

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 October 6, 2026.**

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Spray at 10:00 a.m. The District Vision was read by Ms. Felton. Ms. Felton requested a moment of silence. Ms. Spray added the tragic Polk School District bus accident yesterday. US Air Force Veteran Scott Henson, Chief Technology Officer for the School District, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

STUDENT CELEBRATIONS

School District of Manatee County Named Guy Harvey Conservation District

Ms. Carson announced the honor of being named a Guy Harvey Conservation District for the strong commitment to conservation through instruction and professional development. To earn this distinction, districts must support conservation-focused instruction, provide professional learning opportunities for teachers, and maintain active Guy Harvey Conservation Schools. The Manatee District exceeds the program requirements with five active Conservation Schools across our district. Anna Maria Elementary, King Middle School, and Manatee High School have ongoing environmental learning activities. Williams Elementary and Mona Jain Middle School both have teachers who have participated in professional learning around conservation education and environmental learning. She commended the coordinators of the district's science programs, the teachers and school principals. The district received a lithograph which will be displayed in the board room.

PUBLIC COMMENT

KG – has been a resident for 50 years, volunteers in schools, and attends track meets. He cited the documented risks to students' well-being of running up and down the bleacher steps. He said 43% of high school students sustain injuries from overuse and accidents. Risks are far more prevalent in female athletes. He said there are other conditioning exercises that provide the same benefit without the risks.

REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

Presentation by RSM, the District Internal Auditors, of the Statement of Work (SOW) for FY 2026-2027

Mr. Daniel, Citizen Financial Audit Committee (CFAC) Chair, introduced the representative from RSM to review the plan to focus on six areas: half cent sales tax; millage tax; Manatee Technical College; recruitment and onboarding of personnel; access control; and cybersecurity maturity assessment. While Ms. Sellers had suggested modifying the plan for recruiting and onboarding since a new program is being developed, Mr. Daniel indicated doing it now would provide information about the current status to compare when the new process is in place. The focus is to bring recommendations and on-going follow-up. There were no high-risk observations found to date on previous audits. The ones they did find were followed up and corrected.

Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Choate, Ms. Felton, and Ms. Spray each made statements of concern about the auditing of cybersecurity and CFAC's oversight role due to sensitive security issues. Mr. Kennedy remarked that there would soon be "tweaks" to the CFAC charter in regard to cybersecurity oversight. Mr. Choate pointed out that cybersecurity is still the responsibility of the five-member school board and not CFAC. The RSM response was that CFAC would look at high level security with controls – what is in place, who is doing what, review third party, and who needs to know. RSM's five-year plan should align with the district's objectives through collaboration. Mr. Choate asked Mr. Hensen for a response. Mr. Hensen felt overlapping between two different firms was an issue and it is being worked out. He said the district is monitored on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. He asked for consideration of the board to not duplicate. Ms. Felton asked for discussion in a Shade Meeting. She was not comfortable to address the issue for a vote at this time. Ms. Spray asked CFAC not to have additional access to the district's cybersecurity. She did not think that needed to be added to another group. She requested to have it be removed from RSM's scope of work. She asked Mr. Dye for his opinion. Mr. Dye said that on a former board, Ms. Foreman asked for additional oversight and added CFAC's role with guardrails. Lay people are not generally experts in cybersecurity and the role of CFAC is about to be amended. Mr. Kennedy re-emphasized the need for oversight of a vendor who is doing very sensitive work.

Mr. Daniel acknowledged the sensitivity of the issue and reminded board members that RSM works for them. RSM is not a vendor selling a product. RSM has expertise that could offer to be your eyes and inform you of what is being presented to help you understand, but not take any action on it. RSM is looking at a top-down observation for you, the board. They are here to assist you, not direct you.

Mr. Choate expressed his concern with the time auditing takes and that staff is asked to do their normal jobs and then redo with Purvis Gray and now with RSM. We are asking our staff to spend

considerable time on this and wondered, “Is this overworking?” He added that three of their items are perfectly fine, but would like to pull cybersecurity. Another issue he addressed was employee recruiting and onboarding. He pointed out auditing it while it is being changed doesn’t make sense to him. He said, our staff is auditing it now as they go and he would like RSM to come back when it is done and then look at it. Superintendent Breslin said HR had an outside organization giving them feedback and are in the process of making changes and, implementing the company’s observations. Ms. Spray agreed with Mr. Choate.

