

The League of Women Voters of Manatee County Education Issues Action Team 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 24, 2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Chair Choate called the meeting to order. The district Vision was read by Ms. Foreman. The invocation was given by Dr. Luke Stockeland, First Baptist Church of Bradenton. The Palmetto Color Guard presented the colors followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

The agenda and minutes were approved, 5-0.

Student Celebrations:

CTSO (Career Technical Student Organizations) National First Place Winners – Mr. Barber presented students who were top winners in national level competitions. Dr. Paul Gansemer, Executive Director of ACTE, described the seven different Career Technical Student Organizations, saying that there were many second and third place winners as well. The students recognized as first place national winners were: National SkillsUSA - Manatee Technical College Television (Video) Production - Ricardo Campbell and Alejandro Hernandez-Cedillo, Advisor Abby Toole-Plummer; National TSA - Braden River High School Animatronics - Kyler Wade, Sriya Boggavarapu, Chai Kurakula; Board Game Design - Kyra Wright, Riley Harris, Moksha Pitchala, Jayson Eggleston, Avya Culp, Sriya Boggavarapu and Advisor TJ Leahy. Mr. Gansemer also introduced Doug Wagner, Principal of Manatee Technical College, and Kelli Kennedy, Assistant Director for Career and Technical Education.

Attendance Awareness – Beth Duda, Patterson Foundation and Director of Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading, described the four-county initiative that includes Manatee, Sarasota, Charlotte, and DeSoto. The initiative is supported by many local organizations. Attendance is one of the most important things we can support; a child cannot learn if he/she is not in school. When chronic absenteeism is in excess of 10%, it leads to academic decline. Tiers of intervention are essential. An Attendance Awareness Poster Contest has been successful in elementary schools to motivate attendance as a Tier 1 intervention and 33 schools are participating this year. Since the pandemic, chronic absenteeism is rampant across the country. Motivating Improved Attendance (MIA) as a Tier 2 intervention was created to address barriers to attendance. Ms. Duda expressed appreciation for working with the district through **Soar in 4** and Dr. Wysong.

Hispanic Heritage Month – Sept 15-Oct 15 is set aside to recognize the history and culture of Hispanic Americans. Debra Estes, Director of ESOL and Migrant programs, indicated 41% of

students in Manatee schools are Hispanic or Latino. “Honoring Hispanic Contributions to Florida’s Success” is this year’s theme. She brought one student from each high school who shared their accomplishments and future plans: Bayshore High - Isai Palacios-Alejandre; LWRHS - Alexia Jaime; Manatee High - Ashley Cholette; Palmetto High - Isabella Pena; and Parrish Community High - Mateo Peralta Cancino. Ms. Foreman read a proclamation recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month. It was repeated in Spanish by a staff member.

Public Comments

VM, Gun Safety Committee of the League of Women of Manatee County, encouraged the board to work together with the League and others to increase school safety by stressing the need for weapons to be kept secure at home. She cited that over 75% of school shooters under 18 get the firearm they use from their own home or the home of a close relative. She stressed that school safety begins with gun safety at home.

Six comments were made by citizens encouraging the board to name the new East County K-8 school for Ms. Lynette C. Edwards. Each recounted Ms. Edwards’ rich contributions and lengthy service to the School District of Manatee County and to the community. She graduated from Lincoln Memorial High School. At Lincoln Memorial Middle School, Ms. Edwards taught home economics and then served as a Dean of Students and Assistant Principal. She was Principal at Bradenton Middle School, served as the district’s Director of Personnel and Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. The speakers highlighted Ms. Edwards high moral character, integrity, her focus on the whole child, her servant leadership, and her passion, commitment and compassion throughout her career. Dedicating her life to children is the reason to name the new K-8 school for Ms. Lynette Edwards. She is a beacon of success throughout her career and still serves on numerous boards supporting children. She is a more than worthy candidate to have a school named for her.

Reports and Presentations

Deputy Superintendent for Instruction, Mr. Jensen, presented the **2024-2025 FAST Progress Monitoring 1 (PM1) Assessment Results** dated 9-20-2024. He introduced Mr. Evan McCarthy, Director of Assessment Accountability and Research, as the ‘man behind the scene’ in compiling the data for us. Not only does his team have the technical knowledge but also creative ways of looking at the data. Mr. Jensen indicated there is a helpful parent guide to understand the test report for their student. All of the assessments become part of the district’s accountability grade at the end of the school year. He reviewed both ELA/reading and math results for PM1. He warned that this data in isolation is not productive. The PM1 test is adaptive and covers the entirety of the grade level standards. When PM 3 is administered, third grade students who do not test at level 2 or 3 will be invited to the ‘Summer Reading Camp’ and reassessed to be considered for promotion. Mr. Jensen presented lists of the resources used by the district to focus on literacy and math instruction. Math has undergone the most changes this year with the mathematics progression – i.e. if taking advanced math in 4th grade a student would be taking the 5th grade FAST. Mr. Jensen explained that the largest

benefit of results of PM1 is not the global data but information for teachers to examine which standards they need to reinforce or re-teach with each student. He acknowledged the support of staff members Erin Chapman, Advanced Studies Curriculum Coordinator, and the Curriculum Team of Allison Nichols and Tiffany Spradling. [LWV note: see slide presentation [here](#).]

