

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 10, 2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Chair Choate welcomed Leadership Manatee's Red Team to the School Board meeting. The district Vision was read by Ms. Messenger. The invocation was given by Dr. Linda Francis, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

The agenda and minutes were approved, 5-0.

Recognitions

Mr. Barber introduced Mary Glass, President of the Manatee Education Foundation (MEF), who is in her 18th year as president. Ms. Glass introduced several Foundation board members who were in the audience. During the past school year, they funded a total of \$1,367,627. She then delineated the programs that were funded. Resiliency Florida also added funds to the Foundation to help students. The MEF was founded in 1988. She thanked the community and Manatee County School District for their partnership. In response to board members' questions, she indicated applications for grants to teachers are due September 30 with funds available in November and community donations can be made through the website. LWV note: <https://mefinfo.org/educators-schools/>

Reports and Presentations

Palma Sola Design Development Update

Mr. Ranaldi introduced Mr. Wiles to give an overview of the current status of the project to rebuild Palma Sola Elementary. David Wiles indicated students will be consolidated into the western portion of the campus while demolition of portions of the east side takes place, therefore no portables will be necessary. Architect Ken Zucker continued with specifics. The existing kitchen will remain with a new dining room being constructed. While the project is underway, the arts area will be converted to a cafeteria. New safety protocols will be made to the existing exterior. A safety fence will be constructed during the demolition and building on the east side. An arborist has evaluated the health of all trees currently on the campus and only the diseased and dying will be removed. [LWV note: to view slides of the phased project visit [here](#).]

Presentation Regarding the 2024-2025 Final Millage Rates and Final Budget with updates on the 2024-25 Capital Plan

Deputy Superintendent of Business Operations, Rachel Sellers, introduced the budget team that tracks the budget throughout the year and expressed her gratitude for their work. Ms. Sellers provided a refresher on the composition of the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). She described the four components of the proposed millage: Required Local Effort, Discretionary Operation, Local Referendum, and Capital Outlay. Deputy Superintendent of Operations, Joe Ranaldi provided the Capital Plan. He highlighted the new construction projects and those coming soon. Mr. Ranaldi described the decisions about prioritizing projects using the Jacob's Report. The Five-Year Capital Plan has been updated due to new security requirements by the state (unfunded mandates) and damages due to recent rain events. [LWV note: See slide presentation [here](#).]

Public Comments

Shirley Groover Bryant, Mayor of Palmetto, provided a brief history of Francis (Frankie) A. McKay Howze. As teacher, librarian, football coach, principal, Mrs. Howze began her 67-year career in Palmetto in 1889. Palmetto Elementary was named after her at one point, but after a restoration, the dedication was forgotten. Mayor Bryant advocated for a school to be named for Frankie Howze to right this travesty.

Bradenton City Councilwoman, Marianne Barneby, reinforced Mayor Bryant's remarks and her request to name a school for Frankie Howze by describing what Mrs. Howze meant to her mother who had been a student of Mrs. Howze.

Dwight Walton, 27-year retired state trooper in Palm Beach, said the FLDOE on Oct 14, 2022, issued a memo stipulating changes to mandated fingerprinting and rescreening requirements for employees in K-12 private and public education. He said the district must notify charter schools of changes coming, but they have not been notified. He owns a company that does electronic fingerprinting and background screening. The memo says changes should have started Jan. 1, 2023, and this needs to be done by Jan. 2026. He said he would like to be part of this notification process.

Consent Items

The Consent Agenda included 28 items that were approved 5-0.

Public Hearing

Public Hearing 2024-2025 Final Millage Rates and Final Budget

Chair Choate gaveled out of the regular meeting for the public hearing. With no public comments, he gaveled back into the regular meeting.

Approval of the Final Millage Rates for Fiscal Year 2024-25.

Motions were made and seconded to approve the following: Required Local Effort of 3.0390 + Prior Period Funding Adjustment of 0.0120 + Capital Outlay of 1.5 + Discretionary Operating of 0.748 + and Additional Voted Millage of 1.0000 = 6.2990. Discussion involved the fact that property values have increased. Passed 5-0

Approval of the Final Budget for 2024-2025. Board Members passed 5-0 Final Budget Resolution Number 2024-009 adopting the final millage rates and final budget for fiscal year July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, in the amount of \$1,594,306,046.00.

