

**MINUTES
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
MEETING**

September 24, 2025
Northwest Florida State College
1170 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
Building 8
Fort Walton Beach, 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, MaryLynn Magar, and Layla Collins. Dr. Grazie Christie and Kelly Garcia attended by phone. Chair Petty recognized Mel Ponder, President of Northwest State College, to deliver the invocation, and asked everyone to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Petty recognized President Ponder to provide an update on behalf of the Council of Presidents. President Ponder shared that Florida colleges and the Florida College System are experiencing strong momentum, with enrollment up 7.2 percent and degree completions up 4.4 percent. He shared that Northwest Florida State College recently launched a \$34 million renovation project, which has doubled enrollment. The school also offers health sciences programs, such as Physical Therapist Assistant and Medical Laboratory Technology. Northwest Florida State College is expanding its South Walton Center to provide dual enrollment and postsecondary opportunities for students throughout Walton County and have enrolled 96 students in college-credit AI certificates and are preparing for a new workforce-innovation center in Niceville.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Chair Petty recognized Anastasios Kamoutsas, Commissioner of the Department of Education, to present his report. Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that we celebrate Florida's recognition as the top state for education freedom. He added that on September 11, 2025, a day when we should be honoring those slain by terrorists, a small number of Florida's educators were posting social media content encouraging violence in schools and celebrate school shootings. He expressed that this will not be tolerated and the Office of Professional Practices will continue to investigate each case. He shared that he found probable cause for the complete revocation of an educator's license in Clay County.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that the State Board of Education has voted to hold Alachua County School Board members accountable for violating the First Amendment, state laws, and parental rights, and an investigation found probable cause and action. He shared that the Office of Safe Schools reviewed Alachua County's safety measures. Alachua County Public Schools failed to submit SESIR data, preventing effective interventions.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that salary negotiations for teacher salary increases in Alachua County Public Schools are underway, with an agreement due by October 1, as per Section 1011.62, F.S.

Commissioner Kamoutsas expressed concerns about the handling of teacher compensation in Leon County, specifically regarding Superintendent Rocky Hanna's delay in implementing salary increases, which has caused teachers to wait longer for their raises. He shared that

the union delayed teachers' raises, denying them the compensation they deserve. Leon County School Board Chair Laurie Cox is here to discuss a plan to expedite the process.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that seven district superintendents are discussing turnaround options for schools in need of improvement. The 2024-25 assessment results show 82 percent of 85 schools improved their grades and exited improvement status. He shared that we have the fewest districts in school history presenting turnaround option plans. He shared that nine school districts in Florida now have zero underperforming schools.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Florida ranks first in education freedom for four consecutive years, thanks to Governor DeSantis' vision and prioritizing student success through enhanced school choice opportunities and partnerships. He shared that Bright Futures provides financial assistance to students. Nearly 10,000 eligible students miss out each year. He shared that, along with Secretary Davis, they are committed to ensuring eligible students utilize Bright Futures scholarships.

Commissioner Kamoutsas recognized Teacher of the Year, Mark Harrison, and Florida College System Foundation Scholarship recipient Deznie Quintanar.

Minutes

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the minutes from the July 16, 2025, board meeting. Ms. Magar made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Updates

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

Chair Petty recognized Russell Hughes, Superintendent of Walton County School District, to provide the FADSS update. Superintendent Hughes shared that Walton County is an A school district with high graduation rates, ranking in the top 10 in the state. He thanked the commissioner and the governor for the CAPE funds. He also highlighted that there is no gap in CTE outcomes between low- and non-low-socioeconomic status students.

Alachua County School Board

Chair Petty recognized Dustin Sims, State Executive Director, Bureau of School Improvement, to provide an update on Alachua County. Mr. Sims shared that he attended the Alachua County School Board meeting on September 2, 2025, where the Bureau of School Improvement is actively supporting three schools to raise their performance to a grade of C or higher. The board meeting lacked decorum and organization, leading to confusion among members and a lack of clear leadership. He shared that this raised concerns about the board's ability to effectively serve Alachua County constituents. The September 2nd Alachua School Board meeting failed to incorporate the principles of receiving, processing, and acting on challenging or critical feedback.

