

**MINUTES  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
MEETING**

January 21, 2026  
Tallahassee State College  
444 Appleyard Dr.  
Tallahassee, FL 32304

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: MaryLynn Magar, Layla Collins. Dr. Grazie Christie and Daniel Foganholi attended by phone. Chair Petty recognized Dr. Ken Ellis, Tallahassee State College Associate Dean, to deliver the invocation and asked everyone to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Welcome**

Chair Petty nominated Member MaryLynn Magar for Vice Chair with a second by Ms. Collins. Nomination passed unanimously.

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Jim Murdaugh, President of Tallahassee State College, to welcome the board. President Murdaugh shared that TSC is launching a year-long celebration of America 250, featuring events throughout the year. He expressed his appreciation to Commissioner Kamoutsas for his leadership in policy and budget, and to Governor DeSantis for a record funding recommendation for the system. Last year, we served 17,000 students, awarded over 3,000 credentials, and achieved a 70 percent transfer rate to four-year institutions in Florida. The Associate in Science graduates have a 91 percent job placement rate, and posted a 42 percent graduation rate, the highest among peer community colleges.

**COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Chair Petty recognized Anastasios Kamoutsas, Commissioner of the Department of Education, to present his report. Commissioner Kamoutsas shared his excitement that Florida has been ranked the number one state in the nation for education freedom according to the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) Index of State Education Freedom. Florida also earned an A+ rating for school choice and family empowerment policies, which allow students various educational options, and the state reached a record graduation rate of 92.2 percent for the 2024-2025 school year.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that graduation rates for African American, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and disabled students in Florida increased by 3.9, 2.6, 3.3, and 2.3 percentage points, respectively, reflecting progress under Governor DeSantis' leadership. This trend suggests a commitment to student success amidst criticism from the Florida Education Association, which has failed to recognize these accomplishments.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that he attended the Florida Future Educators of America (FFEA) Conference and the Great Debate in Orlando. The FFEA conference included over 550 aspiring educators who connected with experienced teachers to enhance their skills and passion for teaching, and the Great Debate showcased remarkable talents, expanding from 11 districts to nearly 600 students from all 67 Florida school districts and 15 states, the largest participation ever. This debate promotes civic knowledge essential for personal and community responsibilities, aligning with the principles of virtuous citizenship in the Phoenix Declaration.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that over \$20 million in funding through the Linking Industry to Nursing Education Program, partnered with St. Pete State College, increasing total funding for nursing programs to over \$485 million. Investments are enhancing scholarship programs and training facilities at 20 of Florida's 28 state colleges, resulting in a high passage rate for nursing graduates.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Florida prioritizes accountability in the education system and the state has shifted from annual testing to a progress-monitoring system that offers real-time performance data to students, parents, and teachers. Florida also enforces higher standards for textbook accuracy and accountability regarding pricing differences among publishers. Additionally, it mandates postsecondary students to achieve civic literacy through a dedicated course and assessment.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Florida has allocated nearly \$6 billion towards teacher pay since 2019, with \$1.36 billion earmarked for the current year, reflecting a \$102 million increase. While 64 school districts have approved pay raise plans, some are still in negotiations, delaying teacher increases since funds became available on July 1st. Governor DeSantis' budget includes \$1.56 billion for teacher pay hikes, a \$200 million increase from last year, urging no delays in disbursements due to union negotiations and promoting equitable compensation for educators.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that education depends on trust, professionalism, and respect in the school community. Recent inappropriate remarks by Clay County School Board member Robert Alvero have caused concern among families, as expressed during public comments at the January 8, 2026, meeting, leading to frustration and a loss of trust. This situation underscores the need for leadership accountability and corrective measures to rebuild trust, reflecting the impact of board members' actions and words on the institutions they represent. Florida's experience highlights the dangers of neglecting accountability and allowing misconduct to persist. Mr. Alvero's absence from a meeting violated Florida Statute 1008.32 F.S., and reflects a lack of leadership accountability, undermining the responsibility of school board members as role models. This situation serves as a cautionary tale for school boards across Florida about public conduct and leadership accountability.

