

**MINUTES
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
MEETING**

August 20, 2025
St. Johns River State College
2990 College Drive
Building J, Room J-149
St. Augustine, FL 32084

Chair Ryan Petty called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. and welcomed members and guests to the State Board of Education meeting. The following members were present: Vice Chair Esther Byrd, Daniel Foganholi, Kelly Garcia, MaryLynn Magar and Layla Collins. Dr. Grazie Christie attended by phone. Chair Petty recognized Pastor Bobby Crum from the Anastasia Church in St. Augustine, and former St. Johns River State College trustee, to deliver the invocation, and asked everyone to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Petty welcomed the newest member to the board Layla Collins. Ms. Collins shared her appreciation for her new role with the State Board of Education, sharing her journey over the last 20 years of service to her country and thanked Governor Ron DeSantis for his trust and focus on education and child protection, and thanked her family, and her husband for standing by her.

Chair Petty stressed the roles in preserving an education system vital for liberty and informed citizenship, as he emphasized historical figures like Jefferson, Madison, and Adams. Our mission is to ensure all children receive quality education that fosters character and civic virtues. He then shared key principles from the Phoenix Declaration which include parental authority, transparency, grounding in objective truth, and promoting patriotism.

Chair Petty recognized Joe Pickens, President of St. Johns River State College, to welcome the board and provide an update on behalf of the Council of Presidents. President Pickens shared the significant increase in enrollment at St. Johns River State College, noting a 9.8 percent rise compared to a statewide average of 7.2 percent and an overall growth of over 30 percent in three years. St. Petersburg College has opened three collegiate high schools, with a STEM school celebrating the graduation of its first class in 2025, where all 21 graduates earned both a high school diploma and an associate's degree. Additionally, Seminole State College, has seen significant growth in its Florida Bridge Program, expanding from 37 students in its first year to 410 enrolled students since 2020, with a 90 percent re-enrollment rate for the Fall semester. Also, Florida State College at Jacksonville, celebrated a recent partnership with CSX, which includes a \$1.5 million investment for developing a state-of-the-art railroad emergency response training facility.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Chair Petty recognized Anastasios Kamoutsas, Commissioner of the Department of Education, to present his report. Commissioner Kamoutsas shared his thanks for the significant and empowering comments at the meeting and thanked President Pickens for hosting. He shared that the Florida Department of Education has introduced a new tradition of voluntary participation in the Pledge of Allegiance each morning, emphasizing the honor due to veterans.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Florida's educators, supported by parents, are crucial to the state's high-quality education system. Under Governor Ron DeSantis' leadership,

Florida sets a national standard in education. Florida has been recognized as the top state for higher education for nine consecutive years. Additionally, a lawsuit was initiated against textbook publishers for charging varying prices, which violates state law and diverts funds from student services, an issue the state refuses to tolerate.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared the initiative to deploy the Parent Plus Portal, a free, centralized platform for school districts that provides families with access to classroom resources and school library materials. Additionally, concerns were raised about the availability of the book "Trans Mission" in Hillsborough County Public Schools, prompting a warning about graphic content.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared graphic content regarding transgender experiences with packing and intimacy. This raised concerns about inappropriate materials in Florida schools, he highlighted the need for accountability regarding instructional content accessible to minors, referencing section 1006.28, F.S.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared recent court rulings in Florida that reaffirm the state's commitment to protecting students from indoctrination in gender ideology. Additionally, a Brevard teacher was fired for violating Florida law by not obtaining parental consent before using a student's preferred name, leading to a recommendation for license suspension, though only probation and a reprimand were ultimately issued. Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Superintendent Rendell of Brevard County Public Schools decided not to renew a teacher's contract, a decision supported for protecting parental rights and ensuring transparency. He emphasized the importance of parental involvement in education, citing an incident in Alachua County where a father was treated unfairly for expressing his conservative views against a board member's social media comment.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Governor DeSantis invested over 5.9 billion since 2020, recognizing the importance of teachers in student success and the educational system. However, local teachers' unions are hindering salary increases through prolonged negotiations, causing delays in payments. Last year, 16 districts failed to pay teachers promptly, with some in Leon County not receiving bonuses until May of the next year, which is unacceptable. The governor has urged educators to contact their union representatives to demand immediate payment, reinforcing the urgency for teachers to receive their compensation before the holidays.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that last week, he joined U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon at Broward College to announce a streamlined Free Application for Federal Student Financial Aid process. Over a thousand students tested the new form, which now allows quick completion, unlike two years ago when access was restricted. He commended Secretary McMahon for her innovative approach to facilitating pathways to higher education.

