

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 July 30, 2024**.

### ITEMS OF INTEREST

The special meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 5:05 PM. This was a narrowly focused meeting with none of the typical opening activities.

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

Dr. Wysong gave thanks to Dr. Sellers, her team, and Mr. Jensen for the presentations.

### Presentations

*Presentation Regarding the 2024-2025 Tentative Millage Rate and Tentative Budget.* Rachel Sellers, Deputy Superintendent of Business Services, made a presentation to the Board regarding the adoption of the 2024-2025 tentative millage rate of 6.2990 and the adoption of the 2024-2025 tentative budget in the amount of \$1,590,763,809.00. Clarifying that the tentative rate and budget are the best estimate at this point in time without benefit of all the information that will be available and included in the final report by September 10<sup>th</sup>, Ms. Sellers provided graphs and charts, satisfying the statutory requirements and timeline. [LWV Note: [Link to presentation](#).]

The presentation included:

#### ♣ Statutory Requirements/Timelines

- Statutory Requirement is shown in Sec 200.065(2)(e) F.S.
- Tentative Budget Hearing held July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 5:05 PM (tonight) to establish tentative millage (tax) rate and to adopt the tentative budget for 2024 -25.
- Final Budget Hearing will be held September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 5:05 PM to establish final millage (tax) rate and to adopt the final budget for 2024 -25.

Millage rates trends were graphed and reviewed from 2017-2024 showing the change in Property Values and the impact of Required Local Effort (RLE), Discretionary, Capital Projects, and Referendum (Additional Voted Tax). A tentative rate was shown on the graph for 2024-25.

#### ♣ Proposed Tentative Millage, Roll Back Rate

- The total millage rate to be levied exceeds the rolled-back rate by 2.77%

- The RLE rate is established by Florida's DOE and if not levied would jeopardize state funding via the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP)
- Maintaining the other millage rates at the same level as in 2023-24 allows the District to continue implementation of the Board's Strategic Plan
- Average Impact on Real Property Taxpayer with no Increase in Assessed Value FY 2023-24 vs. FY 2024-25 (Tentative)
  - o Taxable Value Change, 0.00%
  - o Millage Rates Change, -1.90%
  - o Annual Taxes Change, -1.90%
- Average Impact on Real Property Taxpayer with no Increase in Assessed Value FY 2023-24 vs. FY 2024-25 (Tentative)
  - o Taxable Value Change, 8.46%
  - o Millage Rates Change, -1.90%
  - o Annual Taxes Change, 6.40%

The School District of Manatee County continues to demonstrate strong financial stewardship. For the eighth consecutive year, the district anticipates ending FY 2023-2024 with a positive general fund balance of \$101,916,654.

- ♣ Proposed Tentative Budget
- ♣ Adoption of Tentative Millage Rate
- ♣ Adoption of Tentative Budget

Answering clarifying questions from board members, Ms. Sellers indicated the referendum voted by citizens is called "additional voted tax" and makes up 16% of all of the various millages collected. Ms. Sellers and Board Members stressed to the public that while the millage tax rate has dropped over time, the value of property has increased, resulting in higher assessed taxes. Board members expressed appreciation for the work that has gone into this initial report.

*2023-2024 FLDOE School and District Accountability.* Deputy Superintendent for Instructional Services, Derek Jensen shared the recent school and district grades calculated by the Florida Department of Education. He described changes in the grading system that have resulted in new cut scores and the various components that make up the school and district grades. He clarified that Performance Monitoring Assessments 1 and 2 are not included in the calculations.

Mr. Jensen highlighted the improved performance of students over time and improvements in overall school grades.

[LWV Note: Mr. Jensen's presentation to the board can be viewed [here](#).]

The charts compared 2023-24 District Grade to prior year. The district achieved 739 out of 1200 possible points resulting in a B grade for the district. The district was only two points away from earning an A. Also, he demonstrated the increases in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading Proficiency over time: 2021-22, 47%; 22-23, 50%; 23-24, 54%. The State Average for 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading: 57%, Range 38-76%.

