

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 2/13/2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 10:00 a.m. He read the District's Vision then introduced Ms. Logan Harrington of Young Life Manatee County who gave the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Foreman attended virtually from Tallahassee where she was attending a cybersecurity conference.

Recognitions

Black History Month 2024 Proclamation was read by Mr. Tatem.

Annie Lucy Williams Life and Legacy – Mr. Barber reminded all of the contributions of Black Citizens to the Manatee School District serving as support staff, teachers, district and school administrators, superintendents and school board members. Mr. Barber shared a biographical sketch with photographs of Annie Lucy Williams' life. She is the namesake of a district elementary school that opened in August 2007 on Fort Hamer Road in Parrish. She taught in the school district from 1930-1975 having received teaching credentials from Bethune-Cookman and the precursor to FAMU in Tallahassee. Mr. Barber introduced Annie Lucy Williams' family members: her daughters Johncyna McRae and Debra Thomas, a grandson, and two of Mrs. McRae's grandsons. It was noted that seven Manatee district schools are named after Black educators/leaders.

Public Comments

SC – a former teacher and parent of two children at Braden River Elementary brought to the board's attention that every day the bus that transports her children is 20 minutes late to school. Over the school year, her children and others will miss 60 hours of instruction. Not assigning blame, she encouraged the board and district to find a creative solution.

MH – cited Psalm 139 of the Bible and cited that 52 countries have banned the Bible. When people say “read all banned books,” he suggested that include the Bible.

DB – stated there were inaccuracies by public commenters at the last meeting regarding the removal of books from school libraries. Citing the current laws regarding removal of books she stated that the books removed in Manatee County have been done following the current statutes.

Reports and Presentations

Social Studies Instructional Materials Adoption – Deputy Superintendent for Instructional Services, Derek Jensen thanked the leadership of Ms. Fleming and Ms. Nicols. Ms. Fleming reviewed the process for the final selection of the social studies instructional materials involving parents, teachers, administrators and citizens. The materials considered were all approved by the Florida Department of Education and are aligned with the state’s standards. The choice for kindergarten-fifth grade is Gallopade Curriculum that provides a consumable workbook, online platform with other engaging resources, and emphasizes academic vocabulary, map skills, research skills and primary source analysis. National Geographic will provide curriculum for 6-8 grade civics, world and US history, as well as 9-12th grade world history, US history and government courses. This curriculum provides strong teacher support, digital features, ease of differentiation, academic vocabulary, high quality images and engaging content, discussion-based learning and integrates to Schoology, the digital instructional tool used in the district. For high school economics, Teacher Curriculum Institute (TCI) was selected for many of the same reasons. To Mr. Tatem’s question about how state standards are created, Ms. Fleming indicated that multiple statewide committees are formed to do this and said that Manatee school district sends members to participate in these efforts.

Parrish Community High School Construction Update - Updated Feb 9, 2024 – Deputy Superintendent for Operations, Joseph Ranaldi described the classroom addition as the final construction to complete the original master plan to increase the capacity of the high school from 2100 to 2500 student stations. Mr. Wilds, Project Manager, introduced the architect and construction manager who each reviewed the plans. The addition is modeled after building 6 on the campus with construction starting in April and to be completed by Spring Break 2025. The construction will cause minimal disruption to the campus. The price is \$10,592,738 and will include two engineering labs. In response to Ms. Spray’s question about why not a two-story building, Mr. Ranaldi indicated that when site space is available, one-story buildings are cheaper to build since they don’t require the same support structures or elevator.

Consent Items. Twenty-one items passed 5-0.

New Business: (Non-Consent Items) Superintendent Recommendations

Approval of the Budget Amendments for December 2023. Deputy Superintendent of Business Services, Rachel Sellers described three amendments in excess of one million dollars. Passed 5-0.

Approval of the Revisions of Job Descriptions in the Information Technology Department (No Financial Impact) Superintendent Wysong said this is part of a review and update process involving fourteen job descriptions in the Instructional Technology Department to align supervisory roles and responsibilities. Passed 5-0.

Approval of the K-12 Social Studies Instructional Materials Adoption Committee Recommendations for the 2024-2025 School Year (Multiple Funding Sources) Dr. Wysong thanked Ms. Fleming's leadership in the process and expressed appreciation to everyone who participated. The same process will be used for science textbook adoption this spring. Passed 5-0.

Updates

Instruction – Mr. Jensen announced today's robotics tournament at the Bradenton Convention Center from 9-4; the award ceremony for the winners of the Feb. 3rd Manatee Technical College STEM Showcase will be on Feb. 20th at Braden River High School; adoption process for science materials will begin at the Professional Service Center at 8:30 on February 22. He congratulated Ms. Cox for a successful ESE Fair on Feb 8th.