Commissioner Kamoutsas recognized Joshua Florience, for his outstanding achievement as a first-generation college student.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared in regards to the Brevard teacher situation, that the Education Practices Commission serves as a quasi-judicial body for educators involved in misconduct. When an individual, an educator, engages in misconduct, they have the ability to submit what's known as an election of rights to resolve their case, choosing either to settle or opt for an informal hearing before the Commission. Alternatively, they can dispute the facts and pursue a formal hearing at the Division of Administrative Hearings. He shared as asserting my role as the new Commissioner of Education, we deemed a suspension necessary due to the intentional withholding of information from a parent, specifically the

lack of a consent form. This behavior will not be tolerated in the state. However, it's important to note that there is no appellate process from the Education Program Practices Commission involving the State Board of Education; any challenges would go to the First District Court of Appeals.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the Commissioner's Report. Mr. Foganholi made the motion with a second by Ms. Magar. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the minutes from the June 4th board meeting. Ms. Magar made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Updates

K-12 Public Schools – Superintendent Asplen, on behalf of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS)

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Brennan Asplen, Superintendent of St. Johns County School District, to provide the FADSS update. Superintendent Asplen shared appreciation for the collaborative efforts of the newly appointed Commissioner and the Department of Education in serving Florida's families and students. He also acknowledged communication between the Department and superintendents, ensuring a collective approach to addressing parental inquiries and concerns. In the St. Johns County School District, which serves approximately 53,000 students and employs around 6,500 staff, significant achievements include providing over 83,000 meals weekly and ensuring transportation for over 26,000 students. He emphasized security, maintaining a strong partnership with local law enforcement, having resource officers in every school, and feeling secure overall. Recent academic assessments indicated progress, with nearly all categories showing improvement, particularly in Grade 3 English Language Arts achievement at 78 percent. The district has 37 A schools and no underperforming schools. The success is attributed to dedicated teachers, administrators, and collaborative families.

Update on Board Conditions Placed on the Approval of Madison County School District's Turnaround Option Plan for Greenville Elementary School

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Paul Burns, Senior Chancellor, for an overview of the update on Madison County. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that in January 2025, Dr. Pickles, the Superintendent of Madison County Schools, presented a turnaround option plan for Greenville Elementary School, as the plan was nearing the end of its two-year cycle. The district proposed closing the school at the end of the 2024-2025 school year and reallocating its students to Madison County Central K-8, which has consistently received a C grade. The State Board approved this plan with conditions requiring Dr. Pickles to provide regular updates on the students' performance and progress. Following the closure of Greenville Elementary, which had improved to a D grade, the students transitioned to Madison County Central K-8, with ongoing monitoring by the district.

Chair Petty recognized Superintendent Pickles. Superintendent Pickles shared that the district has successfully consolidated three elementary schools, reallocating 340 children to Madison County Central. Greenville Elementary improved from an F to a D, while Central maintained a C rating. The district has filled all teacher vacancies at the beginning of the school year, marking a significant achievement. Enrollment increased from 783 at the end of the last year to 1,069 at the start of this school year, with ongoing efforts to manage

student transportation. The district remains focused on monitoring student performance, emphasizing proficiency as the main priority. The recent ratification of a contract between the board and union establishes a starting salary of 47,500, with some teachers set to receive raises of 10,000 to 12,000 come December, and aimed at retaining veteran educators.

Chair Petty shared that the board looks forward to the results of progress monitoring at the September meeting.