Consent Items

The Consent Agenda included 25 items that were approved 5-0.

New Business: (Non-Consent Items)

Approval of a New Job Description of High School Student Intern (General Fund) - approved 5-0. This will allow the district to hire its own students to complete projects for the district, e.g. MSTV can hire video production students, or hire students to assist IT Department related to the construction of new schools.

Approval of Resolution 2024-0111 Authorizing Florida Statutes Tax Anticipation Note - approved 5-0. The school board has issued a note like this for the last 15 years to borrow money until the first property tax distribution is made. However, because of the current credit rating district is pursuing a public offering for a lower rate for the year. The note will not exceed \$48 million.

Approval of Proposed Opening Plan for East County K-8 - approved 5-0. Following the workshop last week where the plan was outlined in detail, board members were reminded that the construction is on schedule for the elementary (K-5) portion of the school to open in August 2025, with the middle school (6-8) portion opening in August 2026. There will be no attendance boundaries drawn now for the elementary opening; however, there is a voluntary reassignment plan for those families assigned to Gullett, Freedom, McNeal or Braden River elementary schools. Assignment should wrap up by Thanksgiving to determine the staffing plan. Once the name is decided, the Master School Identification Number will be requested from the state. Nominations for names continues through noon on September 27. The board may determine to narrow the list on October 8 with a final decision on a name on October 22nd. Or they may make the decision on October 8. The board members will be given the compiled list of nominations by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, October 1st.

Approval of Proposed Opening Plan for North County School Site - approved 5-0. A parallel plan to the East County K-8 school was detailed at the September 13 workshop. Dr. Wysong reminded the board members that originally the school under construction was to be a middle school. However, there is a higher priority based on the population for grades 4 and 5 at nearby Barbara Harvey Elementary School. This has resulted in planning to make Barbara Harvey Elementary School a K-8 school utilizing both the original campus and the new campus site under one school identification number and one administration. This will allow flexibility for expanding the grade levels across both campuses as the demographics change. The district will use a voluntary reassignment plan to begin with no boundaries, adding grades, and including boundaries later when adding grades. A lengthy discussion followed about how to

clearly designate each of the Barbara Harvey Elementary School campuses. Ms. Spray advocated for the new campus building to be Harvey Elementary at North River Ranch and Mr. Tatem and others indicated they were approached by a Neal developer representative to do this as well. Ms. Messenger and Ms. Foreman pushed back on that idea citing issues brought up by the Parrish community when there was a push for noting the development in naming the high school, and the need for the community to weigh in on any naming that includes more than Barbara Harvey Elementary. The discussion continued with Board Attorney Dye weighing in that since there won't be a school name change and the building designation will only be directional, there is no need to exercise the 6 months required for a school name change. Ms. Foreman asked that the campus designation decision be placed on a future agenda.

[LWV note: For more information about the opening plans for the two new schools, go to <https://www.manateeschools.net/newschool>]

Approval of the Ratified Manatee Education Association (MEA) Collective Bargaining Agreement for the School District of Manatee County (Multiple Funding Sources) - approved 5-0. Dr. Wysong indicated that the MEA ratified the agreement and commended the work of the lead negotiators and the collaboration that led to creative solutions in preparation for the approved contract.

Approval of the 2024-2025 Classroom Teacher and Other Instructional Personnel Salary Increase Allocation Plan - approved 5-0.

Approval of the 2024-2025 Salary Schedules for 11-Month Grandfathered Teacher, 10-month Grandfathered Teacher, 10 & 11-Month Teacher Performance, Para and MEA Salary Supplement Schedule (No Financial Impact) - approved 5-0

Updates

Instruction – Deputy Superintendent Jensen indicated that more than 70 post-secondary institutions were at the College and Career Night at MTC on Monday evening with hundreds of students and parents attending to learn about options for after high school.

Operations – Deputy Superintendent Ranaldi spoke about the success of the recent job fair for operations with 142 attending and offers were made for three custodial positions, 9 food service workers and 8 bus drivers. Oct. 17th from 9-noon at Wakeland is the next operations job fair. For Transportation was 100% compliance for CDL training. Bus safety week is coming with October 21st obstacle course for bus drivers and timed wheelchair securing evens for aides plus a school poster contest. Seven new busses are expected to arrive in October with integrated car seats for pre-K. Food and Nutrition is celebrating Hispanic Month on October 7 serving mangos and churros, and displaying posters of historical Hispanic figures.

