

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 22, 2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 5:01 PM. Ms. Foreman read the district's vision statement and stated Mr. Richard Tatem would give the invocation. The Color Guard from Lakewood Ranch High School was introduced by Chair Choate. The Pledge of Allegiance followed.

The Agenda was approved, 5-0.

The Minutes were approved for August 30, School Board Exempt Shade Meeting and Workshop, September 10, School Board Meeting and Public Hearing, and September 13, 2024 and September 29, 2024 School Board Regular Meeting. Approved 5-0.

Recognitions

Mr. Michael Barber, Executive Director of Communications, introduced Derek Hernandez, a "hero", at Rogers Garden Bullock Elementary. On August 14th, Mr. Hernandez noticed a student choking in the cafeteria and performed the Heimlich maneuver. In addition, the Superintendent presented the Superintendent Excellence Award to Mr. Hernandez.

Chair Choate introduced Woody Gross who spoke about the Edward Jones' \$20,000 donation to the district for purchasing more Translate Live devices. Debra Estes gave a presentation of how the Translate Live works during any meeting. She stated that this is a game changer since these devices have 120+ languages.

Mr. Barber recognized a few of the Hurricane Shelter Staff. Superintendent Wysong stated Hurricane Milton was the 3rd hurricane this year that the District Staff opened for Manatee area evacuations. He added that during Hurricane Milton there were 17 shelters, that serviced 11,000+ guests and 1,400 pets. Two guests that were at Harvey Elementary School gave their personal positive experience at the shelter and the great services provided. Lee Middle School Principal, Kimone Cooper, spoke to how all of the district comes together as a well-oiled machine to make these shelters work. McNeil Elementary's, Sheila Waid, Director of Food Nutrition Services, and Regina Thoma introduced Deanna Sabatino from Mills Elementary School, each highlighted food services' participation. Todd Henson, Director of

Maintenance, thanked all of the custodial staff who served at the shelters. Mr. Henson recognized Nolan Middle School's custodian, Rob Greer who described the custodians' many duties at the shelters. Superintendent Wysong stated that this is a representative group that makes shelters possible. He expressed pride in the district's workforce. Every administrator is on call, and many picked up shifts. He thanked the crew that goes to the Emergency Management Center, and mentioned that additional staff went during Hurricane Milton due to its intensity.

Public Comments

Mike Rio stated why the new school should be named for Tim Kolbe, a long time principal and leader in Manatee County and named 13 people who he influenced to become leaders/principals and how many those leaders influenced others to be leaders.

Brian Flynn, retired Manatee educator and leader, who also endorsed the new K-8 school be named for Tim Kolbe listed all the positions Mr. Kolbe held within the school district for 38 years.

Recess taken 5:46 pm, until 5:55 pm

Reports and Presentations

Florida Department of Transportation Bradenton-Palmetto Connector - updated October 4, 2024. Jimmy Vilce' and Gail Woods presented information about possible corridors that will ease the congestion across the Manatee River between the two areas. The presentation can be viewed at this link.

https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2898256/FDOT_Presentation_Oct_2024.pdf

They explained that the purpose of this plan is to expedite evacuation, improve overall capacity and transportation demands, safety and interlocal relationships. Phases 1 (Planning) and 2 (Project Development & Environment) have been funded. Phases 3 and 4 have not been funded yet. They have held over 90 meetings so far. Several corridors have already been eliminated. Up to three corridors will be recommended to Project Development and Environment. This should be a 10-year project. Looking at how to maximize US 41 is the starting point, possibly expanding to 6 or 8 lanes and then go from there looking at new housing/construction, etc. The DeSoto bridge will start being replaced by 2027 (end in 3 years) due to age with approved federal funding but not the additional lanes. Federal funding ONLY can be used for replacement.

Chair Choate asked about a "flyover." Ms. Woods stated that in this phase, Phase 1, it has not been decided what makes sense. Chair Choate commented that the level of traffic is impacted by the school traffic, and appreciated being given this presentation. He stated it would be interesting to gather input from not only high schools, as well as parents and employees.

Ms. Spray asked to go back to the preliminary corridor elimination page and there was a discussion regarding E-W traffic and N-S traffic. Various models are being reviewed based on current and new projects as DOT moves through the various phases.