Commissioner Kamoutsas recognized Robert Hendricks, a Tallahassee State College student, for his exceptional dedication to law enforcement.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the commissioner's report. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Ms. Collins. The motion passed unanimously.

## **Updates**

### **College System – President Lorenz on behalf of the Council of Presidents (COP)**

Chair Petty recognized President Georgia Lorenz of Seminole State College to provide an update on behalf of the COP. President Lorenz shared that Spring semesters at Florida colleges are thriving, largely due to student-led welcoming events. The Education Estimating Conference forecasts a 5.5 percent rise in Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) for fiscal year 2025-2026. The Florida College System contributes approximately \$56.7 billion to the state economy, representing 3.7 percent of its gross product and supporting 640,484 jobs. Graduates are projected to increase lifetime earnings by \$14.5 billion compared to non-students. The system's alignment with labor market demands includes new programs in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, IT, and cybersecurity, bolstered by state support for student success and workforce development.

## **K-12 Public Schools – Superintendent Nolen on behalf of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents**

Chair Petty recognized Hunter Nolan, Superintendent of Jackson County School District, to provide an update on behalf of FADSS. Superintendent Nolen shared that Jackson County priorities focus on building strong academic teams, assessing improvement needs, and recognizing student progress. This past year, our collaborative efforts resulted in a district grade of B, marking a record 29-point increase. This achievement reflects the effectiveness of teacher collaboration, targeted professional learning, and a commitment to instructional excellence. Last year, we achieved significant improvements in college and career acceleration, ranking third among 67 districts with a rise from 84 percent to 91 percent. This success is due to intentional pathways that prepare students for post-graduation opportunities, supported by partnerships with local businesses and higher education for dual-enrollment credits and industry certifications. Additionally, there was growth in English Language Arts proficiency, while some learning gains, particularly in math, among the lowest-performing students, declined, prompting a focus on this area for the upcoming year. We are celebrating notable progress in our schools this year, increasing from one A school to three, with no D or F schools in Jackson County. Sneads Elementary achieved an impressive leap from a C to an A, while Cottondale High School and Malone School maintained their strong performances. Overall, our campuses are showing steady progress, contributing to an increase in industry certifications from 454 in 2020 to 1,037 last year, indicating a commitment to high school acceleration.

### **Update on Madison County School District’s Turnaround Option Plan**

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Peggy Aune, Vice Chancellor for Strategic Improvement, for an overview of Madison County School District’s turnaround plan. Dr. Aune shared that in January 2025, Madison County proposed a turnaround plan for Greenville Elementary School, recommending its closure and the reassignment of students to Madison Central K-8 School. The State Board approved this plan with conditions, ensuring that reassigned students would be taught by highly-effective teachers as per Value Added Model ratings for the '25-'26 school year. The district is committed to monitoring these students and will report their attendance, grades, and intervention details to the Department quarterly for three years.

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Karen Pickles, Superintendent of Madison County School District. Superintendent Pickles shared that, based on an analysis of school grade history, it is evident that the institution has maintained a C grade over the past three years after initially opting not to take a grade. Notably, there are significant increases in performance metrics (PM1 and PM2) from '24 to '25, particularly in English Language Arts (ELA), where PM1 remained at 19 percent, and PM2 increased from 21 percent to 28 percent. For '25-'26, a nine-percent increase is reported. Similarly, in math, PM1 rose from 6 percent to 7 percent, with PM2 increasing from 11 percent to 17 percent. She also shared the commitment to achieving an A grade, believing in the potential of all students and celebrating each small gain in performance while acknowledging the need for continued efforts in reaching grade-level competencies. In summary, math performance slightly declined from 57 percent to 52 percent, but scores of 3, 4, and 5 increased by 6 percent. Attendance data indicate that 83 percent of Greenville students had fewer than two absences, with few at risk of excessive absences. Furthermore, 85 students received fewer than 1 referral, and those with attendance problems are being monitored and supported through continued work with School Improvement.