Operations - Mr. Ranaldi indicated Human Resources will host a transportation only job fair on Feb. 14th from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. at the transportation compound at Matzke; operations job fair on Feb 22nd at Wakeland; teacher and para job fair on Mar. 16th from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Manatee Technical College. He reported the completion of major Instructional Technology projects including E-rate upgrades at 3 high schools; E-rate cabling at Lakewood Ranch HS; 78 interactive display technologies at Bayshore HS as well as an upgrade of their audio system; and 225 personnel trained to use new technologies.

Legal – No report.

Superintendent Remarks - Reviewing highlights of the consent items, Dr. Wysong pointed out the approval to apply for \$2.57 million in grants; construction on Parrish Community High School; the administrative movement of Willie Clark from Executive Director of Secondary Schools to the Executive Director of School Support Services at Matzke to provide onsite leadership of the operations end to ensure optimum service to schools and principals; the promotion of Sharon Scarborough, Manatee High School Principal, to replace Mr. Clark as Executive Director of Secondary Schools; and the interim principal assignment for Manatee High School to Shane Hall, Assistant Principal; and Reggie Goff is promoted to Assistant Director of Construction Services. Dr. Wysong recognized the separation of three individuals and stressed how seriously misconduct is taken with full cooperation with law enforcement in these isolated incidents that are not representative of the district. Stressing the positives, he reviewed the Feb. 3rd STEM

EXPO, the robotics tournament and the athletic accomplishments going into the regional competitions in boys' and girls' soccer and basketball. He mentioned the Feb. 3rd Manasota Honor Chorus hosted at Manatee High School. He was pleased that all of the board members attended the Excellence in Education Awards event last week. Dr. Wysong continues to visit schools and walk the campuses with principals, including board members as available.

Board Comments

Ms. Messenger also appreciated all board members attending the Excellence in Education event and congratulated the finalists and winners, acknowledging the leadership of Ms. Gambino in producing the event.

Mr. Tatem said the Excellence in Education event went off like military clock work. In a recent meeting with the sheriff, he learned that many guns involved in crimes are taken from unlocked cars at night and stressed the need to secure guns. He assured the public commenter that the transportation department is working hard to solve the delayed bus problem described.

Ms. Foreman said the Excellence in Education event was spectacular and pointed out the catering by Manatee High School and congratulated the winners. She expressed amazement at the poise and projects of the STEM EXPO and thanked the teachers in science for their efforts. She recognized that last weekend Lakewood Ranch and Southeast High Schools participated in a regional debate event. The SEHS coach, Cathy Strate, was named Debate Coach of the Year.

Ms. Spray pointed out the longevity of retirees. She said the award even was like the Oscars. She has attended tennis practice of Manatee High players at King Middle School giving them pointers, and also went to Braden River HS tennis practice. She stressed the need to fix the transportation problem empathizing with what it must feel like to be late every day. She indicated the Citizen Finance Committee is working diligently on their annual report and getting started on the quarterly report. She's provided members with a red binder of pertinent information and encouraged anyone interested in joining the committee to make it known.

Mr. Choate expressed appreciate for the staff pulling together the consent items. He said the Excellence in Education event was exciting and that the MC, Kevin Chapman, was dapper. He pointed out the flags on the City of Bradenton light poles announcing Bradenton Reads, an example of a great collaboration between the district and local governments. The flags feature student art and a QR code to link to resources. He acknowledged the great challenges of creating master schedules at the secondary schools with all of the complexities of student choices, dual enrollment, etc. Regarding the Super Bowl, Mr. Choate pointed out there was a Lakewood Ranch High School player on the Chief's prep team who played for USF.

Meeting adjourned at 11:27 a.m.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

The meeting was run efficiently.

Redundant questions were kept to a minimum.

Board members should appreciate that Superintendent Wysong acknowledged recent personnel problems that were dealt with appropriately and then highlighted many positive aspects of the work being done on behalf of the students in all areas.

In regard to the Black History Month proclamation, we question why the last two years' documents removed the capitalization of Black as well as removed factual history. When looking at seven years of Black History Proclamations, 2024 erases the purpose of Black History Month. In the recent proclamation the following descriptors were removed: "honor the struggles, sacrifices, achievements" and "even in the face of ineffable discrimination and prejudice."

Ms. Messenger's advocacy for the engineering labs to be reinstated in the construction of the final building at Parrish Community High School's addition is a clear example of a school board member being supportive of schools in her district.

While attending virtually, Ms. Foreman's participation in the meeting was seamless.

At the beginning of the meeting, Ms. Spray's voice was understandable. However, when she leaned back in her chair she was not easily understood. Does the microphone need to be placed differently?

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.

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.