

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 25, 2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 5:02 PM. Ms. Spray read the district mission and introduced Pastor Becky Manassa from Resonate Life Church for the invocation, which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Superintendent Wysong requested that Consent Item 11 be removed from the agenda due to an attachment omission. Motion was made, and Item 11 was removed. Approved 5-0.

Motion was made to approve the amended agenda. Approved 5-0.

Student Celebrations

The School Board celebrated Palmetto High School rising senior Kale Bunce, for earning his third straight individual Class 3A-State Weightlifting Championship title in the 169-lb. Olympic event. The event took place April 19-20 at the RP Funding Center in Lakeland. Mr. Barber, a former sports writer, introduced him. Palmetto Athletic Director Brian Wilkes shared a few words and presented Kale with a ring to commemorate this achievement.

Recognitions

Ms. Carol Cook of the Florida School Board Association (FSBA) presented the Master Board Distinction Presentation to the School Board of Manatee County. A six-term school board member in Pinellas County, Ms. Cook discussed the 20-hour voluntary Master Board Training in which Manatee School Board Members participated to become a strong leadership team. She stated this was a worthwhile process which covered communication, leadership development strategies, getting to know each other, identifying what works and what is not working, and integrating a new Superintendent into the team. She recognized the School Board as a Certified Master Board with a plaque that bears each Board Member's name.

Public Comments

No public comments.

Consent Items

32 items were approved 5-0.

New Business (Non-Consent Items)

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 July 30, 2024. There are 27 policies under review. Approved 5-0.

Approval of a New Job Description and Position of McKinney-Vento Program Liaison (Incoming Federal Grant Funds). Dr. Wysong stated the creation of the new job description of McKinney-Vento Program Liaison is due to the escalating complexities surrounding homelessness and housing instability. This function was previously assigned to a district social worker. This new position will serve as a bridge, facilitating strategic initiatives to combat and identify students living in homelessness and making sure they have access to education as well as fostering collaboration among the community. Approved 5-0.

Approval of the Reclassification of the Job Description and Position of Athletic Trainer (General Fund). The current salary structure is not competitive so this reclassification aims to recruit and retain good candidates into these positions to support our athletes. There is one Athletic Trainer at each of the district's seven high schools. Ms. Spray questioned the pay range and was told it is aligned with ranges associated with this pay grade. Approved 5-0.

Approval of the Academic Calendar for the School Year 2025-2026 (No Financial Impact). There was overwhelming preference for Option B of the two options that were presented to the community for input for a 30-day period. Approved 5-0.

Approval to Purchase PeopleSoft Administration and Support Services, SDMC No. 25-0054-RG, Estimated in the Amount of \$2,049,680.00 Over Two Years (Capital Funds). Dr. Wysong stated that PeopleSoft is the district's ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system which manages and automates the core processes. The two-year maintenance contract also includes negotiated performance clauses. Ms. Foreman stated she was pleased to see standards included, and recommended that the team look at ways to move some of the items in-house. Ms. Spray concurred. Motion passed 5-0.

New Business (No Superintendent Recommendation)

Approval of Citizen Financial Committee Annual Report for Fiscal Year Ending 2023. Approved 5-0.

Approval of the Superintendent Evaluation as Provided by the School Board. Ms. Messenger sincerely commended Dr. Wysong for his achievement in his first year as superintendent. Ms. Foreman also thanked him for all he has done and for the wonderful team he has built to earn the trust and respect of staff throughout the district. Mr. Tatem complimented Dr. Wysong on his soft skills and being a good facilitator. Chair Choate echoed the same sentiments and

commended Dr. Wysong for getting out there and meeting people and building relationships. Ms. Spray said it was harder for her to evaluate than be evaluated, and her score may not reflect how much she does believe in Dr. Wysong and that he is doing a wonderful job. Ms. Foreman suggested the Board consider extending his contract as he is one year into a three-year contract. Approved 5-0.

