LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF MANATEE COUNTY

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 October 27, 2026.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Chair Spray followed by the reading of the Purpose Statement by Mr. Kennedy. The invocation was given by Rabbi Paul Schreiber of Temple Beth El. The Parrish High School Color Guard presented the colors. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by the Senior Army instructor for the Parrish Community High School's JROTC, retired U.S. Army Veteran Lt. Colonel Bel Wilson. He is also a top ten finalist for the School District's Excellence in Education Teacher of the Year Award. Superintendent Breslin presented him with a flag that flew over the U.S. Capitol.

Student Celebrations/Recognitions – Associate Superintendent Kevin Chapman facilitated the recognitions.

Student Service Challenge. Eric Jackson, Executive Director of Student Support and Family Engagement, shared information about the Student Service Challenge. The Florida Department of Education, in partnership with the Florida Lottery, launched the Student Service Challenge to promote student leadership, civic responsibility, and community engagement. The School District of Manatee County, in partnership with the Manatee Education Foundation, was proud to be one of only twenty districts selected to participate statewide. Mr. Jackson introduced Jeramiah Bowman, Director of Educational Programs for the Manatee Education Foundation, who introduced twelve of the 22 high school students who each received $500 for meeting all the criteria. Requirements included 20+ hours of volunteer service and writing an essay between September 7th and October 5th. Mr. Bowman thanked both Dr. Halpin, Early Learning Director, and the Manatee County Natural Resources Department for providing volunteer opportunities to meet the required time line.

The Florida Department of Education's Division of Early Learning has recognized the School District of Manatee County's successful VPK programs and educators. Dr. Sheila Halpin, Director of Early Learning and Family Support, described the individuals and their respective efforts in the Early Learning Program. Over 85% of parents rated the program as outstanding or very good. Cari Whiddon, Early Learning Specialist, described the program evaluation criteria including learning gains, attendance, achievement, and classroom observations. Principal Jennifer Grimes and her team of Ms. Perez and Ms. Cook, at Palma Sola Elementary School received the remarkable score of 100 out of 100 points. Only eleven schools statewide

received that perfect score. Williams Elementary School's Summer VPK Program received 94 of 100 points making it the top-rated school in the state of Florida. The summer VPK program is 300 hours within 30 days. Five teachers were recognized.

Principal Advocate of the Year for the State of Florida. Principal Michael Escorcia, Rogers Garden-Bullock Elementary School, was recognized as the Principal Advocate of the Year by the Florida School Counselor's Association. Shawn Griffon, of Barbara A. Harvey K-8, as a School Counselor of the Year Finalist and Rebecca Bruner, Palmetto High School Counselor, with the Rising Star Award.

Red Ribbon Week Proclamation. Red Ribbon Week is celebrated annually in late October. This year's theme is "Make a Difference, Be a Hero, Stay Drug Free." Braden River High School senior, Emma Daley, President of Students Working Against Tobacco Club (SWAT), described their group's work supporting peers, and thanked community groups who work with them. There are 150 students in their organization. Rather than punishment, their goal is rehabilitation if there is abuse. Ms. Felton read the Red Ribbon Week Proclamation.

Holocaust Education Week Proclamation – Members of the Jewish Federation Sarasota/ Manatee were introduced by Tiffany Spradling, Director of Secondary Curriculum. Shep Englander, CEO of the organization, thanked the district for its support of the organization and its goals of history, ethics, and civic responsibility. On January 27, 2027, a new art-infused learning path will be unveiled. Bette Zarek, Holocaust Education Initiative Specialist, described that over 20,000 local students have been able to hear directly from a Holocaust survivor. Over 60,000 Jews perished from the horrors of the Holocaust. Ms. Zarek introduced Holocaust survivor, Thelka Kahn, age 97, who brought her childhood suitcase and dolls. Ms. Kahn shared her story. Born in northwestern Germany, her father was eventually sent to Buchenwald concentration camp and she never saw him again. All of the windows of her home were broken during Kristallnacht. She could not go back to school after that. At nine years old, her mother put her on a Kindertransport to Sweden. She never returned to Germany and was adopted. They spoke no German and she spoke no Swedish. A German speaking teacher in Sweden helped her learn the language. Her mother was sent to Warsaw and worked in a factory of 4,000 people. The owner went to Berlin one day and all of the workers were taken out back and shot and killed. After she went to high school in Sweden, her aunt in the United States was able to get a visa for her and she came to the United States in 1947. She married a German man in the U.S. He died just before their 60th anniversary. She has four children and twelve grandchildren, indicating her family's forbearance. Mr. Tatem read the Holocaust Education Week Proclamation.