New Business: (Non-Consent Items)

Approval of the Annual Financial Report and All Official Parts Thereof for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2024, (No Fiscal Impact). Passed 5-0

Approval of the Budget Amendments for June 2024. Passed 5-0.

Approval of a New Job Description and Position of Teacher Assistant - Project EDGE (MTC) (Funded by the Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program Initial and Continuing Grant). This is a program at MTC for adults with disabilities starting with its first cohort of students. This position is needed to assist the teacher previously approved. Passed 5-0.

Approval of Advertising a Notice of Intent to Amend School Board Policies, Including New Board Policies, and Setting a Public Hearing at the Board Meeting on October 22, 2024. The changes were workshopped on August 30 and will be prepared as final on September 23, to be on course for the October 22 hearing. Passed 5-0.

LWV Note – link to policy changes [Cover Page - default \(d2kbkoa27fdvtw.cloudfront.net\)](https://d2kbkoa27fdvtw.cloudfront.net)

New Business: (No Superintendent Recommendation)

Approval of Travel Expense Associated with the School Board Member's Attendance at the Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards (GFCSB) Meeting, August 16-18, 2023, at the Zota Beach Resort, Longboat Key, FL, Not to Exceed \$1250.00. The motion was amended to correct the date to September 26-27, 2024, and the amount not to exceed \$1,700.00. Passed 5-0.

Approval of Legislative Priority List for the Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards.

Board Members agreed 5-0 to send the following priorities from Manatee District to the Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards: 1. Provide for annual inflation and to support unfunded mandates. 2. Districts should be exempt from lawsuits by charter schools in their district. 3. Fund full-day universal pre-K and fund and expand options for 3-year-olds. 4. Provide for levying millage for 12 years rather than current 4 years. Discussion among board members showed differences of opinion regarding a fifth priority of going back to a 2.0 levy for capital rather than 1.5 that centered around local taxpayer effort vs support from state taxes.

Approval to Remove Member from Citizens Financial Oversight Committee (CFOC) Due to Lack of Attendance. Rather than remove the member, the member's resignation was accepted. Passed 5-0.

Approval of the Updates to the Citizens Financial Oversight Committee (CFOC) Charter (No Financial Impact). Attorney Dye had made changes, and these changes were presented at a recent workshop. Passed 5-0.

Approval of the Audit Committee Charter. Mr. Dye reviewed this with board members at a recent workshop. Passed 5-0.

Board Discussion and Selection of Citizen Financial Oversight Committee (CFOC) Member to Auditor Selection Committee. Discussion resulted in a plan to ask Ms. Holly Johnson, with Mr. Eric DeSilvesterov recommended as alternate to serve as CFOC representative on the Auditor Selection Committee. Passed 5-0.

Updates

Instruction - Mr. Jensen stated schools are currently in the middle of ELA Progress Monitoring 1 and students can make up the test until Sept 27th. There is instructional utility in comparing the results of PM3 last year to PM3 this year. Hispanic Heritage month is coming up, noting 40% of students in our district are Hispanic. Tomorrow is 9/11 and students will receive instruction in their social studies classes. Adult Career and Technical produced a workshop on completing FAFSA. Open house for colleges is on Oct 27th.

Operations – Mr. Ranaldi reported that HR's job fair for support staff had 387 attendees with offers made for transportation, custodial and cafeteria personnel. Van drivers should be up and running on Monday and two more vans approved for purchase. Transportation's auto mechanics remains at 10 and still advertising. Two more job fairs are scheduled for Sept 19th and Sept 26th. One hundred and two Promethean projection/interactive boards installed at Lakewood Ranch High accompanied by teacher training. Seventy-five will be installed next at Southeast High. More than 500 PeopleSoft workshops have been completed including financial monitoring for all bookkeepers and secretaries. Food Services are hosting Tuesday/Thursday fresh fruit and vegetable days with nutritional education.

Legal – Board Attorney Dye said District Attorney Pendley will return the next day and he has been covering while Mr. Pendley was gone. He has been pushing information to the board and answering questions.