ACTION ITEMS

Consideration of Probable Cause for Noncompliance with Legal Protections Regarding Parental Freedom of Speech

Chair Petty recognized David Chappell, General Counsel, to provide an overview. Mr. Chappell shared that this agenda item examines the compliance of Alachua County School Board with the First Amendment and relevant Florida statutes. The compliance process is outlined in Section 1008.32 includes five steps: investigation of allegations, determination of probable cause, reporting to the State Board, potential ordering of compliance, and actions for noncompliance, including withholding state funds and reporting to the legislature.

Chair Petty recognized Commissioner Kamoutsas. Commissioner Kamoutsas shared the concerns raised about the Alachua County School Board meetings, where real incidents have occurred that threaten First Amendment rights and parents' rights, fostering a hostile environment. A specific example involves a parent reading from a book with graphic content unsuitable for children, prompting requests for children to leave or mute their video during the reading. Commissioner Kamoutsas shared his outrage and determination in response to the Alachua County School Boards behavior regarding free speech rights. He argued that the School Board's arbitrary restrictions on citizens speaking at public forums violate the First Amendment. Additionally, he highlighted instances where the Board specifically targeted conservative viewpoints, asserting that this constitutes a severe violation of free speech rights and has a chilling effect on expression. Section 286.0114, F.S., mandates that governmental boards allow public input while maintaining decorum. In the mentioned cases, breaches of decorum were perpetrated by the school board or attendees, not by the speakers. According to Section 1001.372 F.S., a school board must issue a warning before removing a speaker for decorum violations, which did not occur in these instances. Chair Rockwell's conduct, particularly regarding her criticism of conservatives, raises concerns about her professionalism. Jeremy Clepper represented parents' dissatisfaction with her remarks, as many in Alachua County seek accountability and restoration of trust in the school board, emphasizing First Amendment rights and parental involvement. A letter outlining probable cause was sent to Chair Rockwell on August 1, 2025, summarizing these findings.

Chair Petty recognized Sarah Rockwell, Chair, Alachua County School Board and Vice Chair Tina Certain.

Ms. Rockwell thanked the Commissioner and board for allowing her remote appearance due to health issues. The board recently updated their public input policy in response to the Moms for Liberty versus Brevard case and held a workshop to ensure fair application.

Ms. Certain shared that at their meeting on July 31, 2025, 31 speakers signed up, each was allotted two minutes, and the audience was instructed to avoid disruptive behaviors. During

the public hearing, Mr. Clepper was allowed to speak for his full two minutes, expressing critical views of board members. Despite interruptions from the audience, he was not silenced or removed. However, after his comments, he continued to shout at Dr. Rockwell, creating a tense and disruptive atmosphere. Following legal advice, Mr. Clepper was not removed but he left voluntarily during a recess.

Chair Petty recognized members of the audience for public comment.

Commissioner Kamoutsas's recommended the board to acknowledge a First Amendment violation and set a timeframe for updating policies, training school board members, and the department will monitor compliance during the 2025-2026 school year. Automatic sanctions should be enacted for any future violations, including weekly reports to the legislature on ongoing violations and corrective measures. Failure to comply could result in salary withholdings equal to the board salaries.

Chair Petty called for a motion to accept the Commissioners recommendation. Vice Chair Byrd made a motion and second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of 2026-27 Education Operating and Fixed Capital Outlay Legislative Budget Request