Public Comments. - None

Reports and Presentations:

National School Lunch Week – October 12-16. Anthony Anastasas, Food and Nutrition Services Director, and Skye Grundy, Supervisor of Student Nutrition shared the history of the school lunch program in the U.S. It started in 1946 by President Truman to support the farmers and ensure students were well fed at school. The week itself was named by President Kennedy in 1962. Today over 30 million students receive a school lunch every day. This year's

National School Lunch Week theme was Cafeteria Circus. Students enjoyed decorations and menu items centered on the theme.

Consent Items: 23 items – Approved 5-0.

New Business (Non-Consent Items)

Approval of the Budget Amendments for July and August, 2026 (No Financial Impact). Approved 5-0.

Approval of the New Job Descriptions for the 11-month Calendar Positions for Associate Director(s) and Assistant Principal(s) at the Elementary, Middle, and High School Levels (Cost Savings to General Fund). This will provide an option. Those currently on 12-month contracts are not required to change. Approved 5-0.

Approval of the Reclassification of the Job Description and Position of Supervisor Athletics and Physical Education to Associate Director, District Athletics, Activities, and Physical Education (Athletic Millage). It is being reclassified to include work with community engagement, statutory support for coaches and students, and expanded duties with the addition of a new high school and expanded middle school athletic opportunities. Approved 5-0.

Approval of the New Job Description and Position of Associate Teacher Substitute (General Fund). This position is created for five individuals participating in the Para-to-Professional program supported by the Bishop-Parker Foundation. Approved 5-0.

Approval of the New Job Description and Position of Executive Director Construction and Facilities Services (No Financial Impact). This and the next item are splitting out the current position. The district is using two unfilled positions to accomplish this. Approved 5-0.

Approval of the Revised Job Description and Position of Executive Director, School Support Services to Executive Director, Food and Transportation Services (No Financial Impact). Approved 5-0.

Approval of a New Job Description and Position of Broadcast and AV Specialist (No Financial Impact). Revising a current vacant position and placing the newly drafted position under the Communications Department. Approved 5-0.

Authorization to Negotiate Architect and Engineering (AE) Services and Construction Management At-Risk Services (CM) for Bayshore High School HVAC Renovation (No Financial Impact). A discussion followed regarding this and the next item.

Mr. Choate inquired about the processes used to identify vendors. He claimed ignorance about the selection process and requested a workshop about the process. Mr. Choate brought up a concern where two major high school contracts are with one vendor and whether or not, down the road, similar projects could be lumped together for a common vendor for savings. Mr. Choate suggested inviting a representative from Gulf Coast Builders Exchange to bring an outside perspective. Mr. Kennedy indicated he concurred with Mr. Choate about the need for a

workshop. He also stressed the priority of using local firms to benefit the local economy. Ms. Spray described sitting in on a selection meeting when a volunteer. Dr. Breslin indicated the procurement process has been audited and found sound, but indicated tweaks are possible and she would arrange a workshop in February. Approved 5-0.

Authorization to Negotiate Architect and Engineering (AE) Services and Construction Renovation Management At-Risk Services (CM) for Lakewood Ranch High school HVAC Renovation (No Financial Impact). Approved 5-0.

Approval of the Revised Job Descriptions and Position of Deputy Superintendent Business Services (No Financial Impact) added after publishing. With the pending January retirement of Ms. Sellers, the description was updated to prepare the posting. Approved 5-0.