Ms. Foreman spoke to the bridge and its replacement. The final design is being worked on, but this project may impact the final design, but not for the replacement of the bridge. The current federal funding is dedicated to bridge replacement, not capacity.

Ms. Foreman stated she didn't understand the angst about a flyover. Mr. Tatem also spoke about fiscal constraints and the need for a flyover.

Consent Items

The Consent Agenda included 24 items that were approved 5-0.

Public Hearing

Chair Choate closed the Regular Meeting and opened the Public Hearing to Consider Adopting and Amending School Board Policies. The policies were considered in two batches.

With no public comments, Chair Choate closed the Public Hearing, and reopened the Regular Meeting.

Superintendent Wysong moved to adopt and amend presented School Board Policies. Approved 5-0.

LWV Note: Links to the adopted and amended school board policies are as follows

https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2861418/October_8_Policies_Part_One.pdf

https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2861419/October_8_Policies_Part_Two.pdf

https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2861420/October_8_Part_Three.pdf

https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2893414/Policy_6110.pdf

https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2893416/Part_Four_Policies.pdf

New Business: (Non-Consent Items)

Naming of East County K-8 School. Dr. Wysong suggested the Board select several names and asked the community for feedback, with the expectation to make a final decision on October 29th, a called meeting to catch-up on School Board business delayed due to school closures. Each of the board members stated their top picks. Board Members approved 5-0 the following four nominations: Frankie Howze, Tim Kolbe, Liberty, Lake Manatee. Board members asked to see the supporting nomination documents about each of the four finalists and asked that the community weigh in on the decision for naming the new school by October 28th.

Approval of the Budget Amendments for July and August 2024. Rachel Sellers indicated there were 550 amendments affecting 3300 chart strings with eleven over a million dollars. Seven concerned the general budget and four concerned the mil budget. Approved 5-0.

Approval of Resolution No. 2024-004 Authorizing Issuance of Certificates of Participation, Series 2025A (the "Series 2025A Certificates") (Capital Funds) - Updated 10-18-2024. Rachel Sellers presented. Known as COPS, these funds will be used to build two new elementary schools in the area of Rye Ranch and Artisan Lakes. Ms. Sellers introduced representatives from PFM Financial Advisors LLC to address questions from Mr. Tatem regarding interest rates and penalties. Approved 5-0.

Chair Choate closed the School Board meeting and opened the meeting of the Manatee Leasing Corporation.

Manatee Leasing Corporation

Approval of Corporate Resolution No. 2024-005 Authorizing Issuance of Certificates of Participation, Series 2025A, (the "Series 2025A Certificates") (Capital Funds) - Updated 10-18-2024. Mr. Tatem asked a question regarding the threshold of lease payments and impact on credit ratings for the district. A representative from PFM Financial Advisors LLC responded that the district's credit status is good. Approved 5-0

Chair Choate closed the Manatee Leasing Corporation and opened the School Board meeting.

New Business: (No Superintendent Recommendation)

Discussion Regarding the Appointment of Citizen Financial Oversight Committee (CFOC) Member. CFOC requested that past Florida Senator and former Manatee County Supervisor of Elections Mike Bennett be selected to join CFOC. Approved 5-0

Approval of Travel Expense Associated with the School Board Members' Attendance at the Greater Florida Consortium of School Boards (GFCSB) Meeting, November 7-8, 2024, at the Zota Beach Resort, Longboat Key, FL, Not to Exceed \$2000.00 (General Fund). Approved 5-0

Information Only (No Board Action Required)

Year to Date Financial Statements through August 31, 2024

Year to Date Charter School Financial Statement Summary through August 31, 2024

School Safety Requirements and Monitoring Reports – 2024-2025 Quarter 1

Hurricane Debby Reimbursement FEMA Sub-Grant

Updates

Instruction – Mr. Derek Jensen, Deputy Superintendent of Instructional Services, described the amazing STEM elementary catapult competition held prior to Hurricane Milton. He congratulated the winners. Harvey Elementary came in first for distance and Sea Breeze placed first for accuracy. He also congratulated Larissa Bennett for being recognized by the Florida School Counselor Association as the Outstanding District Leader. He acknowledged that Manatee Technical College has been notified of Florida Department of Education grants of \$400,000 for aviation equipment, and \$400,000 to remodel a program at Bayshore High School. He visited Kinnan Elementary and acknowledged their emphasis on showing student work and how it aligns to the purpose and benchmarks of the instruction. This is a priority throughout the district.

