

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 April 23, 2024**.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The meeting was called to order by Chair Choate at 5:00 p.m. Mary Foreman read the District Vision statement and introduced Mr. Gary Crawford to give the invocation. The Palmetto High School Color Guard presented the flags for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Recognitions / Student Celebrations

Cambridge District of the Year - Mr. Barber introduced Erin Cox, District Advanced Studies Coordinator, who administers the Cambridge Program for Manatee Schools. She introduced Don Meyers who announced that Manatee County has been chosen as Cambridge District of the Year in the medium category size district category. He turned it over to Jeremy Ridgeo, Cambridge International School Improvement Manager, to explain why. In June of 2022, 1,500 exams were administered and in June of 2023 there were 2,339 exams given. Even with more exams being given, high scores have remained consistent, which was the basis for Manatee County's recognition. Annually 20% of students are taking the exam and winning \$4.5 in scholarships as well as college credits. This spring, 2,875 candidates will take the Cambridge exam. Every year 20% of the students are getting the opportunity to take the exam. \$4.5 million in scholarships. AICE team members Kari McMillan and Jen Little from Palmetto High and Dr. Carlson from Bayshore High were introduced by their respective principals Monica Delesline and Wendell Butler.

Superintendent's Student Leadership Forum – On Tuesday, March 5, more than 40 senior student leaders from the district's seven high schools took part in Dr. Jason Wysong's first Superintendent's Student Leadership Forum at Southeast High School. Representatives of each school's participants attended the School Board meeting Tuesday to share thoughts, experiences, and takeaways from the forum. The seven student representatives at the Board meeting were Neveah Ortiz of Bayshore, Toni Ann Arnold of Braden River, Karson Moore of Lakewood Ranch, Chad Cohen of Manatee, Deja Bradley of Palmetto, Jack Davis of Parrish Community and Abigail Hite of Southeast. A short video was shown to provide a view of the workshop. The goals of the workshop were: 1. Learn from each other; 2. Talk about leadership; 3. Discuss our schools; 4. Reflect on the future. The representative students described their experience stating they enjoyed learning about each other's schools and were surprised they

were asked to give feedback. Dr. Wysong expressed his appreciation for the students' candor and his commitment to take their input seriously.

Reports and Presentations

CRI Presentation of Medical Claim Payments Process Audit Report – Mr. Mark Smith presented the report. The period from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022 (calendar year 2022), was reviewed during this internal audit. There were 90,729 claims for \$37,533,169 processed for the 2022 calendar year based on the monthly check registers. Upon discussion with the Deputy Superintendent of Business Services, a sample size of fifty (50) was used and selections were made based on an analysis performed of the claim dollar amount and number of claims for different claim dollar ranges. The match analysis performed resulted in 547 total matches. After discussion with the Deputy Superintendent of Business Services, it was determined that testing would be performed on 10 matches (20 claims total). Four (4) out of the ten (10) selections were deemed to be duplicate payments per responses from Meritain, for a total of \$8,834.30. Due to the number of discrepancies from the original duplicate claim payments testing, and per discussion with the Deputy Superintendent of Business Services, additional testing was performed for possible duplicate payments for an additional 20 matches (47 claims- some matches resulted in multiple claims). Four (4) out of the twenty (20) selections were deemed duplicate billings per responses from Meritain, for an additional of \$1,201.07. In all, eight (8) out of the thirty (30) duplicate claim payment matches resulted in duplicate claim payments totaling \$10,035.37, which calculates to 0.0267% of the total claims paid during the 2022 Calendar Year. This review did not cover the rates or what services were provided; but that the service was provided and whether there were duplicate claims.

Science Instructional Materials Adoption - Shannon Flemming, Secondary Curriculum Director, reviewed the adoption process, described the top two choices, and the rationale for the top choice. Criteria included alignment with the state standards and the support structures both through the books and digital resources that provide teachers with tools to support all learners. Since the Department of Education has not yet published its final list, a single recommendation was not reached. The materials are available for public review throughout April at the Professional Support Center and on the district website. The 30-Day Objection Filing Period is April 24-May 23, 2024. The order may be placed as early as May 24 so that teachers have the materials before school starts in the fall.

