

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 September 8, 2026](#).

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Chair Spray. She asked for a moment of silence for the 25th anniversary of 9/11. She then read for the first time the new District Purpose Statement: "The School District of Manatee County, grounded in the [Portrait of a Graduate](#), develops every student for life, learning, and leadership, and prepares them to succeed and contribute to their community." The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mr. Tatem.

Public Comment

RJ lodged a formal complaint that the property of Lincoln Memorial Academy (LMA) was stolen. He expressed disappointment that the board and that Charlie Kennedy did not get back to him after his last time giving a statement. He recounted the actions that led to the termination of LMA's charter. He claimed the actions were an illegal takeover of the school. He had asked for all of the complaints that had been filed and the district said there were none. He indicated he was making civil, criminal and RICO complaints.

KJ seconded RJ's formal complaint of a fraudulent takeover of LMA. He then played a recording on his phone of a third party until Chair Spray indicated the person on the phone had not been recognized. He continued to recount the actions the 2019 board took to terminate LMA's charter and reminisced about the locked arms of the individuals who felt LMA had been wronged, as well as the promises that then Superintendent Saunders made that were not kept.

Ms. Spray said she would have a conversation with the attorney to learn what these issues are.

Public Hearing

Public Hearing 2026-2027 Final Millage Rates and Final Budget

Chair Spray gaveled out of the regular meeting and into the public hearing.

Deputy Superintendent for Business Services, Rachel Sellers, presented the information on the items that the Board would vote on later in the Agenda. She introduced Gina Maliniak,

Director of Budget, who is retiring this week. Ms. Sellers reviewed the Florida Education Funding Program (FEFP) and the statutory basis for calculating the millage that must be levied. She compared the Millage Rates and Revenues for 2025 and 2026 indicating the impact of increased taxable values, and the decrease in Required Local Effort adjustments. Millage rates have decreased while property values have increased since the fiscal year 2018-2019. Because property values in the County have increased by \$5.4 billion, the district anticipates collecting an additional \$30 million even though the millage rates will decrease from 6.304 mills to 6.275 mills. She indicated that if the district does not charge the required millage rate, it cannot receive the full-time student expenditure funds, but must still pay the same amount to the charter schools. A summary of the components of the proposed rates is as follows:

	P r o p o s e d Millage 2025-2026	P r o p o s e d Millage 2026-2027	R e v e n u e Increase
Required Local Effort (State of Florida)	3.056	3.027	\$13,383,217
Discretionary Local Effort (Local)	.748	.748	\$3,857,373
Local Referendum (Local)	1.000	1.000	\$5,156.915
Capital Outlay (Local)	1.5000	1.5000	\$7,735,373
Total	6.304	6.275	\$30,132,878

A demonstration of the “rolled-back rate” shows that the increased taxable value of property would have required a proposed millage of 6.0998 in order to generate the amount of revenue that would equal the revenue collected for 2025-2026. The difference between the prior year real estate tax and the 2026-2027 rollback rate would cost a home with a taxable value of \$326,390 an additional \$57.18 for the year.

Ms. Sellers then shared the final budget for all funds with a total ending fund balance of \$147,933,893 for the Fiscal Year 2026-2027. She illustrated the anticipated Revenues and Funding from Other Sources of Funding of \$1.661 billion. Total Expenditures are budgeted at \$1,513 billion. This will decrease the Total Fund Balance to \$147,933,893 which includes a decreased General Fund Balance of \$48,949,366. Increases in wages and benefits, insurance and utilities costs make up the majority of the increase in the totals. Ms. Sellers stated that the Annual Budget Book, which was attached to the Agenda, presents the budget for each department.

Ms. Sellers discussed the changes to the Final Budget for 2026-2027 from a previously discussed tentative budget. Changes discussed included additional compensation, a reserve for health insurance, and the reporting of the commission charged by the Manatee County Tax Collector for the voted millage referendum.

Link to the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Fiscal Millage and Budget Hearing presentation:

https://files-backend.assets.thrillshare.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/5192/Sdmc/0aa55f09-05c7-48d5-b9c3-5f3eddcacf20/Presentation---Final-Millage-and-Final-Budget-Hearing--FINAL---2026-09-01.pdf?disposition=inline

Mr. Kennedy and Ms. Spray asked about the status in regard to the money withheld by the Manatee County Tax Collector last year as a commission for gathering the school tax approved by voters.

Mr. Dye, School Board Attorney, asked if there was anyone in the audience who wanted to speak to the budget. There was none.

Ms. Spray reconvened the general meeting.

New Business

Approval of the Annual Financial Report and All Official Parts Thereof for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2026 (No Financial Impact) Approved 5-0.