The district increased ALL SDMC Achievement Categories from 2023-2024. The number of schools achieving an A grade has increased, including Tillman and Abel Elementary Schools, both Title I schools. Ballard Elementary improved its score from a D to a B. Four schools received D grades: Samoset Elementary, Lincoln Middle, Bayshore High, and Manatee School of Arts and Sciences. In addition, it was noted that Combination Schools such as K-8 schools were affected most by FAST School Grading Scale.

Mr. Jensen described the on-going and intensive one on one and small group discussions between the Superintendent, district staff and school leadership to pinpoint areas for improvement and specific instructional approaches to improve student performance. Instructional Responses to the report in Semester 2 were outlined by Mr. Jensen.

- Summer 1-on-1 and Small Group Principal Meetings with Superintendent
- Weekly Data Review Meetings
- New Data Monitoring Approaches
- Executive Director of School Improvement and Leadership Development
- Modified School Support/Walkthrough Schedule at Priority Schools
- Master Schedule Review in August 2024

Mr. Jensen stated these efforts are the reasons the last item is on the agenda to Authorize the Superintendent to Utilize the Flexibility Established Per Florida Statute 1001.42(21).

School board members acknowledged the effective impact of the district and school leadership, and specifically teachers' efforts, resulting in improved performance. Some board members asked to see data for charter schools broken out from the district-led schools.

### **Public Hearing/New Business**

*Public Hearing Regarding the 2024-2025 Tentative Millage Rates and Tentative Budget.* There were no public comments.

*Approval of Adopting the 2024-2025 Tentative Millage Rate of 6.299.* Approved 5-0.

*Approval of Adopting the 2024-2025 Tentative Budget in the Amount of \$1,590,763,809.00.* Approved 5-0.

*Public Hearing for Consideration to Adopt and Amend School Board Policies.* Superintendent Wysong reminded board members the recommended changes were discussed at workshops. There were no public comments.

*Approval to Adopt New Policy and Amend School Board Policies.* Dr. Wysong indicated changes to those policies related to weapons were withdrawn. Approved 5-0. LWV note:- links to changes to policies in four parts:

[https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2755193/Policies\\_July\\_30\\_Part\\_1.pdf](https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2755193/Policies_July_30_Part_1.pdf)

[https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2755188/Policies\\_July\\_30\\_Part\\_2.pdf](https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2755188/Policies_July_30_Part_2.pdf)

[https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2755189/Policies\\_July\\_30\\_Part\\_3.pdf](https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2755189/Policies_July_30_Part_3.pdf)

[https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2755190/Policies\\_July\\_30\\_Part\\_4.pdf](https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2755190/Policies_July_30_Part_4.pdf)

*Authorize the Superintendent to Utilize the Flexibility Established Per Florida Statute 1001.42(21) to Establish Salary Incentives or Other Strategies that Address the Selection, Placement, Compensation, and Expectations of Instructional Personnel, Including Executing Memorandum(s) of Understanding, up to \$600,000.00 (Multiple Funding Sources)*  
Approved 5-0.

**Adjournment.** Chair Choate adjourned the meeting at 6:41 p.m.

## **GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE**

The Board Chair efficiently gaveled in and out of the two public hearings.

All Board Members expressed gratitude for the time and efforts of the presenters. Members asked good clarifying questions regarding both the millage and school accountability data.

We concur with Ms. Messenger that Ms. Spray bringing up the start time for evening meetings was inappropriate since this will be addressed by the total board when a new chair is elected and she, as a board member had voted for this some time ago.

Once again, Ms. Spray asked questions during the presentation that should have been asked prior to the meeting, whether in the workshop or during briefing meetings with staff.

We thank Ms. Foreman for clarifying for Mr. Tatem that the extra funding currently in place for Title I schools comes from federal dollars, not local or state dollars.

We also thank Chair Choate and Ms. Messenger for their comments about the effects of the millage rate on the district. Mr. Choate mentioned that data shows the district is getting high quality teachers from the millage money. Ms. Messenger added that we now have 24 “A” schools as compared to 8 “A” schools pre-millage.

Mr. Tatem thanked the teachers and the leadership who enabled the increase in scores.

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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.