Public Comments

MM - spoke to the library book review process, and stated the district is on a "laughing stock list" for politicizing the book review process and is still in violation of the state laws. She said they need to look at the policy and that community members and parents need to be involved in the sunshine. Principals are in the crosshairs, as they are now risking their licenses. Also, the district's media specialists are not aware of the policy the School Board adopted in January. She said, "that's what our public records show."

BR – addressed two issues. She stated that she doesn't like administrators who write up students for something they didn't do. She also asked if they have sent out to the parents an

explanation of Just Cause for students to go to the 9th grade in regards to the points needed to go to high school. Parents should be told of their child's graduation status prior to graduation.

Consent Items – Twenty consent items passed 5-0.

Public Hearing – Chair Choate closed the general school board meeting and opened the hearing to hear public comments regarding the consideration to adopt and amend school board policies. No public comments were made. The chair closed the hearing and reconvened the school board meeting. [LWV link to changes: https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2509662/Board_Policies_for_March_19_and_April_23_Hearing_-_Part_1.pdf and https://legistarweb-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/attachment/pdf/2509663/Board_Policies_for_March_19_and_April_23_Hearing_-_Part_2.pdf]

New Business: (Non-Consent Items)

Approval to Adopt New Policy and Amend School Board Policies as described above under public hearing. Passed 5-0

Approval of the K-12 Science Instructional Materials Adoption Committee Recommendations for the 2024-2025 School Year (Multiple Funding Sources). Mr. Tatem asked Mr. Jensen about concerns he has with the environmental science and biology science curriculum (9-12) providing a fair and balanced approach regarding climate change and green energy and he wants to search for truth. Mr. Jensen responded that all of the selections are aligned to state standards and that is the basis of their recommendations. And these recommendations stand awaiting the official list from the state department of education. Passed 5-0.

Approval of Revision of the Job Description and Position of Manager, Instructional TV and Program and the Change of Title to Senior Producer (No Financial Impact) Dr. Wysong indicated this is an update in the title to reflect the job and to attract appropriate applicants. Passed 5-0.

Approval of a New Job Description and Position of Van Operator, Student Transportation (Multiple Funding Sources) Dr. Wysong explained this new position will provide non-CDL drivers for vans to add another tool for transportation to use when small numbers of students need to transported, rather than sending a bus. His intention is to hire 5 non-CDL drivers and come back later to request funding for transport vans. Passed 5-0.

Approval of the Revised Job Description of Position for Lead Guardian (General Fund) This changed the position from a 10-month to a 12-month position. Passed 5-0.

New Business (No Superintendent Recommendation)

Board Approval of the CRI Medical Claim Payment Process Audit Report The report summary was provided earlier in the meeting and passed 5-0.

Updates

Instruction – Mr. Jensen reminded about the following upcoming events: Math Superstar Competition, 9:30-11:30, on Saturday April 27 at MTC; Lakewood Ranch HS will present *Screenagers*, a movie about how teens can navigate the digital world; the Migrant Awards' Ceremony at Lakewood Ranch High School will honor 12 seniors with their parents who are migrant farm workers; and a multi-county, fifteen-day We Make Learning Days event. He congratulated the more than 100 students who participated in the Skills USA event - 33 students earned 1st place; 15 placed 2nd and 10 placed 3rd. Mr. Jensen attended Bashaw Elementary's STEAM Expo on Thursday.

Operations – Mr. Ranaldi related that Human Resources' Spring Teacher/Paraprofessional Event on 4/20 had 293 participants with 38 offers made. He said the Orlando Annual Great American teach-in was not as robust as past years and no offers were made. The next virtual Teacher and Paraprofessional event is scheduled for May 7th, 9-11 a.m. The Maintenance and Operations Department will be busy this summer with major school painting projects at Miller, Seabreeze, and Palmetto High. In addition, there will be major roofing projects, fire alarm upgrades, flooring replacements, and boiler and HVAC projects. Food Services is celebrating "Farm to School" activities April 22-26.