Chair Petty recognized Sr. Chancellor Burns to give an update on communications with the district. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that the commissioner sent a letter to the district stating they were out of compliance with SESIR data reporting, requiring a response within three days to prevent future issues. The department will follow up with the district within

three days, inform the commissioner, and identify any next steps if the district still doesn't comply.

Chair Petty shared that there will be an emergency board meeting if compliance is not met.

Teacher Salary Increase Allocation (TSIA) - Leon County School Board

Chair Petty recognized Laurie Lawson Cox, Chair, Leon County School Board, for an update on TSIA. Chair Cox shared the tireless efforts of district staff, HR, and CFO in obtaining funds for teachers. She highlighted the importance of recognizing and rewarding exceptional teachers in Leon County. Data from district staff shows that teachers were not paid until July 2022 for the 2021 TSIA. The union has held meetings to present proposals, but no settlement has been reached.

Vice Chair Byrd recognized the districts that have already completed TSIA ahead of schedule: Charlotte, Dixie, Gulf, Hardee, Hendry, Levy, and Washington counties, and FAU Lab School.

Action Items

The School Board of Alachua County v. Newberry Community School, Inc.

Chair Petty recognized Adam Emerson, Executive Director, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, for an overview of Alachua County v. Newberry Community School Inc. Mr. Emerson shared that the School District of Alachua County and Newberry Community School appealed a decision to convert an existing public school to a charter school. The Charter School Appeal Commission recommended denying the appeal and granting the application, citing the vote, competent evidence, and Florida law standards.

Chair Petty recognized Sean Arnold of Arnold Law Firm, representing Newberry Community School, and Amy Envall, representing the School Board of Alachua County.

Chair Petty recognized David Chappell, General Counsel. Mr. Chappell shared that the legislature established the Charter School Appeals Commission and Charter Review Commission to streamline charter school applications. The Appeals Commission issued recommendations, which are then appealed to the State Board of Education, ensuring a simple and straightforward process. The Department believes the legislature intended to oversee charter appeals through the Review Commission, Appeals Commission, and State Board, with potential litigation up to the District Court of Appeal.

Chair Petty called for a motion to deny Newberry Community Schools motion to dismiss. Vice Chair Byrd made a motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Petty called for a motion to uphold the Charter School Appeal Commissions recommendation to deny the appeal of the School Board of Alachua County and grant the conversion charter application filed by Newberry community School. Vice Chair Byrd made a motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Amendment to Rule 6A-1.0998271, Schools of Hope

Chair Petty recognized Mr. Emerson to provide an overview of the amendment to rule 6A-1.0998271. Mr. Emerson shared that this rule governs Schools of Hope in Florida, recruiting high-performing charter schools to open schools in low-achieving areas. This aligns with

Governor DeSantis' priorities for school choice and access to high-quality educational options. Senate Bill 2510 amends the School of Hope statute, allowing co-location in public school facilities.

Chair Petty recognized Zander Moricz, Alan Pollack, India Miller, Casanova Dougherty, and Zaire Kekahuna-Samedi in opposition.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the amendment to rule 6A-1.0998271. Mr. Foganholi made a motion with a second by Vice Chair Byrd. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Amendment to Rule 6A-10.081, Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Paul Burns, Senior Chancellor, for an overview of amendment to rule 6A-10.081. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that the proposed amendment, requires educators to self-report offenses or final judgments within 48 hours to a school district authority or other appropriate authority. This includes arrests for misdemeanors or felony offenses, as per section 435.04 F.S.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the amendment to rule 6A-10.081. Ms. Magar made a motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

New Specialized Associate in Arts Transfer (SAAT) Degree Program(s) in the Florida College System

Chair Petty recognized Kathy Hebda, Chancellor of the Florida College System for an overview of the New Specialized Associate in Arts Transfer (SAAT) Degree Program(s) in the Florida College System. Chancellor Hebda shared that the Florida College System is seeking approval for five specialized Associate in Arts transfer degrees, aiming to provide foundational courses for career advancement. In 2024, a new law was passed by the legislature and Governor DeSantis allowing specialized Associate in Arts transfer degrees.

