

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 2/27/2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 5:05 p.m. Mr. Tatem read the District's Vision then introduced Pastor David Anderson, Faith Baptist Church in Sarasota, who gave the invocation. Chair Choate introduced the color guard from Bayshore High School, and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Student Celebrations – Career and Technical Education Month

Mike Barber acknowledged a robot in the lobby and a tractor in the parking lot, then introduced Dr. Gansemer, Director of Adult Career and Technical Education (ACTE). He introduced the staff working with ACTE including MTC Director, Doug Wagner, Kelly Kennedy, Assistant Director ACTE, and Amanda Clark, Teacher on Assignment. There are 17 clusters of career programs offered plus Law and Public Safety, Industry Certifications and he also described articulation agreements with Manatee Technical College (MTC) and then to State College of Florida (SCF). He recognized examples of the variety of programs. He featured Sugg Middle School and Nolan Middle School's Innovation with Animatronics and Parrish Community High School's Gettel business relationship through their accredited Automotive Program. He cited all of the various Career and Technical Education student organizations including TSA, DECA, HOSA, FFA, FBLA, and Skills USA. Three Manatee County students are leaders at the state level: President from Palmetto HS, Secretary from Southeast HS, and Sergeant of Arms from Lakewood Ranch HS. In the State TSA competition, Braden River HS came in first with the most accumulated points, and Southeast HS came in second. Mona Jain MS won first place in the VEX Robotics Competition where over 600 students participated on 200 teams. MTC has over 50 programs and many can be completed in one year – "career in a year and no school debt."

Public Comments

MN – introduced herself as a retired Media Specialist and spoke about the impact the book *Wrinkle in Time* had on her as a fourth grader when she found a character with her unusual

name. She emphasized how she can only imagine how important it is for more marginalized kids to see themselves in books. She said book challenges are being made by people like herself and removing books about characters not like myself. Parents need a voice. She supports committees to decide.

MM – thanked board members for their email responses to her in the last two weeks. She found district librarians were very supportive that committees would be formed to vet books in the sunshine and disappointed that the schools would not have them. “You know that you are not in compliance with state law.” She added, one person in the community should not have the right to challenge a book and have it removed and parents need the right to have their children read books of their choice.

Reports and Presentations - Early Learning Updates

Dr. Sheila Halpin, Director of Early Learning, gave a thorough report of all of the early learning resources available for preschool age students and their families. This includes early evaluation, a variety of classrooms, family activities, creating a circle of support for early learners and families, and an evaluation center. She described the expertise of her staff. She went into depth on the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) offerings in Title 1 and non-Title 1 schools. The choice window is open in February. She described all of the “Soar in 4” offerings for everyone in the community and with the partnership with Patterson Foundation for the summer reading program. She cited 2022-2023 data showing that 3rd graders who had participated in VPK, scored higher in the reading assessment than the children who did not participate in VPK. Dr. Wysong explained that current capital funding rules do not allow building PreK classrooms. Comments and questions that followed from board members and Dr. Wysong reinforced early learning as a district priority.

Consent Items. 17 items passed 5-0. New Business: (Non-Consent Items)

Approval of MTC Florida Law Academy - Agreement Between Owner and A.D. Morgan Construction - Amendment 3 - Guaranteed Maximum Price in the Amount of \$4,437,976.98 (Capital Funds) This police training facility is a partnership with the school district and the City of Bradenton and locks in the price with the contractor. The City of Bradenton donated the land. Other law enforcement agencies will use the facility on a fee basis.

The next three items begin the process of renewing contracts for these three charter schools. Charter schools who have earned A or B school grades can be renewed for up to 15 years. Other schools can get a 5-year renewal. Dr. Wysong recognized Dr. Breslin and Dr. Hyer for their work with charter schools sponsored by the district. Each item passed 5-0.

