



**MEETING MINUTES
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD
Thursday, February 29, 2024, 6:30 p.m.
Fire Administration Building
528 NW 2nd Street
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33311**

Members	Attendance	Present
Chair Suzanne Dean	A	3
Vice Chair Tina Jaramillo	A	1
Pamela Aiken	P	4
Heather Brinkworth	P	4
Kristina Dever	P	4
Erin Gohl	P	2
Juliet Gray-Williams	P	4
Janet Gualtieri	P	3
Alyssa Mendez	P	3
Denia Perloff	P	2
Deborah Rosenbaum	P	1

Staff

Von Howard, Public Affairs Administrative Supervisor
Susan Grant, Assistant City Manager
Leslie Harmon, Prototype, Inc.

Others

Armando Arana, Broward County Public Schools

Communications to the City Commission

With the City’s focus being – Fort Lauderdale, the City you never want to leave – we as the Education Advisory Board (EAB) feel very strongly that education is one of the keys to making this vision a reality.

This Board respectfully requests the following commitments and/or actions be taken by the Commission:

- Commissioners and pertinent City staff engage with Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) on the direction/approach the School District will take regarding the City’s schools to include programming, repurposing plans, and opportunities to provide municipal support and empower the Chief Education Officer position, as it provides the ability to effectively liaise with BCPS.
- Prioritizing appointments for open positions on the EAB.
- Showcasing or sharing something education focused on the website and/or social media (in the news, school spotlights, etc.)
- Conducting visits to local schools within respective Commission districts.

The members of the EAB thank you for taking the time to consider these requests.

Motion was made by Ms. Gray-Williams, seconded by Ms. Gualtieri, to approve the Communication to the Commission. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.



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Motion was made by Ms. Gray-Williams, seconded by Ms. Gualtieri, to approve the Communication to the Commission. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

- **Welcome**

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 p.m. by Assistant City Manager Susan Grant.

- **Pledge of Allegiance**

Assistant City Manager Grant led the Pledge of Allegiance.

- **Call to Order and Determination of Quorum**

Roll was called and quorum was present.

Motion was made by Ms. Gohl, seconded by Ms. Gualtieri, to allow Board member Deborah Rosenbaum to participate in the meeting via Zoom. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

- **Approval of the January 18, 2024 Minutes**

Motion was made by Ms. Gray-Williams, seconded by Ms. Brinkworth, to approve the January 18, 2024, minutes as presented. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

- **Old Business**

- **Education Advisory Board Communications**

Assistant City Manager Grant reviewed the draft Communication to the Commission based on the January 18 discussion.

Ms. Brinkworth noted that she had been asked to incorporate the letter from Chair Suzanne Dean into the Board's draft. She pointed out that some of the items in that letter may no longer be relevant due to Chief Education Officer Zoie Saunders moving on from her position and added that there may be too many topics addressed for a single communication to be effective.

The Board returned to discussion of Item V.a. following Item VI.c.

Ms. Gray-Williams asked whether the intent was still to communicate to the Commission regarding the inclusion of education in their annual priorities. The Board discussed the

Commission priorities and reviewed the draft communication prepared by Ms. Brinkworth between meetings.

Assistant City Manager Grant advised that education was not listed as an independent priority but was woven throughout. She explained the Communication to the Commission process briefly.

Ms. Gohl pointed to the inclusion of joint use parks on the draft, and asked if funding was in jeopardy. Assistant City Manager Grant stated it was not, and suggested the Board invited a representative of the Parks and Recreation Department to speak at a future meeting.

Discussion ensued regarding filling open positions on the EAB, as well as the potential for student representation.

The Board discussed and drafted a Communication to the Commission, as follows:

With the City's focus being – Fort Lauderdale, the City you never want to leave – we as the Education Advisory Board (EAB) feel very strongly that education is one of the keys to making this vision a reality.

This Board respectfully requests the following commitments and/or actions be taken by the Commission:

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The members of the EAB thank you for taking the time to consider these requests.

Motion was made by Ms. Gray-Williams, seconded by Ms. Gualtieri, to approve the Communication to the Commission. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

The following items were removed from the draft to be communicated to staff:

- Creating and implementing a City of Fort Lauderdale scholarship program like those other cities with Broward County offer

- Recognizing the BCPS Teacher of the Year and Noninstructional Staff Member of the Year for each City school at a City event.
- Providing additional recognition for the BCPS Caliber Award finalists

Item VI.a. was heard prior to Item V.

- **New Business**
 - **Introduction of ACM Susan Grant**

Assistant City Manager Grant introduced herself. She advised that due to organizational changes, the new Chief Education Officer would be reporting to her and the City Manager's Office instead of Public Affairs. She provided a brief overview of her background and her experience with Fort Lauderdale and Coral Springs.

- **Chief Education Officer Update**

Assistant City Manager Grant advised that the Chief Education Officer position was still open through the end of the week, but over 90 applications had been received. She stated there are some very good candidates, and the plan is to fill this important role.

Ms. Gray-Williams asked for examples of good candidates. Assistant City Manager Grant stated an idea candidate to her would be someone who had been a teacher and maybe served as an administrator, with a special emphasis on people who had lived and worked in Broward County.

Ms. Gray-Williams inquired as to whether there would be a selection committee. Assistant City Manager Grant commented that she would complete the initial screening herself, and then decide on next steps.