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Plinske, President of Valencia College. President Plinske shared the importance of completing prerequisites for baccalaureate majors before transfer.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the five Specialized Associate in Arts Transfer Degrees for Valencia College. Mr. Foganholi made the motion with a second by Ms. Magar. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Turnaround Option Plans for the School Districts of Duval, Gadsden, Hendry, Manatee, Marion, Pasco, and Polk County

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Paul Burns, Senior Chancellor, to provide an overview of Turnaround Option Plans for Duval, Gadsden, Hendry, Manatee, Marion, Pasco, and Polk County school districts. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that seven district superintendents representing ten schools in Florida are meeting with the school improvement team, supported by the Bureau of School Improvement. The team works with teachers, school leaders, principals, and instructional coaches to improve student performance. Superintendents present turnaround option plans for schools with F or D grades, as per State Board of Education rules. The four options include district-managed turnaround, charter, external operator, or closure. Superintendents have chosen district-managed turnaround to improve student performance.

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Chris Bernier, Superintendent of Duval County School District to present their plan. Superintendent Bernier shared that the district has chosen district-managed turnaround, focusing on district support plans and improvement, aiming to be the top school district in the state. They have implemented a stipend for teachers, targeted professional development, and data-driven reviews. They also addressed low-performing students and middle-range students through community partnerships, progress monitoring, and regular checks.

Chair Petty recognized Commissioner Kamoutsas for his recommendation. Commissioner Kamoutsas recommended the approval of the TOP Plan for Smart Pope Livingston Elementary School.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Commissioner Kamoutsas' recommendation. Vice Chair Byrd made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Petty recognized Superintendent Elijah Key from Gadsden County School District to present their plan for Chattahoochee Elementary School. Superintendent Key emphasized they are working together to eliminate underperforming schools. Chattahoochee Elementary School, a small school with 161 students, and to address attendance issues, positive behavior intervention plans and support systems were implemented to recognize and reward students' attendance and behavior.

Chair Petty recognized Commissioner Kamoutsas for his recommendation. Commissioner Kamoutsas recommended the approval of the TOP Plan for Chattahoochee Elementary School.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Commissioner Kamoutsas' recommendation. Vice Chair Byrd made a motion with a second by Ms. Collins. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Petty recognized Mike Swindle, Superintendent of Hendry County School District to present their plan for Digital Academy of Florida. Superintendent Swindle shared that the school is addressing attendance issues by ensuring correct enrollment, online engagement, and early warning signs. They are cross-training teachers through benchmark-aligned standards-based planning and using rigorous, engaging lessons. Daily meetings are being conducted multiple times per day to ensure effective instruction and support for students.

Chair Petty recognized Commissioner Kamoutsas for his recommendation. Commissioner Kamoutsas recommended approving the TOP Plan with three conditions. The first condition includes appointing a principal to oversee the school. Second, progress-monitoring and student achievement. Third, the Department must assess progress after two monitoring sessions to determine if sufficient progress is made, and if not, Hendry County will need to seek a new virtual provider for the '26-'27 school year.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Commissioner Kamoutsas' recommendation. Ms. Collins made a motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Lori Breslin, Superintendent of Manatee County Public School District, to present their plan for Samoset Elementary School. Superintendent Breslin shared that the principal has been replaced by Ms. Webb, who has a proven track record of turning schools around and raising student performance. Samoset Elementary School is collaborating with families, district, school board, community partners, and families to improve literacy education, and increase parent communication.

Chair Petty recognized Commissioner Kamoutsas for his recommendation. Commissioner Kamoutsas recommended the approval of the TOP Plan for Samoset Elementary School.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Commissioner Kamoutsas' recommendation. Mr. Foganholi made a motion with a second by Vice Chair Byrd. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Danielle Brewer, Interim Superintendent of Marion County School District, to present their plan for Oakcrest Elementary School. Superintendent Brewer shared that Oakcrest Elementary School plans to move from a D to a C or higher for '25-'26. New principal, Sarah Dobbs, has increased student proficiency, increased attendance, and strengthened a positive school culture. Oakcrest Elementary is focused on high-quality instruction, early warning indicators, and attendance.