Superintendent – Dr. Wysong indicated that of the 28 consent items approved, they included \$5.3 million in accepted grant funding to train students and staff on resilience, as well as student travel. He reminded everyone the district is currently seeking nominations for the name of East K-8 school to open in August 2025. [LWV note: <https://www.manateeschools.net/newschoolname>]

Friday's workshop will be devoted to finance, including plans for Certificates of Participation (COPS) issuance to cover cost of construction, annual investment report, update for current and

future enrollment, and construction updates. Dr. Wysong expressed appreciation for the continued financial support from Gettel for the Parrish Community High School automotive program. He has attended ribbon cuttings at new fields at 5 of 7 high schools. He enumerated his visits to multiple schools and thanked board members for joining him when available.

Board Comments

Ms. Foreman acknowledged interesting presentations at LWR Business Alliance meeting where both the Sarasota Schools Superintendent and Dr. Wysong spoke. All five Manatee School Board members attended while Sarasota sent none. Audit Committee met and an update will be coming soon. Ms. Foreman thanked the auditor selection committee team for their work. She made note of the recent school shooting in Georgia, another student shot in a bathroom, and another shooting today. She's incredibly grateful and commends the use of the EVOLV system this district uses and expressed the need for more mental health care. She mentioned CENTEGIX prevented more deaths in GA and wants the public to know we have that and thanked the safety people and administration for that great decision. We are doing more than is required. She added, all this money is money not available in classrooms and this is why we rely on our discretionary millage.

Ms. Messenger expressed appreciation for everyone's time and energy making the meeting successful.

Mr. Tatem visited a couple of schools and was impressed with the orderliness of schools and particularly high school transitions between classes, especially with new security requirements, saying that is good to see. His safety tip: feedback from parents about inconveniences with EVOLV systems and getting into schools, there are software glitches but over-all he feels the pros outweigh the cons. Manatee did have some weapons in schools last year that were found so that's why these were put in place. He acknowledged that to some people and certainly for parents it seems "we're moving toward a prison-ish type system for our schools and it's unfortunate but that's the world we're living in" and the EVOLV systems are a necessary evil. He read from the Florida constitution on the night we approved taxes, to show that while as taxpayers we would all like to pay the minimum taxes necessary, we do have to fund free public education for ALL students pursuant to the constitution. He believes the tax rates they've set and the money they're bringing in is what we need to do to meet their constitutional requirement. We need this money to pay employees to retain them so they don't go to neighboring districts with better pay as they're free to do in a capitalist system.

Ms. Spray toured Ballard that morning and she said it is great to see kids and they learn to print differently than she learned to print. "You can see different levels of need in the schools. I identified a high-needs student in one classroom very quickly. But it's such a home-based school with lots of moving parts all the time because it is basically an inner-city school, Title 1, and maintaining their B grade is probably going to be the challenge, but I think they can do it, because they've got a great staff there." She too was disappointed and actually shocked that no one from Sarasota showed up at the luncheon, especially in a campaign cycle. She expressed appreciation for a few retiring employees. She is looking forward to the Chamber retreat and consortium event. As a school board member, it breaks her heart to hear about school shootings and she was grateful for the EVOLV and CENTEGIX systems we have here and is confident in our safety team. "On the behavioral

side, it's personal responsibility and parents' responsibility to work that. Schools teach how to hold a pencil and have class decorum, and to pile on mental health on top of that, it's just so complex and she doesn't fault the school at all, it's the shooter." She takes pride in coining the phrase "Safety Over Secrets" and shared that at an event. She appreciated the work and help of the finance team, and the board.

Mr. Choate thanked the budget team and everyone involved in security, and adjourned the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

Board members remained engaged throughout the meeting, expressing appreciation, asking clarifying questions, and making appropriate observations. Mr. Tatem's clarification of homestead vs non-homestead property taxes was appreciated for public understanding. Unfortunately, many of Ms. Spray's questions regarding construction plans and the budget had already been answered or explained during the presentation.

Board members are encouraged to remind staff to define acronyms used during presentations. It was helpful when Mr. Tatem asked for clarification and/or definition of terms, i.e. the Jacob's Report and COPS.

The discussion of legislative priorities to be submitted to the Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards seemed lengthy since it had already been workshopped.

We encourage the Board to request that names of staff members to be acknowledged are included in the agenda packet. In tonight's meeting, Ms. Sellers recognized many staffers who worked on the budget and presentation, but we were unable to catch them all for recognition here.

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, WSLR News and Education Matters in Manatee County Facebook Page.

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.