

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 29, 2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 5:03 p.m. and he read the district's vision statement and introduced past school board member Frank Brunner, Chaplain of SCF and the American Legion, who gave the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Recognitions

Holocaust Education Week 2024

A Proclamation for Holocaust Education Week for November 4-8, 2024, was read by Mr. Tatem, which was presented to two representatives from the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee. Shep Englander, spoke in appreciation of the partnership with the school district in educating students about this very challenging topic. He pointed out that discrimination of minorities leads to the downfall of democracy. This includes age-appropriate curriculum materials, professional development and bringing in survivors to discuss their experiences with students. In the plans is opening an outdoor holocaust museum this winter. District staff, Katrina Singleton discussed Classrooms without Borders, for which the district received a grant and Katie Wald shared her travels to Poland through a slideshow. This left a profound impact on her, including a greater understanding and desire to impart this knowledge to students and fight Anti-Semitism.

Board Member Richard Tatem

Mr. Richard Tatem was recognized during this last scheduled Board Meeting for his two-year service to the School District. Board Members and Superintendent Wysong took turns acknowledging Mr. Tatem's contributions to the school board and the district. Comments included his focus on students and safety, his participation and attendance at many school and district events, his responsiveness to others, and his questions for greater understanding. Dr. Wysong presented him with a certificate signed by the governor and a flag flown over the capitol earlier this semester in addition to a plaque. Mr. Tatem responded how different it was to be elected to office by citizens rather than promoted through the ranks as in the Air Force. He expressed hope that the board has set a standard of decorum that will remain.

[LWV Note: Mr. Tatem was elected to a four-year term in 2022 and took office on November 22, 2022, but resigned in April 2024 to run for a different office, and chose November 5th as the effective date of his resignation. Therefore, his seat will be vacant as of next Tuesday and awaiting an appointment by the governor.]

Public Comments- No public comments.

Consent Items - The Consent Agenda included 11 items that were approved 5-0.

New Business: (Non-Consent Items)

Naming of East County K-8 School (No Financial Impact)

After extensive discussion, the School Board voted 5-0 on the final name of the new East County K-8 to be Lake Manatee K-8. Mr. Choate's opinion centered around the need to honor Frankie Howze at the current Palmetto Elementary, bringing the name back to "her roots." Ms. Foreman recognized renaming Palmetto Elementary would "create a new wrong" and advocated for a school somewhere to be named for Howze. Ms. Spray indicated she is not in favor of naming any schools for an individual but should be named for the location and advocated for Lake Manatee. Ms. Messenger sees naming schools for individuals to provide a rare opportunity to "honor someone in such magnitude" and agreed with Ms. Foreman that not naming this school after Frankie Howze would be a mistake. However, she said she could support Lake Manatee as the name. Mr. Tatem, referencing his military experience, said he's "not a fan of memorializing people in this way." After an initial motion by Ms. Spray and second by Mr. Tatem to name the school Lake Manatee Academy K-8, more discussion followed. Ms. Foreman pointed out that no other district run school has "academy" in its name, only some charter schools use that descriptor. A "friendly amendment" followed to name the school Lake Manatee K-8 and was approved 5-0.

Approval of 2024-2025 Salary Schedules for SAMP (Supervisory, Administrative, Managerial and Professional Staff), Hourly Non-Bargaining and School Administrators (Multiple Funding Sources) - updated 10-25-2024. Dr. Wysong explained that this is moving forward ahead of the final agreement with ASCME to allow payroll adjustments to those individuals who are not represented by a union. Passed 5-0.

Revision of Current Job Descriptions (No Financial Impact). Dr. Wysong explained the Director Attendance job description has been updated to reflect a more appropriate family-centered and updated vision for Director of Student Enrollment, Pathway, Experience's role. Passed 5-0.

Approval of the 9-12 Personal Financial Literacy Adoption Committee Recommendations for the 2025-2026 School Year (Multiple Funding Sources). Dr. Wysong and Mr. Jensen acknowledged the work of the committee that finalized a prioritized list of materials awaiting the Florida Department of Education's approved list for adoption. Passed 5-0.

Authorization to Negotiate Construction Management At-Risk Services CM Artisan Lakes Elementary School and Rye Ranch Elementary School Prototype (No Financial Impact).

Saying she agreed with the rationale to use the same construction manager for both new schools, Ms. Foreman said she pulled this item from the consent agenda to discuss the process of identifying and selecting construction managers and the role of School Board members in attending district meetings for this purpose. She and Ms. Messenger both indicated that attending the meetings provides them as decision makers with a great deal of background knowledge that is very helpful. However, no invitation was made to board members for this project's presentation, and when asking about this, Ms. Foreman was told it was due to the School Board attorney's concern for the limitations of the Sunshine Law. Ms. Foreman shared that the Board Members who attend, only listen and do not comment or discuss during the presentation. Mr. Dye indicated that district and school staff committee work is not subject to the Sunshine Law, but the convening of School Board members is. He indicated he would come back to the board with a new procedure that can address concerns. The item passed 5-0.