Chair Petty recognized Commissioner Kamoutsas for his recommendation. Commissioner Kamoutsas recommended the approval of the TOP Plan for Oakcrest Elementary School.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Commissioner Kamoutsas' recommendation. Vice Chair Byrd made a motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi.

Chair Petty recognized Dr. John Legg, Superintendent of Pasco County School District, to present their plan for Anclote Elementary School, Chester W. Taylor Elementary School and Richey Elementary School. Superintendent Legg shared that these schools were reorganized as opportunity schools, aiming to support students with chronically underperforming grades. Teachers and principals were moved out of schools with low Value-Added Model (VAM) scores, and experienced turnaround educators were brought in.

Chair Petty recognized Commissioner Kamoutsas for his recommendation. Commissioner Kamoutsas recommended the approval of the TOP Plan for Anclote Elementary School, Chester W. Taylor Elementary School and Richey Elementary School.

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

Chair Petty recognized Fred Heid, Superintendent of Polk County School District, to present their plan for Crystal Lake Middle School and North Lakeland Elementary School of Choice. Crystal Lake Middle School's new principal, Mr. Mons, focuses on reestablishing high expectations and addressing issues like teacher retention and absenteeism. North Lakeland Elementary School's new principal, Youmone Berrien, has proven success in turnaround. Both schools benefit from wraparound service providers and community groups and are now fully staffed. The schools worked with the Bureau of School Improvement to reassign highly qualified staff to vacant positions.

Chair Petty recognized Commissioner Kamoutsas for his recommendation. Commissioner Kamoutsas recommended the approval of the TOP Plan for Crystal Lake Middle School and North Lakeland Elementary School.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Commissioner Kamoutsas recommendation. Mr. Foganholi made the motion with a second by Vice Chair Byrd. The motion passed unanimously.

Designation of 2024-2025 Academically High-Performing School Districts and Designation of Schools of Excellence

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Paul Burns, Senior Chancellor, to provide an overview of Designation of 2024-2025 Academically High-Performing School Districts and Designation of Schools of Excellence. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that the Florida Legislature established the Academically High-Performing School Districts program in 2007, which is designated annually by the State Board based on school and district grades, class-size compliance, and financial audits, ensuring high-quality teacher recruitment and retention. The list of districts meeting criteria increased to 13 this year. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that the Schools of Excellence program, established in 2017, recognizes schools in Florida that perform in the top 20 percent of the same type of schools. Schools recognized as Schools of Excellence receive administrative flexibilities, allowing teachers to earn in-service points towards their educator certification renewal, saving time and money, and allowing them to focus on professional development.

Chair Petty recognized Zander Moricz in support.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the Designation of 2024-2025 Academically High-Performing School Districts. Mr. Foganholi made the motion with a second by Ms. Magar. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the Designation of Schools of Excellence. Vice Chair Byrd made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Consent Items

Chair Petty recognized Zander Moricz, Nicole Walkewitz, India Miller, Cassandra Dougherty, in opposition of the Renewal of Schools of Hope Operator Status for KIPP Team & Family

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve consent items 13-19. Vice Chair Byrd made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

Member Comments

Vice Chair Byrd expressed her gratitude for the Bureau of School Improvement (BSI) team that has significantly improved school improvement processes and thanked the commissioner for his proactive communication with teachers' unions and school boards. Mr. Foganholi expressed his gratitude for the law enforcement presence at the meeting. Ms. Magar thanked President Ponder and the college for hosting the meeting. Chair Petty shared the commonalities of the turnaround plans, attendance and discipline. He also shared the importance of engaging parents in their child's education..

Chair Petty announced that the next meeting would be on November 13, 2025, in Crawfordville.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business, Chair Petty adjourned the meeting of the State Board of Education at 1:24 p.m.

Chris Emerson, Corporate Secretary

Ryan Petty, Chair