Approval to Purchase Security and Vulnerability Testing Services from Sylint Group, Inc., SDMC No. 25-0056-RG, Not to Exceed \$82,680.00 (General Fund). A Shade Meeting was held on this. Ms. Spray said she cannot whole-heartedly get behind this contract as it is such a big hike over last year's contract. She doesn't feel good that the district hasn't reached out to other vendors for bids and has a hard time supporting it. Ms. Foreman pointed out the rate did not go up but the services have increased, now including extra testing and training. She added that the current contract expires July 1 so this is not the time for questioning that. Approved 4-1, with Ms. Spray dissenting.

Updates

Instruction – Mr. Derek Jensen said summer camps are wrapping up and other programs run into July. He mentioned visiting Shark Week at King Middle School and that student interest “was off the charts.” MTC graduation week is occurring now. The district is still waiting on the state list of approved science instructional materials for the coming year. School grades and district data are also not yet available but should be ready before the late July Board meeting.

Operations – Mr. Ranaldi said there are currently 60 instructional vacancies. A virtual job fair took place earlier in the day which may reduce that number. The transportation fair had 33 attendees so offers are being made to some of those candidates. There are 33 summer routes currently running, and 7 bus drivers are assigned to field trips. Routes for the upcoming school year are currently under development. Summer food service program saw 24% increase over first 4 weeks. There have been 109,000 meals served so far. Manatee County Library staff is reading to students at Pride Park during food distribution there.

Mr. Tatem asked if it's a legal requirement for the district to provide transportation. It is for ESE and credit recovery programs.

Legal – No updates.

Superintendent Remarks – Mr. Dye has worn two hats for six weeks but a new legal counsel will be seated by next month. School Resource Officers will be provided in all secondary schools and Dr. Wysong looks forward to the partnership with the sheriff's office. Dr. Wysong expressed gratitude and highlighted a few of the items approved by the School Board, such as for a potential property purchase for a future elementary site that would open in the fall of 2026. He appreciated the Board's feedback and insights on his evaluation. From his perspective, it was a great year and everyone has been wonderful. He appreciated the Master Board Training and working with each board member individually to build a great team. He expressed gratitude to the cabinet and staff, as well as to his wife and son who gave up a lot for him to move to Manatee County.

Board Comments

Mr. Tatem started with a safety tip he had heard: “turn around, don’t drown” when you’re driving. He mentioned a vocational training event he had attended for law enforcement, and support for encouraging vocational training.

Ms. Foreman attended the Florida School Finance Officers Association last week and found an interesting perspective with lots of good breakout sessions, including: capital markets to finance new construction; staffing of hurricane shelters by schools is no longer required so something to look into; and security issues that are upcoming, such as closing cafeteria doors and outside gates and procedures for church rentals. They discussed how the transportation budget is calculated and that the legislature comes up with a number that is only about half of what is needed, perpetuating the shortfall.

Ms. Messenger had no comment.

Ms. Spray said parents and students are also responsible for safety at schools and sporting events, and should say something if they see something. She could not pull up resignations due to a computer glitch but thanked people for time spent with the district. She appreciated her quick briefing with Dr. Wysong this afternoon to answer some of her questions.

Chair Choate expressed thanks to the staff and Dr. Wysong for bringing new programs to the district. He attended Portrait of a Graduate, which focuses on where we want our students to be after when they graduate so that they are productive citizens after graduation.

Meeting adjourned at 6:05 PM.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

The Board Chair may want to consider setting guidelines for the length of the invocation by visiting clergy to avoid long and what can appear to be performative public prayers at a business meeting.

We find Mr. Tatem’s lack of interest in providing summer transportation for students living in remote areas disheartening and shows a lack of care for fairness.

The Chair and Board Members moved through the agenda efficiently while still providing important information to the public.

Board members are commended for making sincere expressions of gratitude for various staff members.

Ms. Spray’s explanation about the inconsistency of her ratings of the superintendent as compared to the other board members ratings appeared awkward. Perhaps when she is uncertain about a task, she should seek guidance.

We commend Ms. Messenger's experience and contributions during the meeting and missed her comments during the updates.

The League of Women Voters Manatee County adds its congratulations to the accomplishment of the School Board by achieving Master Board Certification. You are commended for participating in the volunteer effort to increase your capacity as effective School Board members.

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.