Approval to Notify Parrish Charter Academy in Writing of Proposed Action to Renew and to Enter into Contract Renewal Discussions for the 2024-2029 School Years (No Anticipated Additional Financial Impact)

Approval to Notify Visible Men Academy in Writing of Proposed Action to Renew and to Enter into Contract Renewal Discussions for the 2024-2029 School Years (No Anticipated Additional Financial Impact)

Approval to Notify William Monroe Rowlett Academy of Arts and Communication in Writing of Proposed Action to Renew and to Enter into Contract Renewal Discussions for the 2024-2039 School Years (No Anticipated Additional Financial Impact)

Approval of the Florida High School for Accelerated Learning - Manatee, Inc. Charter Application (No Anticipated Additional Financial Impact) Passed 5-0. Dr. Wysong explained that this organization operates similar face-to-face and computer assisted instruction models in other districts in Florida and provides a blended learning model that traditional high schools do not. He pointed out that a charter application going through the district for approval touches the hands of 39 district experts to ensure the applicant meets all of the requirements. He again recognized the work of Dr. Hyer and Dr. Breslin who lead this effort.

Updates

Instruction – Deputy Superintendent Jensen announced the Suncoast for Reading fifteen-day festival from April 20-May 4. Since 1,100 students participate in after school programs, he took district leaders to visit them, looking for ways to support after school learning. The Instructional Rodeo is held at MTC, where 300 students meet with business leaders, work force and trade personnel to learn of opportunities.

Operations - Deputy Superintendent Ranaldi indicated recent operational job fairs were successful with 20 job offers made. The district will participate in the Great Teacher Teach-in in April in Orlando.

Legal – No report.

Superintendent Remarks - Dr. Wysong reviewed key consent items integral to the district's work. He highlighted the memorandum of understanding with the University of South Florida for Project Parasol which enables English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) paraprofessionals to become teachers. He visited several elementary schools taking with him board members and several non-profit organization leaders. With Mr. Chapman and Mr. Edwards, he has convened three breakfast meetings with School Advisory Council (SAC) leaders across the district and receives good feedback. The workshop on Friday is about the future of a millage referendum. This will be the third workshop on this topic. This will be time for the school board members to talk among themselves.

Board Comments

Mr. Tatem said he goes to nine schools every week to deliver food and talks to hundreds and finds that 99% like their schools and still working on bus issues. He reminded everyone to lock cars at night.

Ms. Foreman reported briefly on the Savannah Cybersecurity conference she attended with people nationwide, representing federal and state governments. She was complimented as the only school board member attending and communicated the hope that superintendents would attend in the future. She described risks to HVAC systems, cameras, various business

systems, school technology, etc. She said some states are ahead of Florida in putting guard rails up regarding Artificial Intelligence. She also went to Tallahassee for legislative meetings with the Greater Consortium of School Boards where they heard what is coming in legislation. The group presented and talked about priorities including funding for Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) and maintaining local control in school issues. She tagged along to Sea Breeze Elementary with Dr. Wysong and said she learns so much listening to his conversations with school folks.

Ms. Messenger reinforced Mr. Tatem's earlier comment about being "jazzed" about Pre-K and early learning. When she was a kindergarten teacher in 2016, there were only 25 PreK classes in the district and now there are over 100. She wants to see the growth continue.

Ms. Spray said, "I pass."

Mr. Choate thanked staff for doing all the work required for consent items to come together. He reminded everyone that the referendum and millage support a lot of the technology resources. He wished Dr. Wysong good luck throwing out the first pitch at the Pirates' game for the Manatee Education Foundation.

Meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

The observers find it refreshing to see the Board and Superintendent talk back and forth making a nice circle of information for the public.

We appreciate it when board members share with their colleagues and the public, information gleaned from conferences as Ms. Foreman did about the Cybersecurity and legislative meetings.

Mr. Tatem posed helpful clarifying questions regarding participation in the early learning program.

Mr. Choate asking the Superintendent to explain how charter school contracts begin and how recommendations for renewal of contracts occur was good for public information.

When board members recognize district staff by name, they increase morale. It is also recommended to continue providing messages of appreciation for the work in schools and the positive feedback board members hear from parents and the public.

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.