Modification of 2024-25 SDMC Academic Calendar and Ratification of the Memoranda of Agreement between SDMC and Manatee Education Association, Inc. as well as SDMC and American Federation of State and County Municipal Employees (AFSCME) (Multiple Funding Sources) -added after publishing. Dr. Wysong talked through the changes on the academic calendar due to the eight Instructional days missed recently with three for Hurricane Helene and five for Hurricane Milton. He discussed the state rules for funding and for credit hours for graduation. The state has not waived any requirements due to the storms. After a thorough analysis by the district staff, the changes reflect how time will be made up in order to be in compliance and ensure students get enough instructional time for academic growth.

The original calendar shows Thanksgiving week as hurricane make-up days but these days would not be sufficient to meet the requirements. Therefore, an additional calendar modification would be necessary with nearly all changes impacting working conditions for employees, which means consulting, collaborating and negotiating with both collective bargaining groups to figure out the best way forward. They looked at potential benefits and disadvantages from the leadership team's perspective, what was best for students from a learning perspective, families from stakeholder feedback, and best for employee groups. They spent a good part of the last week negotiating and the result is the proposed modification to the calendar and memoranda of agreement signed by presidents of those groups and the superintendent. He feels this is a family-friendly approach with no impact to Thanksgiving week or to Winter and Spring Breaks. The modified calendar is their best attempt to balance all of those interests. Some changes include those to specific high schools to add a minute or two to high school class periods, but no changes to arrival and dismissal times. No changes are made to the high school graduation schedule.

One day to be flipped is Veteran's Day. Mr. Jensen spoke from an instructional perspective about this day. There is required instruction on or before Veteran's Day integrated into curriculum and instruction, so this will be moved to this day. This is a unique opportunity to encourage patriotism and to recognize veterans on this day, have a "wear red, white and blue day" for students and staff who would like to participate with school uniform requirements lifted for that day. The curriculum department will provide instructional supports aligned to the required instruction topic to recognize veterans on that day. Those students participating in events, such as parades, on that day will be excused for that day.

Board Members acknowledged that not everyone will be happy, but agreed with the need to put students first, and thanked everyone for working so diligently on the changes. Concerns were voiced regarding having hurricane days built into the calendar but not using them. They agreed how important it is to everyone's well-being to have the break at Thanksgiving. Board Members acknowledged the collaboration that was required to produce this amended calendar.

The Board voted to ratify Dr. Wysong's signature to the MOU agreements and accept the new calendar modifications, 5-0.

[LWV note: follow this link to the modified calendar. https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2943615/Revised_2024-2025_Academic_Calendar_10-29-24.pdf

Updates

Instruction – no comment

Operations – no comment

Legal – Mr. Dye acknowledged Mr. Tatem and their past discussions about the Sunshine Law.

Superintendent Remarks – Dr. Wysong expressed appreciation for convening this special meeting due to having to cancel a meeting because of a hurricane. From the Consent Agenda he highlighted that current Gullett Elementary's principal, Todd Richardson, will move to Lake Manatee K-8 full time and Julie Gearhart will assume the role of interim principal at Gullett Elementary, effective December 2. Anna Maria Elementary will be able to reoccupy their campus on November 4. He thanked Stewart Elementary for hosting the staff and students of Anna Maria Elementary.

Board Comments

Ms. Foreman shared that Mr. Choate observed the Auditor Selection Committee. The two applicants for the External Auditor position will make one-hour presentations on November 4 at 1:00 p.m. and the three applicants for Internal Auditor will make presentations on November 5 at 1:00 p.m. November 7 and 8 is the Greater Florida School Board Consortium meeting. The Chamber of Commerce is looking for volunteers for the upcoming Big Bank Theory. She reminded fellow board members it is time to do the School Board Attorney evaluation before new Board Members come on.

Ms. Messenger thanked everyone for really productive good discussion, and wished Mr. Tatem well.

Mr. Tatem's safety note focused on Halloween and storm debris. He encouraged early voting and discussed absentee ballot drop off rules. He acknowledged how much he's learned while on the

school board and he's been pleasantly surprised that we do have a really good school system and it's been getting better. He liked helping constituents but if he can be of assistance, he will be happy to continue to help. He gave a shout out to all of the staff behind the scenes.

Ms. Spray echoed concern about Halloween and debris on the sidewalks and suggested putting out puck lights so kids can see. Regarding the changed Academic Calendar, she recognized there are sacrifices and give and take with everything, so she knows there will be discontented people and said sorry for short notice, but they have no choice but to make up that time.

Mr. Choate thanked staff and adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Board Members' praise and acknowledgment of district staff for their analysis and cooperation to address the make up days due to the recent storms is to be commended. Convening this special meeting was important for the district to continue its work in a timely manner.

We recommend the Board set a time limit on the Invocation and again, encourage reflecting the diversity of the community when selecting participants. For example, since this meeting recognized Holocaust Education Week it would have been appropriate and relevant to invite a rabbi to provide the invocation.

Board Members participated in a thoughtful, thorough and extensive discussion regarding naming the new K-8 school. Ms. Messenger quickly but professionally corrected Ms. Spray's error regarding a tally of votes. Ms. Foreman's disagreement with Ms. Spray's motion to add "academy" to the name was related in a respectful manner. Ms. Spray's response to those who objected to adding the word "Academy" was unbecoming of a board member. The observers agreed with Ms. Messenger when she responded, that is "so wildly inaccurate and that is not a message to send from the dais."