Legal – Mr. Dye – will be out next week and Ms. Petruff will fill in for him.

Superintendent's Remarks – Dr. Wysong thanked board members for approving the consent items including a computer science teacher certification grant and nine clinical experience

agreements to benefit MTC medical programs. He described the challenges over the last two weeks with students making bad choices regarding threatening the safety at school campuses and he discussed this with the principals at today's meeting. A video was made regarding this topic that was played at all middle and high school campuses this week. Sheriff Wells did an interview that was also sent to all parents. Student Services put together a one page hand out of information to be sent to all parents with lists of suggestions and resources to help them talk to their children about the seriousness of these threats even if meant as jokes. All of these resources are on the district's website. Weather plans and announcements were made earlier today. He thanked all those who will work 24 hours a day until the storm passes. Dr. Wysong thanked board members who went with him to visit schools.

Board Comments

Ms. Messenger indicated the Chamber Retreat was great and said the Superintendent did an excellent job. She said she learned a lot about housing, jobs, and infrastructure as well as hearing from local leaders in law enforcement. She asked everyone to be safe in the storm.

Mr. Tatem's safety tip, with storm coming, is don't go out after the storm to see what happened. Just stay home and let county first responders do their job.

Ms. Foreman shared that Dr. Wysong and Terry Connor, Sarasota Superintendent, came on around the same time. Mr. Conner was offered an extended contract and Ms. Foreman would like to discuss extending Dr. Wysong's contract at a workshop now before a new board comes on. She said don't forget to contact Dr. Rio and get her reaction to changing the name of the school. She said she was sorry she missed going to MHS as she broke her toe and couldn't walk. She announced this is Banned Books Week and spoke about law suits that have resulted in returning books to the shelves. She wants to be sure we are following the process and revamp and make it clearer what distinguishes instructional, media center and classroom materials. She indicated the need to more clearly define the process so there is no ambiguity and reminded board members that they still need to talk about policy 2520 and have a revision. She ended her remarks with "Happy Birthday to Mr. Choate."

Ms. Spray said there is a book on our shelves on how to build a bomb and she needs to talk with Mr. Jensen about it. She met some community business leaders at the Chamber affair. She recounted that a member of Leadership Manatee at that affair was also at the last board meeting and thanked her for the questions the board asked about the budget process. She reminded fellow board members that developers produce jobs that filter down into our whole community. She requested a workshop item about a Drop Out Prevention Program that was dropped after piloting it. She acknowledged changing school boundary lines will take a whole lot of work. She reiterated "Safety Over Secrets" which means a lot over the last few weeks and thanked the Superintendent and Sheriff Wells for following up on it.

Mr. Choate thanked Dr. Wysong, leadership and the safety staff. He remarked that our district is a leader in the state and it showed last week. He said Dr. Wysong's video was excellent. He thanked the staff for schools that will be shelters and asks all to stay safe during the storm. He thanked the Abel Elementary principal for creating a dynamic school. Mr. Choate said the

essays from students at Palmetto and Lakewood Ranch High Schools on the Constitution were exceptional.

Adjournment: 8:41 p.m.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

As noted previously, we recommend inviting religious leaders from a variety of denominations and religions to provide the invocation so that the entire community is reflected.

The board has been well served by Ms. Foreman's financial expertise. She praised the district for being in such an excellent financial position that financial institutions are vying for the district's business.

The observers agree that Ms. Messenger's corporate knowledge about history of the district and familiarity with board policies are indeed valuable and will be missed. Examples include when she reminded Attorney Dye and board members that changing a school name would trigger a 6-month waiting period, as well as explaining to other board members why the issue of adding North River Ranch was contentious.

Each member of the board needs to come to decisions within an historical context and willingness to seek community input. Without Ms. Messenger, this will require an increase in information gathering and background checking on the part of each board member. Diligence and ethical priorities are required. Mr. Tatem was observed to question whether the board was legally obligated to follow their own policy which we found to be a major concern. It is disheartening that after two or more years on the board, there is ignorance of board policies.

The discussion about naming the North County K-8 highlighted the lack of general knowledge among some on the board about the philosophy and purpose of a K-8 school and how a K-8 can add value to a family.

We were encouraged to hear board members' questions about Progress Monitoring focused on student success and parent support rather than just the numbers. Ms. Spray noted that best practices are being shared from school to school.

We commend Ms. Foreman for being forthright when challenged for her adamant insistence to follow the board's own policies and for expressing serious concern about the intentions of someone in the community wielding undue influence.

Board members are cautioned against using sarcasm and jokes to make a point from the dais.

We appreciate Mr. Choate commending the Superintendent for the very well thought out plan for the new North County K-8 school with every aspect being considered.

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.