Link to Annual Financial Report Year End June 30, 2026:

https://files-backend.assets.thrillshare.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/5192/Sdmc/1f1a7c44-c47d-4920-9b53-c56a3dae2cfe/Annual-Financial-Report---2026-2027---NOT-ADA-COMPLIANT---Uploaded-to-Website.pdf?disposition=inline

Approval of the Budget Amendments for June 2026 (No Financial Impact) Approved 5-0.

Approval of the Final Millage Rates for Fiscal Year 2026-2027, each taken separately were approved 5-0.

Approval of the Final Budget 2026-2027. Approved 5-0.

Link to Final Annual Budget 2026-2027:

https://files-backend.assets.thrillshare.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/5192/Sdmc/50bf4cde-96b0-4a3c-8f43-59f894e4666e/2026-2027---Final-Budget-Book..pdf?disposition=inline

Information Only (No Board Action Required)

Year-to-Date Charter School Financial Statement Summary Through June 30, 2026

Superintendent's Remarks

Superintendent Breslin thanked the Board for their continuing work along with the finance department staff through the entire process. She thanked Budget Director Gina Maliniak for waiting to retire until the budget process was completed.

Board Comments

Ms. Felton – Speaking for herself and not the Board or School District, she shared information she gathered about the impact on the Children’s Services Tax if Amendment 3 passes. Ms. Felton is the school board representative on the Children’s Services Tax Advisory Board. They advise the Board of County Commission on how the funds are distributed. This is a voter-approved millage fund to nonprofit organizations which serve children and their families. Manatee County is anticipating a loss of \$2.2 million with the passage of Amendment 3. She indicated that of the ad valorem taxes collected by the county, 25 cents of every dollar goes to the sheriff’s department. An additional 3 cents goes to EMTs and safety services. School Resources Officers are part of this group and the sheriff pays 50% of those costs or \$4.7 million for officers’ salaries. Florida has mandated safe schools and with no additional funding, the district would be required to find over \$7 million to make up the difference. She said, “We will lose school resource officers (SROs) from our schools.” She indicated further discussions will be needed regarding Guardians. Ms. Felton added that there are summer programs and after school child care that are not part of district funding that will be cut. She stated all of this information is available on her Substack and encouraged people go there to find all of the information. [LWV note: to view Ms. Felton’s analysis on her Substack go to <https://heatherfelton.substack.com/p/amendment-3-and-our-school-district>]

Ms. Spray responded to Ms. Felton’s comment that while she appreciated her information, “this is a county thing.” She indicated there is a need to “wait and see” in anticipation of loss of funding. She said the Board would not take a position on Amendment 3 and cautioned Board Members to be careful about what they say.

Mr. Kennedy said on his own time he will share opinions about Amendment 3 and being elected to the Board “we do not give up our rights,” and he said, “I do respect your clarification. I do hear you.” He also thanked Gina Maliniak for all her years working with the district. He mentioned Don Falls, who taught in the district for 41 years, retired last Friday.

Mr. Choate thanked staff for all the preparations for tonight. He thanked Leadership Manatee Team Red for being there. He also commended Dr. Breslin for her first year.

Mr. Tatem reminded the public that the state constitution says it must provide uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high-quality system of free public schools. He also reminded everyone of many unfunded state and federal mandates. Additionally, they must make sure the employees have strong salaries and benefits, as well as to provide for the six new schools. Mr. Tatem said the budget they approved will do that. He repeated that the millage has gone down the last nine years and this takes inflation into account. Mr. Tatem said “we have developed a solid budget.”

Ms. Spray thanked the staff for all of their work to get the budget to the Board tonight.

Adjournment at 6:39.

Good Governance

With prompts from others, Ms. Spray gaveled in and out of the general meeting to convene the public hearing.

Ms. Felton had clearly stated the information she shared about the projected negative impacts of the passage of Amendment 3 on non-profit organizations funded through the Manatee County Children's Service ad valorem tax was done in her capacity as a citizen, not on behalf of the School Board. Ms. Spray's sharp admonishment about what Board Members should or shouldn't say was ably countered by Mr. Kennedy's reminder that he had not given up his speech rights when he became a School Board Member. We commend both Ms. Felton and Mr. Kennedy for their demonstrated leadership, instilling confidence in their capacity for critical thinking. In addition, Ms. Spray's "wait and see" position was concerning to the observers considering the potential impact to our students and the community.

Board Members should have asked for the usual explanation of the monthly Budget Amendments.

While the presentation of the information to be considered in this meeting was given, further clarity could have been achieved if the order of the Public Hearing presentation tied directly to the order of the Agenda items to be approved under New Business.

Also, since each category of millage was voted on separately, the Agenda should have included each item.