services they used. Mr. Dye explained why there are differences among the schools.

Updates

Instruction – Mr. Jensen, Deputy Superintendent for Instruction

Summer programs up and running: Dive into Reading, field trips to Guy Harvey at Anna Maria, Career Exploration of 16 tracks at MTC for 40 students, ELL in computer science and engineering at Lincoln MS, professional learning for 80 teachers in Instructional Strategies to make content accessible for English Language Learners (ELL). MTC summer graduation for 600 students will be held June 26th -27th. The new instructional materials for social studies have already been delivered to schools. The Curriculum Teams are working with teachers to develop curriculum maps and they are already posted for first semester. With the 30-day review having passed, the district is waiting for the final approved list of science materials from the Florida Department of Education. Once the list arrives, orders will be placed. In the meantime, scaffolding activities are in place if there is a gap before school starts.

Operations – Mr. Ranaldi, Deputy Superintendent for Operations

In HR, there are 61 open instructional positions with 66 formal interviews conducted at the last job fair. The next instructional and para job fair is June 25th, with the next operational job fair on June 20th. Transportation's bonus program for drivers and aides saw marked improvement in attendance for both groups. Sixty percent of drivers and 45% of aides received bonuses. Fifty-seven of 98 drivers received all three bonuses. A consent item for construction provided for the architect and contractor for the MTC aviation program's classrooms and hangar. Food Service has provided over 44,500 meals – 9,000 more than the same time period a year ago. The mobile locations are adding Sun N Fun Wednesdays with a variety of fun activities.

Legal – Mr. Dye, School Board Attorney

He explained that he has also been covering the School District Attorney's duties and was surprised at the numbers of subpoenas served to various district personnel regarding custody disputes, personal injury, need to respond and object, questioning by state attorney, document requests, and video requests.

Superintendent Remarks – Dr. Wysong

Dr. Wysong expressed appreciation for the approval of the consent items so the district can continue with its work. He indicated there are three new district administrators – Jamara Clark is currently principal of Rowlett Middle Charter School and former teacher and assistant principal in our school district. He will become the Director of Student Demographics and Education Choices; Tiffany Spradling is coming from Seminole County to be the Director of Secondary Curriculum; and District's General Counsel is Kevin Pendley from Volusia County. At this point all of the school principal and assistant principal positions are filled. He stated there is greater student achievement if the district has stable school and district leadership teams. He said a few individuals left due to retirement but none to other districts. He acknowledged the board approved the preconstruction contracts for the MTC aviation program. Dr. Wysong thanked the local partners that provide hands-on clinical experiences for medical students. In preparation for the 2024-2025 school year, the district personnel and school leadership are getting “deep in the weeds” at the student level and sharing best practices and using new visualization tools for decision making leading to great reflective conversions. The final part of a three-part budget workshop for the board will be this Wednesday with shade sessions on school safety and cyber security on Thursday.

Board Comments

Ms. Messenger thanked Mr. Ranaldi for updates on the summer meals program and reminded everyone that the distribution sites are on the front page of the website. She encouraged parents to sign up their children to participate in the summer reading programs at the county libraries to increase their interest in reading.

Mr. Tatem said people don't often leave their jobs but leave their bosses so retaining so many leaders is excellent. His safety tip was to have your car looked at before you have safety issues.

Ms. Foreman attended the “Gala for Early Learning Coalition” and Vernon DeSear was honored for all he has given to the district and county. She attended last week's Florida School Board Association (FSBA) meeting and said, yes, she did karaoke. She is currently the President of the Greater Florida School Board Consortium and they are having their legislative priority planning session. Manatee County will host the meeting on Sept 26th -27th . She pointed out the districts in this consortium have more than half of the students in Florida.

Ms. Spray rued missing Stand Up for Children gala but did go to Charles Clapsaddle's well attended retirement party from METV. She welcomed to the district Mr. Pendley, Ms. Spradling and Mr. Clark whom she knows. She recognized long time employees who are retiring. She found the break out sessions at the FSBA informative.

Mr. Choate agreed with Mr. Tatem that leaders are staying. He stated the district gives the best education possible in this area. He again congratulated the Parrish Community High School softball team. The session at FSBA on advocacy talked about feelings in the State House toward public education as compared to feelings in the Senate. He suggested being proactive with our delegates, preparing them about all that is going well in our schools. A second takeaway was the suggestion to prepare for new board members to transition and do some type of orientation as a board, perhaps compiling something like they did in Pinellas, a notebook of “things I wish I knew coming in as a new board member.” He said maybe this could be the first workshop.

Meeting adjourned at 12:08 p.m.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

We appreciate Board members informing the public about their attendance at various community and school events related to education. It is important for the public to know Board Members are actively involved in educational events.

Much of the Board's discussion about the two-year service agreement with the County's radio division was informative and enabled the Board to understand the provisions of the contract and make a decision about supporting it. Their shared concern about the amount of the increase was justifiable and members asked several good questions for clarification on the cost increases.

The discussion about the radio agreement was unnecessarily prolonged by comments that had nothing to do with the contract directly. Ms. Spray's comments and claims against the county showed her lack of understanding about how local governments work. Unfortunately, it prompted other Board Members to follow up and Ms. Spray to defend her position which did nothing to inform the discussion. Also, Ms. Spray made an assumption that bids were required to provide sports' physicals, leading to extended conversations that could have been averted had she inquired during her board briefing.

We thank Board Members for acknowledging Dr. Wysong's role in retaining principals and assistant principals. The Board is encouraged to continue to show appreciation for the preparation of staff members and their ability to provide in-depth information and answer questions during Board discussions. Examples include Mr. Ranaldi and Mr. Damico regarding radios, Ms. Sellars on contracts from the purchasing department along with the date, and Ms. Scarborough explaining medical care for student athletes.

We encourage the Board to follow through on Chair Choate's excellent suggestion to prepare an orientation for new board members early in their tenure.

The Board Members demonstrated positive collegiality and humor adding an uplifting touch to the meeting.

Please be reminded that the League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization, with the mission of encouraging citizen involvement in government. Our feedback to Board Members regarding Governance and Sunshine is based on their own school board policy and standards set by the Florida School Board Association.

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.