Legal – Mr. Dye indicated everything is under control. He stated it was Pam D'Agostino's last meeting. She thanked the Superintendent and Board for the opportunity to participate.

Superintendent Remarks – Noting the consent items, Dr. Wysong highlighted the vote to approve two interim principals to principal status: Ms. Cooper at Lee Middle School and Mr. Bradshaw at Parrish Community High School. He acknowledged Ms. D'Agostino's last meeting. He acknowledged Ms. Fleming for completing the negotiations with USF and SCF for the articulations agreements that were approved tonight as well. He indicated that at this Friday's workshop very minor adjustments to bell times will be discussed to improve transportation, with 5 to 10-minute adjustments. He announced that Choice Option will be reopened on May 1st. While there is choice, it is based on where there is space and in alignment with statute. He may choose to exercise Policy 5120 to offer choice to families who are in over capacity schools to move to another school.

Acknowledging it is "events season", he attended the Art Center Manatee exhibit and the Congressional Education awards thanking Rep. Vern Buchanan who honored two dozen of the district's educators. He also thanked the team who worked on the job fair and stated there are 188 openings posted for next year. He attended the technological water tower competition last Saturday. While baseball and softball are still in season, he also commended the girls' Braden River Flag Football team and the Manatee HS boys' and girls' Lacrosse teams. He attended SAC meetings at Gullett Elementary and Southeast High School and he and Mr. Chapman had

breakfast with SAC chairs. Testing season starts next week and will continue to the end of the year.

Board Comments

Mr. Tatem highlighted the AICE program and asked parents and teachers to encourage students to take part in this program that offers international opportunities. He went to the Florida School Board Association (FSBA) meeting in Gainesville last week. He acknowledged the teachers who were recognized by Rep. Buchanan and requested a list of the honorees from the Superintendent. He thanked Ms. D'Agostino. The state is trying to readdress the safety and security law, and he hopes they will readdress how to fund it.

Ms. Foreman also attended FSBA 3.0 forum on finance and it is the third one she has attended. She stated that it was not the good news they hoped for. She gleaned really good information to consider at a board workshop. She also indicated the Congressional Awards was a great evening. She highlighted the upcoming Migrant Awards Ceremony as her favorite event of the year.

Ms. Messenger wished Ms. D'Agostino the best with her new position with Manatee County government. She loved the Congressional Teacher Award Ceremony and this year it included support services employees.

Ms. Spray stated she spoke at the Migrant Awards Ceremony last year and said it is a great event. She recognized George Schrier's retirement after 36 years. She will interview an applicant for CFOC. It's going to be a busy month next month with senior activities.

Chair Choate enjoyed the 4th grade speeches this past week – his nephew wants to eliminate school on Monday. Thanks to staff and congratulations to the Cambridge and Congressional winners. He noted that this district offers many options and opportunities to our students.

Meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

GOVERNANCE AND SUNSHINE

Again, we remind the chair to ask responses to be made into the microphone so all can hear, e.g. Ms. Sellars' response to a question while seated at her table. Ms. Spray's audio is still problematic. Could she sit closer to the microphone?

Mr. Tatem's personal opinion about certain science materials bordered on promulgating mistrust in the facts presented in the state approved instructional materials. Bringing politically motivated ideological comments to the discussion is beyond his capacity as a school board member. He showed complete disregard for the work and the expertise of the entire science curriculum committee by stating their textbook choice has a "propaganda flavor" to it and repeatedly

saying selected materials are not “fair and balanced” science books and are skewed to one side. We commend Mr. Jensen for reminding Mr. Tatem and others that their driving force for textbook selection is alignment to state standards, and the state has experts who select these materials from which they choose.

We recommend board members invite a more diverse representation of clergy to provide the invocation.

We were surprised that no one mentioned the annual Golden Herald Awards that took place recently. Since 1979, the Golden Herald Awards have recognized seniors from all of the high schools in various categories.

We appreciate that Mr. Choate thanked the Superintendent for working with the students for their input.

Ms. Messenger noted for the public that policies were discussed at length at a workshop before being voted on tonight. [LWV Note: Workshop agendas and videos can be accessed on the district website.]

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 and WSLR News.

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.