Mr. Tatem said he needs further discussion with all the experts. He said, “I am not trying to be flippant.” He reviewed the three areas under discussion: cybersecurity, retention and onboarding, and access control. He asked Mr. Daniel what he was recommending.

Mr. Daniel indicated CFAC operates in a bubble and identified these three areas as being where there are risks. These reflect their best guess to recommend where work is needed to be done. In regard to HR onboarding and the changes, if you don’t know what is being done right now, what will you compare to when the changes are made? With security being identified as a high-risk area he indicated RSM has expertise and can work with you without CFAC involvement. In response to Mr. Tatem’s question, he said they would like to start with HR and where they are currently.

Mr. Tatem questioned if CFAC was operating in a vacuum and did they need more discussion with staff. CFAC did their risk analysis months ago and may need more information about what is currently going on. Mr. Daniel acknowledged that things change. He emphasized, if you want product enhancement then you need baseline information. CFAC meets every other month with their latest meeting in July. RSM indicated they could work directly with staff to see what is currently going on if that would be helpful.

Ms. Felton said she would like to discuss cybersecurity in the shade. In regard to recruiting and onboarding, she made the analogy of working on next year’s football play book without the benefit of analyzing last year’s play book.

To move things along, Mr. Kennedy suggested they approve the whole scope, but not do anything on the three areas under discussion until the Board tells them to proceed. Mr. Choate said if we withdraw cybersecurity or other items, RSM could then work on other areas not included, but identified.

Mr. Daniel requested they pull Access Controls, HR, and Cybersecurity so RSM can work on the other areas they have identified. They will come back with an update at future meetings.

Ms. Spray clarified that for the item later in the agenda in regard to RSM that the three items under discussion be removed.

Presentation of the Adoption Process Including Review and Selection of Instructional Materials for K-12 Math

Mr. Derek Jensen, Deputy Superintendent of Instructional Services, Ms. Kaththea Johnson, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, Ms. Tiffany Spradling, Director of Secondary Curriculum, and Ms. Alison Nichols, Director of Elementary Curriculum, provided an overview of the adoption process, including review and selection of instructional materials, for K-12 mathematics. They explained the state requirements for textbook adoption as well as the district timelines. The newly adopted materials would be in place for the 2027-2028 school year.

Mr. Tatem asked how many classes of math a student had to take to graduate. Mr. Jensen said it was three (later restated there are four) with passing end-of-course state exams in Algebra I and Geometry. Ms. Felton clarified that in selection of all textbooks the district must select from a state approved list and not just any one they wish. Ms. Spray asked if asking for community members who wish to participate will be posted visibly on the website and was told it will be under Hot Topics. Mr. Choate asked if the Mathematics Standards have changed since the last adoption. The response was that they have not changed. Mr. Choate then asked if the current textbooks are still usable. He was told that many of the materials are consumable workbooks and digital resources with 5-year licenses. Dr. Breslin said even if the text books could still be used, there would be expenses, but not as great, as many would need to be replaced.

https://manateeschools.granicus.com/services/legistar/download/pdf/4375098/K-12_Math_Adoption_-_Board_Presentation.pdf

2026-2027 FAST Progress Monitoring 1 (PM1) Assessment Results

Mr. Evan McCarthy, Director of Assessment and Research, and Mr. Derek Jensen, Deputy Superintendent of Instruction, presented the data regarding the 2026-2027 FAST and current Progress Monitoring (PM1) results. Mr. Jensen reminded everyone these are starting points after summer break. We always start behind the state in ELA in first grade and that is because there are two different tests and we start with the more difficult one. Historically we have closed the gap by the end of the year. The kindergarten students started ahead of the state for the first time. Early learning is showing the results. We are keeping pace with the state increase in scores.

In response to Mr. Tatem's question about why he hears that people going to college can't read, Mr. Jensen said that we have placed greater emphasis in Pre-K on building the foundation and

then build from there to 10th grade application concepts and analysis in college style assessments.