- **BCPS Government Affairs Update**

Armando Arana, Governmental Affairs Coordinator, Broward County Public Schools, provided a brief update. He advised that he would be serving as liaison between the Board and the School District. He shared the recently approved 2024-2025 school year calendar and discussed Superintendent of Schools Dr. Peter B. Licata's plans for listening in the communities. Mr. Arana highlighted enrollment issues, noting there are 50,000 empty seats in the district, and advised that former Chief Education Officer Zoie Saunders is now leading an initiative in the district called Redefining our Schools. He noted three (3) community meetings had been held, and data continues to be gathered. He commented on next steps in the process and how the data would be used.

Mr. Arana stated the impact of those 50,000 empty seats was over \$2 million a year and noted job cuts and a hiring freeze in the School District central office. He discussed plans for enhanced programming for students, increasing teacher and staff salaries,

improvement of school facilities, and expanded community services. He noted the School District was considering plans to sell property or invest in affordable housing, among others.

Assistant City Manager Grant asked when the School Board would next discuss the initiative in a public meeting. Mr. Arana advised that the next community meetings have not yet been set, but a Board Workshop was scheduled for March 20. He stated he would send an updated schedule.

Discussion continued. Mr. Arana confirmed the School Board's plan was still to vote on recommendations in June.

Ms. Gohl shared her experience attending the community meeting at Fort Lauderdale High School. She noted in her breakout room, there was a lot of call for expansion of training in trades available for high school students. She stated she hoped there would be an effort to align those programs with specific communities.

Mr. Arana noted the input of the EAB would also be weighed and suggested the Board draft a statement to the School Board. He provided an update on the conversation regarding school uniforms, advising that it was determined that a school-level survey should be conducted. He reviewed the policing plan briefly, sharing that the School Board had decided to focus on the Redefining our Schools initiative first and revisit improvements to safety and security in the schools after.

Ms. Dever asked what the community is saying about safety and security, and whether the District is losing students as a result. Mr. Arana responded that safety and security are not currently among the main drivers behind the empty seats.

Ms. Dever inquired as to what data this assertion was based on. Mr. Arana advised that his comment was based on data regarding cost of living, inflation, and the housing market. He noted some of this data could be found on the School District website.

Ms. Brinkworth commented that she had also attended the meeting at Fort Lauderdale High School and had been in a separate breakout group. She noted that in her group, there were safety and security concerns voiced from all over the District. She shared feedback that some of the factors provided as cause for the 50,000 seats to be empty are not accurate. She noted there is not data that shows vouchers and charter schools are the reason for the empty seats, but there is data showing families are moving to other districts, and this may need to be reviewed to learn what the issues are. She suggested more care be taken in the messaging.

Mr. Arana stated that at least five (5) schools will need to be closed. Ms. Brinkworth asked what calculation that statement was based on. Ms. Gohl added that Dr. Licata had recently stated it would be more than five (5) schools.

Ms. Brinkworth noted the District's \$4.4 billion budget and asserted it is important to her as a parent and a former School Board member to understand how much money the School District thinks it is saving by closing a school. She stated that while she agrees they need to think about doing things differently, she did not think the issues would be solved by closing schools.

Ms. Gohl shared that she had also heard concern during the breakout session she participated in that schools would be closed in the eastern part of the district. She suggested mapping previous school closures to make sure trends are not being repeated and focusing on the same communities.

Ms. Gray-Williams asked what would happen to the closed schools, and whether they would be left empty. Mr. Arana advised that at this point, the School District is in the phase of exploring options and everything is on the table. Discussion continued regarding declining enrollment, including demographics and locations.

Ms. Brinkworth commented that selling a piece of property today would have a minimal impact, and the District would never be able to afford property again. She asserted the neighborhoods where property is sold will be without a community school forever, and that is a very serious consideration.

Mr. Arana congratulated the City on its teachers being recognized at the Caliber Awards and the Teacher of the Year awards. Discussion ensued regarding potential recognition of these teachers by the City Commission.

Continuing, Mr. Arana shared results of the annual customer surveys of parents, school staff, and students. He advised that an agreement had been reached with the Broward Teachers Union. Discussion continued regarding teacher salaries and initiatives for future increases.

Mr. Arana commented on the legislative session and advised that 93 schools will be utilized as polling places in 2024. Ms. Gohl highlighted an issue with equipment being unplugged and damage to schools as a result of being used as a polling place. Mr. Arana advised that facilitating the use was required by State law, and the focus was on safety and security. Discussion continued.

Mr. Arana reviewed graduation rates, advising that 30 schools in the District have graduation rates of 90 percent or better. Ms. Dever asked for clarification on the data. Board members asserted there is a significant gap between the cohorts entering 9th grade and the group of students graduating and questioned that true data was being shared. Discussion continued regarding tracking accurate outcomes.

Mr. Arana advised that the School District is partnering with Broward Sheriff's Office on a sextortion campaign. Ms. Brinkworth asked that information also be shared with parents so they can be better prepared to ask questions.

Mr. Arana stated there was a community meeting scheduled for March 5 at Plantation High School focused on drugs and alcohol, and a Parent Community Involvement Taskforce virtual meeting on March 6. Discussion ensued briefly regarding parent engagement.

- **Member Discussion**

Ms. Brinkworth asked that staff reach out to the Vice Chair, as she was formerly an active member of the Board. Discussion ensued briefly regarding restrictions on communication between Board members.

Ms. Brinkworth asked if there was data the City could share with Broward Public Schools regarding skilled trade jobs that are lacking applicants. Von Howard, Public Affairs Administrative Supervisor, commented on efforts to gather data and assist in the creation of opportunities for certificate programs. Discussion continued.

The Board discussed the impact of Spring Break on the schedule and noted the April meeting was scheduled for an early release day.

Motion was made by Ms. Gohl, seconded by Ms. Gray-Williams, to reschedule the March 21 meeting to March 14. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

- **Closing**

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 14, 2024.