### **Action Items**

## **Approval of the 2026-27 Amended Education Operating and Fixed Capital Outlay Budget Request**

Chair Petty recognized Suzanne Pridgeon, Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Operations, to provide an overview of the amended Education Operating and Fixed Capital Outlay Budget Request. Ms. Pridgeon shared that the amended 26-'27 education operation budget emphasizes investments in Florida's education system, highlighting allocations from the Governor's recommendations. It includes \$455.3 million for the VPK program, \$30.6 billion for K-12 public education (the highest per-student funding at \$9,406), and \$200 million to increase teacher salaries. Additional allocations involve \$650.8 million for school safety and mental health, featuring funds for the Safe Schools Allocation and various mental health initiatives. The budget also dedicates \$17.5 million for civic engagement and workforce education funding of \$487.2 million, with \$1.75 billion for the Florida College System. Overall, the budget reflects a commitment to support families, students, and educators across all educational stages.

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

## **Approval of Request from St. Petersburg College for a Bachelor of Applied Science in Building Construction Technology**

Chair Petty recognized Matthew Liao-Troth, Vice President for Academic Affairs at St. Petersburg College for an overview of the St. Petersburg College for a Bachelor of Applied Science in Building Construction Technology. Vice President Liao-Troth shared that St. Petersburg College aims to develop programs aligned with workforce demands, particularly in Florida's construction sector, which currently employs 587,000 workers and contributes \$89 billion annually to the state's economy. With a projected need for 439,000 additional construction workers by 2025, the college plans to offer a Bachelor in Applied Science and Building Construction Technology to enhance opportunities for students from Associate in Science programs and address the demand for skilled construction professionals in leadership and management positions.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the request from St. Petersburg College for a Bachelor of Applied Science in Building Construction Technology. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Ms. Collins. The motion passed unanimously.

## **Approval of Amendment to Rules 6A-1.09401, Student Performance Standards and 6A-1.09414, Course Requirements - Grades PK-12 Exceptional Student Education**

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Paul Burns, Senior Chancellor, for an overview of amendment to rules 6A-1.09401 and 6A-1.09414. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that Florida's state academic standards were developed by educators to enhance student outcomes and graduation rates. These standards are integral to courses that aid student progression and credit accumulation. Recent data show a 2.3 percentage-point increase in graduation rates for students with disabilities, bringing the total to a 5.6 percentage-point rise since 2021-2022, underscoring the importance of these standards in supporting academic gains for

these students. The proposed amendments request that the board adopt K-12 access point standards for health education, aligned with the general education standards previously adopted in 2023. Following that adoption, teams developed the access point standards, which are now complete and ready for board approval.

Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that rule 6A-1.09414 is amended to adopt K-12 social studies courses to include the new access point standards adopted in November 2025.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve amendment to rules 6A-1.09401 and 6A-1.09414. Ms. Collins made the motion with a second by Vice Chair Magar. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of High-Demand Teacher Needs Areas**

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Josey McDaniel, Deputy Chancellor for Educator Quality, for an overview of the High-Demand Teacher Needs Areas. Chancellor McDaniel shared that Governor DeSantis has invested over \$5.5 billion since 2020 to enhance the educator workforce in Florida, primarily to increase teacher pay and align recruitment with student demand, rather than address a teacher shortage. Key initiatives include the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation and the Great Florida Teach-In, which have successfully attracted over 550 students to teaching in the 2026 program. House Bill 875 aims to ensure new teachers are ready from day one, while annual assessments identify high-demand teaching areas by evaluating certification status, program graduation rates, and vacancy percentages.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the High-Demand Teacher Needs Area. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Ms. Collins.

Chair Petty recognized Christy Kirkland and Mark Motl in support.