Math again shows that we accelerate at lower levels and it reflects in the scores. This year the accelerated 5th grade math students took the 5th grade test rather than the 6th grade test as in the past. The most proficient 8th grade students are taking 9th grade tests.

[https://manateeschools.granicus.com/services/legistar/download/pdf/4406604/School Board PM1 Data Review 100626.pdf](https://manateeschools.granicus.com/services/legistar/download/pdf/4406604/School_Board_PM1_Data_Review_100626.pdf)

CONSENT ITEMS- Ten (10) items were approved 5-0

PUBLIC HEARING – Ms. Spray closed the general meeting and opened the public hearing.

Public Hearing for Consideration to Adopt and Amend School Board Policies

Mr. Chapman explained that one policy regarding guidelines for school safety was changed to reflect new statutes and the new policy addresses foster care. There were no public comments.

Ms. Spray gavelled out of the public hearing and resumed the general meeting.

NEW BUSINESS (NON-CONSENT ITEMS)

Approval to Adopt and Amend School Board Policies (General Fund). Approved 5-0.

Approval of the 2026-2027 Salary Schedules for Teacher Performance Hiring Salary Schedule, Para and MEA Salary Supplement Schedule, Grandfathered Teacher Salary Schedule, Hourly Non-Bargaining, SAMP, and School Administrators (Multiple Funding Sources). Approved 5-0

Approval of Resolution 2026-006 Authorizing a Section 1011.13, Florida Statutes Tax Anticipation (TAN), Series 2026 (General Fund). Approved 5-0.

Approval of Resolution 2026-2027 Authorizing the Issuance of Not-to-Exceed \$65,000,000 Aggregate Principal Amount of Sales Tax Refunding Revenue Bonds, Series 2027 (Capital Funds)
Mr. Tatem clarified that refunding means refinancing. Approved 5-0.

Recess for 25 minutes for a lunch break.

NEW BUSINESS (NO SUPERINTENDENT RECOMMENDATION)

Approval of the Statement of Work with RSM US, LLP, to Provide Internal Auditing Services, SDMC No. 25-007 RG, Estimated in the Amount of \$340,000.00 (General Fund) As amended due

to previous discussion by removing the three items: Recruitment and On Boarding, Cybersecurity, and Access Control. Approved 5-0.

Approval of the 2027 School Board of Manatee Legislative Priorities Approved 5-0.

https://manateeschools.granicus.com/services/legistar/download/pdf/4396578/SBMC_2027_Legislative_Priorities.pdf

Approval of the Proposed 2027 Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards (GFCSB) Federal Legislative Programs – Ms. Spray indicated there was a vote to bring Sarasota back in to the Consortium. Approved 5-0.

https://manateeschools.granicus.com/services/legistar/download/pdf/4388385/PROPOSED_GFCSB_2027_Federal_Legislative_Program.pdf

Approval of the Proposed 2027 Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards (GFCSB) State Legislative Programs. Ms. Felton added that FSBA is meeting this Thursday to work on their legislative agenda. Approved 5-0.

https://manateeschools.granicus.com/services/legistar/download/pdf/4388388/PROPOSED_GFCSB_2027_State_Legislative_Program.pdf

Approval to authorize the recommendation of General Counsel and Board Attorney held in Shade Session the dispute from Southwest Charter Foundation, Inc. (Lakewood Ranch Preparatory Academy and Manatee Charter School) regarding the distribution of Sales Tax.

Mr. Dye indicated the complaint was attached for review regarding a dispute from one charter operation, Southwest Charter Foundation. They operate Lakewood Ranch Preparatory Academy and Manatee Charter. There is a dispute about the roll-in method of sharing the sales surtax with charter schools. He reminded the Board that sharing with charter schools was not required since the tax predated the 2020 statute but the Board volunteered to start sharing as a resolution with the charter schools. Mr. Kennedy asked if we are withholding all of the funding that is being shared with other charter schools. Superintendent Breslin said 15 charters signed the documents and this is the last holdout as they wanted the funds all at once.

Approved 5-0.