NEW BUSINESS (NO SUPERINTENDENT RECOMMENDATION) - None

Updates

Instructional Update*.* Mr. Derek Jensen reminded everyone that one key performance indicator in the strategic plan is to increase opportunities for K-12 students to take advanced classes and reported that more students took accelerated classes last year than the year before. Last Saturday, the second Literacy Summit with 160 pre-K – 3rd grade teachers was a success. Catapult competition for 125 teams from 32 elementary schools will be held November 9 at Bayshore High School. Math book adoptions are underway. MTC held its advisory committee breakfast with over 300 business partners attending. Fall and Halloween activities are evident at elementary schools. Middle school cross country competitions were last week with the middle school golf match next Saturday. Band performances were held at Manatee High School last week. The regular high school football season ends this Friday.

Operations Update. Mr. Willie Clark reported that 42 participated in Human Resource's October 17 webinar to learn about alternative paths to teacher certification. Last week's Operations Job Fair resulted in hiring employees for food service, custodial, vehicle maintenance, electricians, LPNs and health aides. The next Operations Job Fair is January 14 with a virtual teacher/para job fair on November 17. Open Enrollment for benefits continues through November 14 with changes taking effect on January 1. Regarding construction, Rye Ranch High School is almost completed; Veterans Elementary is in phase 3; Lake Manatee K-8 is 85% completed; and Harvey K-8 addition is 35% complete. The annual Stuff the Bus event on October 11 resulted in the collection of 61,000 pounds (30.5 tons) of food to distribute to families.

Legal Update. Mr. Dye announced the closing with Jones Farm in early December. He indicated hiring back Mr. Mike Pendley is a big help to him.

Superintendent's Remarks. Dr. Breslin agreed she is happy to have Mr. Mike Pendley back. She described many of the consent items beginning with the School Improvement Plans that are posted on line and the various grants that were approved to support student learning. She thanked everyone for their continued work on Manatee Momentum and described her visits to see instructional strategies in action. Dr. Breslin held a student forum with seniors and plans a

second one in the spring that will include rising juniors. She reminded School Choice begins in November and December with a Show case scheduled on January 9 at the Bradenton Convention Center. She described the role many district leaders have in community organizations.

Board Comments

Ms. Felton shared that the Children Service Advisory Board held their annual retreat in preparation for the next grant season for the millage fund. She reported on the progress toward adoption of legislative priorities by the Florida School Board Association. She visited Lee MS and the exceptional art show at the library at SCF with over 90 student submission. She sat in on the keynote address at Saturday's Literacy Summit.

Mr. Choate described participating in the Chamber's Big Bank Theory at the high school that shows seniors what it is really like out there. He attended the ground breaking for the hanger at the airport our students will be using and helping to build now. He applauds the Sarasota-Bradenton airport for helping to create this eco-system around aeronautics. He suggested that students would benefit knowing about the Port and the businesses related to the Port. He cautioned drivers to look out for kids on e-bikes and trick or treaters.

Mr. Kennedy acknowledged tonight's fascinating meeting as a sign of how great this board is doing. He thanked the superintendent and all who help prepare for the meeting. He thanked Ms. Sellers and stated his appreciation for her work.

Mr. Tatem said Halloween safety was already mentioned. He pointed out that a lot of scholarships out there are not being used and wants to see them promoted more. He described sitting on the selection board for military academies for District 16, and of the 30 applicants, only four were from Manatee County. He apologized for missing the all-county orchestra event and lamented that none of the board members were there. He shared a "great to good" video produced by the Air Force that highlighted leadership that develops people beyond their jobs to develop them as leaders, better husbands, and better community members by "taking care of people."

Ms. Spray said it was a long but beneficial meeting, pointing out all the students, teachers, and parents attending. She said the video was great and reminded her that you need to find something to be brave for and that is yourself. She will be a judge for the Manatee Matters essays with the Chamber. She will be two days at Palmetto High School for Big Bank. She thanked everyone who presented today and thanked Superintendent Breslin for looking at what other districts are doing.

Adjournment – 8:22 p.m.

Good Governance

The observation team was pleased that a Rabbi was invited to provide the invocation, especially in light of Holocaust Education Week. We are encouraged that providing a platform

for others lived experiences contributes to building community. We appreciated Ms. Spray's comment about the role a teacher played in Ms. Kahn's story.

Mr. Choate may benefit by preparing his remarks in note form so that he is clear and concise when describing his thoughts. His comments were observed to be uncharacteristically rambling and repetitive, unnecessarily consuming a great deal of time during a long meeting.