Chair Petty recognized Suzanne Pridgeon, Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Operations, for an overview of the Legislative Budget Request. Ms. Pridgeon shared that this budget aligns with the Governor's focus on smart investment of State funds for a brighter future. This is a fiscally conservative budget, prioritizing known growth projects, school safety and teacher recruitment. The Department requests a \$10 million increase in the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) for Safe Schools (totaling \$300 million), a \$10 million increase for mental health (totaling \$190 million), and \$42 million for school hardening. Additionally, \$145 million is requested for teacher salary increases, raising the allocation to \$1.5 billion, along with \$1 million for an educator recruitment tool. This request is for approximately \$27.5 billion, with \$25.5 billion for operating costs and \$2 billion for fixed capital outlay, an increase of about \$815.3 million from the current fiscal year. A significant portion is allocated to the FEFP, totaling \$30.3 billion, to support K-12 students and accommodate an enrollment growth of 18,620 students projected for the 2026-27 school year. Over the past decade, FTE funding has increased from \$7,307 to \$9,322. Additionally, \$18 million is earmarked for enhancing civics education through various programs and initiatives. Other allocations include \$480.7 million for maintenance and construction projects across educational institutions, emphasizing improvements in facilities and workforce readiness.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the 2026-27 Education Operating and Fixed Capital Outlay Legislative Budget Request and authorize the Commissioner of Education to make technical adjustments. Ms. Magar made a motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Amendment to Rule 6A-1.0018, School Safety Requirements and Monitoring

Chair Petty recognized Darren Norris, Vice Chancellor, Office of Safe Schools for an overview of the amendment to rule 6A-1.0018. Chancellor Norris shared that Florida leads the nation in school safety, further reinforced by Senate Bill 1470 and House Bill 1607, which enhanced campus security and mandated emergency plans involving automated external defibrillators.

Proposed amendments clarify definitions, specify emergency drill requirements, and ensure substitute teachers are informed of safety protocols before starting. He also acknowledged Governor DeSantis for his leadership in promoting school safety.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the amendment to rule 6A-1.0018. Ms. Garcia made a motion with a second by Vice Chair Byrd. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Amendment to Rule 6A-4.02451, Florida Teacher Standards for ESOL Endorsement

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Peggy Aune, Vice Chancellor for Strategic Improvement to provide an overview of the amendment to rule 6A-4.02451. Dr. Aune shared that the proposed amendment updates and enhances the standards for teachers earning ESOL endorsements, equipping them to provide high-quality instruction aligned with academic expectations.

Chair Petty recognized Shari Little, Edwidge Bryant, Wildalynn Thomas, in opposition.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the amendment to rule 6A-4.02451. Vice Chair Byrd made the motion with a second by Ms. Collins. The motion passed unanimously.

CONSENT ITEMS

Chair Petty recognized Richard Burroughs in support of the amendment to rule 6A-6.0331.

Chair Petty recognized Holly Ross, Debbie Parker, Dianne Battel, in support of the amendment to rule 6A-6.0531.

Chair Petty recognized Rebecca Nathanson in support of the amendment to rule 6A-7.0710.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve consent items 9-17. Ms. Garcia made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Member Comments

Mr. Foganholi thanked the staff for a great job preparing the board for the meeting. Ms. Garcia expressed her appreciation towards the staff for their dedication to children in Florida, and public comments were appreciated. She recognized the Chair's role in promoting discussions and addressing key issues. She highlighted concerns over inappropriate instructional materials readily accessible to children and expressed disappointment over time spent on "adult issues" rather than student achievement, hoping for future discussions in Alachua to focus more on constructive topics. Ms. Magar echoed members appreciation, she thanked President Pickens for hosting, and Governor DeSantis for his leadership and which has led to 71 percent of schools receiving A or B ratings this year, up from 64 percent. Notably, Indiantown High School improved from a D to an A. Ms. Collins thanked all who contributed to her preparation and is grateful to be on the board. Vice Chair Byrd highlighted the necessity of transparency in government, particularly regarding the treatment of conservative viewpoints, which is concerning. The public comments offered valuable insights, proving the existence of bias. The school board leadership's failure to acknowledge this issue suggests that without intervention, change is

unlikely. Chair Petty thanked the board for their leadership and dedication to our mission. This meeting exemplifies our commitment to respecting First Amendment rights, allowing diverse viewpoints without exclusion. We value the participation of parents and families in discussions, processing their comments with respect, regardless of differing opinions.

Chair Petty announced that the next meeting would be on September 24, 2025, in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business, Chair Petty adjourned the meeting of the State Board of Education at 1:21 p.m.

Chris Emerson, Corporate Secretary

Ryan Petty, Chair