UPDATES

INSTRUCTION – Mr. Jensen announced there were 233 students who had perfect scores on assessments last spring. First quarter is ending and there is no school for students on Monday, since October 12 is a record day. The Early Literacy Summit is October 24 at Lakewood Ranch HS. STEM competitions begin in November and robotics in January. The first small SOAR n 4 lab

will be at the Next in Robin's Apartments. The staff of SOAR are offering monthly learning activities for families. MTC's EMT graduation is next week. At the Florida School Council meeting in Orlando on October 13 three of the district's counselors will be honored. Ms. Scarborough, Secondary Executive Director, is meeting with all high school principals to look at 9-12 students' progress to meeting graduation requirements. Manatee HS will host marching band competition next week. [Note: has been cancelled due to weather conditions.] Parrish Community HS is showcasing its "Into the Woods" production.

OPERATIONS – Mr. Clark reported that 85 attended the September 24 teacher/para job fair and 10 moved on to interviews. The next teacher/para job fair will be virtual on October 14 from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Currently there are 36 teacher vacancies. Operations job fair will be held from 9:00 a.m. – noon at Wakeland Support Center. The annual enrollment window for medical benefits is October 26-November 4. Rangeland HS's walls are going up and Veteran Elementary's phases one and two are operational with the third phase, the second floor, to be finished by December. The Food and Nutrition department is working with Samoset students on their vegetable garden with their STEM teacher for hands on math and science learning. Bus Safety Week is October 19-23, with a host of activities to emphasize this important focus given the accident in Polk County. Sunday, October 11 from 8:45 a.m. -3:30 p.m., the annual Stuff the Bus with food drive will be at nine locations.

LEGAL – no further remarks.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REMARKS

Dr. Breslin stressed that today's meeting shows the progress the district is making. She thanked the Board for supporting the math textbook adoption process. It is National Principal Appreciation month, so when out in schools, please thank them. Dr. Breslin thanked the Board for their approval of the consent items. She welcomed the new budget director who started yesterday. She asked Ms. Sellers to share the news as a result of the updated credit analysis. The rating is now AA3 and has moved from positive up to stable. Dr. Breslin and Ms. Sellers are attending the Florida Association of District School Superintendents meeting next week with a focus on conserving and maximizing every dollar spent. The district is launching a Story Book Trail at Jessie P. Miller which will be the first in the city. SOAR labs are collecting clothing for those in need. She asked everyone to say a prayer for Polk District Schools.

BOARD COMMENTS

Ms. Felton shared that the Children Services Advisory Board held their first meeting for the upcoming grant cycle. She will be in Tallahassee with the Florida School Board Association to realign legislative priorities. The advocacy groups will convene. She listed the schools she has been to this past week and a half. She thanked staff for all of their reports.

Mr. Choate said he was pleased with the Moody financial ratings and the growth in reading scores which came from the millage. It is homecoming season and he reminded students to have fun but be safe.

Mr. Kennedy thanked everyone for the good meeting today. He agreed the credit rating going up is always great news.

Mr. Tatem reminded everyone to be safe with a lot of rain coming in the next few days and to remember "Turn around, don't drown." He shared a leadership story from his leadership sessions in which participants were asked to see people as people and not as an object. He said the next time you go to the grocery store, line up all items with the bar codes facing the cashier – see them as people you can help to make their job easier while you are doing your job.

Ms. Spray said this board does work well together. She said she does not mind at all when board members want to dialogue with each other. She attended a county meeting where each county officer presented what they do in their jobs to 19 of our students. She thinks the new park being built in Palmetto would be a good place for a Story Book Trail. She thanked staff for putting the meeting together and wished those traveling to be safe.

ADJOURNMENT – 1:10p.m.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Each Board Member asked respectful and information-expanding questions throughout the meeting.

Ms. Spray continues to run efficient meetings, respectful of everyone's time.

On several occasions, board members alluded to events or activities without specificity. For example, at least three people during the meeting alluded to the bus accident in Polk County but never named it. Ms. Spray spoke to 19 students but didn't reference it was a part of the Model Manatee government project.

While admitting confusion during the discussion of the scope of work for RSM being recommended by CFAC, Mr. Tatem's questions helped clarify the situation and ultimately led to a conclusion after a long discussion.