Operations – Mr. Ranaldi, Deputy Superintendent of Operation Services, thanked the Board for the recognition of the staff for manning the shelters. In addition, six school buses were provided for vacating the shelters and this was the first time for doing this. The next operations job fair is 2-5 p.m. on November 14. He invited the board members to participate in the bus rodeo to celebrate next week's Bus Service Week. In November, a class of fifteen will commence their CDL course. He remarked about the October 17 menu featuring pirate themed foods to celebrate Food Service Week. To honor First Responder Day, eight elementary schools invited first responders to lunch and made cards and posters. In response to Mr. Tatem's questions about downed school zone lights and signs, as well as debris covering sidewalks and decreasing drivers' visibility, Mr. Ranaldi indicated he is working with the county.

Legal – Mr. Dye and Mr. Pendley had no reports.

Superintendent Remarks –

Dr. Wysong thanked the Board for approving 24 consent items. He highlighted an agreement with the University of Florida to continue capacity for literacy development through a grant funded by the Sarasota Community Foundation for \$500,000. He mentioned enjoying pre-Milton events including girls' golf and volleyball games, as well as the STEM competition and the all-county orchestra performance. Dr. Wysong expressed gratitude that "all hands were on deck" during Milton including Willie Clark at the EOC and Attorney Pendley at Witt Elementary. He expressed gratitude to the governor's office for assistance to employees that were impacted by Helene and Milton with \$100,000 to the Manatee Education Foundation. Dr. Wysong acknowledged the work of the operations staff to assess and prepare all of the school sites for the Tuesday reopening of schools. He is working with all of the relevant groups to

determine the schedule to make up the school days lost due to the storms and will let everyone know by next week. He described the schools he has visited recently. A special board meeting has been called for next week on Tuesday, October 29.

Board Comments

Mr. Tatem asked everyone to be safe and slow down due to the debris on the road. In reference to upcoming Veteran's Day, he mentioned a veteran, Ron Zaleski, author of [A Long Walk Home](#), who is again walking across the country to put a spot light on veteran suicides. Mr. Tatem spoke to his experience at a shelter.

Ms. Foreman visited the Soar In Four museum describing it as interesting and unique and hopes for an increase in size and scope with additional locations. She indicated the shelter operations were incredible. She expressed concern about debris on sidewalks putting students who walk to school in danger. She updated the board on the Auditor Selection Committee reviewing the applications of five internal and two external auditors.

Ms. Spray said she was glad to get through the initial part of naming the school and asked the public to go to the website and indicate their choice. She also thanked staff who worked at the hurricane shelters.

Ms. Messenger also thanked all the employees who worked so hard for everyone. She reminded everyone that early voting began yesterday and asked them to please go vote.

Mr. Choate thanked Dr. Wysong for keeping board members in the loop and for his leadership and the staff throughout the storm and for opening so quickly and well. He indicated Edward Jones did collaborate with various Florida school districts to fill in blanks for the financial literacy program and that it will be free to the districts. Mr. Choate joined Ms. Messenger, to ask everyone to please vote and vote Yes on #7. He cautioned voter fatigue because #7 (renewal of school referendum) is on the back of page two of the ballot.

Adjournment – 8:06 p.m.

Good Governance

Chair Choate seamlessly gaveled in and out of the regular meeting for the public hearing and the Manatee Leasing Corporation. He also demonstrated quick adaptability when the electronic voting did not work.

Board Members each made sincere statements of gratitude for all of the effort the district staff made to man the seventeen hurricane shelters for 11,000 citizens and 1,400 pets during Hurricane Milton.

Board Members questions and comments regarding the transportation study to address north-south traffic congestion were spot on as well as bringing up the impact of school district traffic as something to be considered. However, perhaps if Board Members had taken advantage of

reviewing information from the 90 meetings held over the last several years, they would not have appeared to be so surprised by aspects of the presentation.

Ms. Messenger and Ms. Foreman continue to contribute historical background, corporate knowledge, and a priority for gathering and honoring public input. They will both be missed.

LWV note: Board Members need to be made aware that although the sound coming through to home viewers was not adequate, district staff rectified the issue early in the meeting after receiving feedback.