Chair Petty recognized Jessica Jenkins, Carol Gauronskas, and Michael Greenan in opposition. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of Amendment to Rule 6A-6.0576, CAPE Industry Certification Funding List**

Chair Petty recognized Ashley Meros, Chancellor for the Division of Career and Adult Education, for an overview of the Amendment to Rule 6A-6.0576. Chancellor Meros shared that Rule 6A-6.0576 aims to align Florida's workforce with economic opportunities through valid, industry-recognized credentials. Since 2019, over \$12 billion in investment has led to 1.3 million students in Career and Technical Education pathways, with a 77 percent increase in certifications. Nearly 40 percent of high school graduates now earn certifications, while postsecondary institutions awarded over 168,000 credentials in fields like healthcare and IT, supporting over \$650 million in performance funding. This reflects Florida's commitment to workforce-oriented education, and the updates to rule 6A-6.0575 enhance Florida's credentialing framework by updating key lists that connect education with the economy. This initiative aims to keep Florida competitive globally by emphasizing urgency and alignment. Students are earning valuable credentials in fields such as welding, machining, and nursing, which bolster the state's workforce and future.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the amendment to rule 6A-6.0576. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Ms. Collins. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of the General Education Course Review and Reform**

Chair Petty recognized Kathy Hebda, Chancellor of the Florida College System, for an overview of the General Education Course Review and Reform. Chancellor Hebda shared that this text outlines the major educational reform initiated by Governor DeSantis in 2023 through Senate Bill 266, implemented by the State Board of Education and Florida's higher education institutions. The core of this reform is a 36-hour general education requirement that requires students to complete courses in designated core areas. Approved in 2024, these courses are designed to be rigorous and foundational, promoting intellectual skills for lifelong learning while imparting knowledge of Western civilization's historical and philosophical foundations and an understanding of foundational national documents. She also stated that the courses must focus on critical-thinking skills and exclude identity politics, as established by statutory principles governing five general education core subject areas. The accompanying materials detail each college's course offering, the number of Florida colleges and state universities offering these courses, and include certification forms from each board of trustees confirming their adoption of the lists in public meetings. All submissions were completed by the September 1 deadline to the Articulation and Coordinating Committee, which forwarded them to the board by the statutory December 1 deadline.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the 28 Florida College System institutions' General Education Course list as presented and authorize the Commissioner of Education to make any necessary technical adjustments requested by the college. Ms. Collins made the motion with a second by Vice Chair Magar. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of Appointment to the Charter School Review Commission**

Chair Petty recognized Adam Emerson, Executive Director, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, for an overview of the Appointment to the Charter School Review Commission. Mr. Emerson shared the reappointment of Jim Murdaugh, President of Tallahassee State College, to the Florida Charter School Review Commission. Established in 2022, the commission oversees charter school approvals and requires members to have relevant experience. Murdaugh was an inaugural member and previously led TSC to become Florida's first higher-education charter school sponsor, beginning with the successful Tallahassee Collegiate Academy. His reappointment to the commission is endorsed due to his significant contributions and leadership in the charter school sector.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the Appointment to the Charter School Review Commission. Ms. Collins made the motion with a second by Vice Chair Magar. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Consent Items**

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve consent items 12-16. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Ms. Collins. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Member Comments**

Vice Chair Magar thanked her fellow board members for their trust in electing her as Vice Chair and thanked members Byrd and Garcia for their contributions to the board, and also supports the Governor's responsible budget prioritizing students and Florida's future, while expressing concern over potential delays in teacher pay increases and urges

superintendents to be cautious in their leadership roles and community interactions. Ms. Collins reiterated her appreciation for the former board members, and expressed concern about disruptive student behavior, compounded by the behavior of adults around them, and about the withholding of teacher pay. Chair Petty echoed the members and thanked the Commissioner for his leadership, noting the mission to prioritize students and teachers, which has garnered national accolades for being number one in education.

Chair Petty announced that the next meeting would be on February 20, 2026, in Key West, FL.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Having no further business, Chair Petty adjourned the meeting of the State Board of Education at 11:37 a.m.