

**MINUTES  
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
MEETING**

February 20, 2026  
The College of the Florida Keys  
5901 College Road  
Key West, FL 33040

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 MaryLynn Magar, Layla Collins, Dr. Grazie Christe, Daniel Foganholi, Erika Fritz-Ochs, and Luis Fuste. Chair Petty recognized Edward Coy, retired Army Chaplain, to deliver the invocation and asked everyone to remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Welcome**

Chair Petty welcomed two new members, Erika Fritz-Ochs and Luis Fuste.

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Jonathan Gueverra, President of the College of the Florida Keys, to welcome the board. President Gueverra shared that the Florida College System (FCS) institutions have essential workforce engines that promote innovation and economic opportunities, mentioning unique programs as dual enrollment. He shared that the institution has added four Baccalaureate degrees and over 36 Career Technical Education (CTE) options, with over 40 percent of students enrolled in CTE, demonstrating alignment with workforce needs. The College of the Florida Keys offers a significant return on investment, with students earning a 19 percent annual return and \$4.50 for every \$1 invested. Graduates earn an average of \$57,724, exceeding the state average, while the college contributes over \$44 million to the local economy. There is a strong initiative to enhance CTE through partnerships with the local school district, though sustainable funding is essential for these programs' viability.

Chair Petty shared that Commissioner Kamoutsas is celebrated for his nomination for the 40 under 40 award, highlighting this deserving recognition. The Commissioner's commitment to addressing the educational needs of students across the state at all levels is acknowledged, along with gratitude for his dedicated service, leadership, and vision.

**COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Chair Petty recognized Anastasios Kamoutsas, Commissioner of the Department of Education, to present his report. Commissioner Kamoutsas thanked Dr. Gueverra and the college for contributing \$44 million to the local economy. The higher education system's focus on mission-driven programs is evident, as it has been ranked number one since 2017. Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that recent progress monitoring results show significant improvements: 49 percent of students in English Language Arts and 34 percent in mathematics are performing at or above grade level, marking a 10 percent and 18 percent increase since the school year began, respectively. This year's progress outpaces last year's, with approximately 50,000 additional students meeting standards in English and nearly 20,000 in math. These results highlight the effective teaching and commitment to student growth in Florida's education system.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that February is recognized as CTE Month, and that Governor DeSantis has announced that Florida ranks as the top state in workforce education

and that Executive Order 19-31 aims to achieve the nation's top workforce education by 2030. Recently, an announcement was made five years ahead of schedule, highlighting that under Governor DeSantis' leadership, over \$12 billion has been allocated to workforce education. Currently, Florida serves over 800,000 K-12 CTE students and 500,000 postsecondary CTE students, marking a 30 percent increase since the administration began.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Florida's adult education programs serve over 189,000 learners, enhancing access to credentials and career opportunities. On January 27th, Workforce Day at the Capitol was marked by the presentation of the '24-'25 Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship Report, which records significant growth in Florida's apprenticeship system, now boasting over 25,000 apprentices and pre-apprentices—a rise of 11 percent from last year. More than 2,000 apprentices graduated last year, earning an average wage of nearly \$28 per hour, equivalent to over \$58,000 annually, providing a compelling pathway to prosperity and education.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that during National School Choice Week, Florida highlighted its leadership in educational freedom, showcasing record scholarship participation and rising student performance. Governor DeSantis announced the state's participation in the Federal Tax Credit Scholarship program, aimed at enhancing school choice and providing additional funding for low-income families. The commitment to educational choice ensures that every student can attend a suitable school, reflecting the state's focus on putting students first.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that the 19th annual Celebration of Literacy Week focused on promoting reading among Florida students and families, aligning with this year's theme, "Read White and Blue," in honor of America's 250th anniversary. Activities included reading a patriotic book at Madison County Central School and taking the reader's oath with kindergarten students. The event, supported by Just Read, Florida! aimed to inspire a love for reading, highlighted by students receiving books to share with their families. Additionally, the Department is partnering with Volunteer Florida and the Department of State for the America 250 Florida Art and Essay Contest.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Florida has recently organized multiple civics events, including professional learning for teachers and a debate for postsecondary students, reflecting Governor DeSantis's commitment to enhancing civics education. As a result, Florida leads the nation in this area. The Department focuses on preparing students for civic engagement through initiatives like the 55-hour Florida Civics Seal of Excellence endorsement, which equips educators to deliver high-quality civics instruction aligned with revised academic standards.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that he recently participated in a professional learning event at the Capital Complex with 50 teachers, where they engaged in hands-on sessions to enhance content knowledge and classroom resources. He thanked Representative Dana Trabulsy for addressing the teachers. Additionally, the Department hosted the inaugural Sunshine State Debate, with nearly 100 students competing in a Ronald Reagan-style format, showcasing impressive civic discourse. He encouraged others to view the final round, which is available on the Florida Channel, as it was a rewarding experience to judge and witness the students' excitement upon winning.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that our nation's future is promising, as highlighted by recent correspondence regarding organized student protests during school hours. In response, a memo was issued to district superintendents outlining expectations for maintaining instructional time and campus safety. While students have the constitutional

right to free expression and peaceful protest, such activities must not disrupt education. The support of school districts in preventing walkouts is emphasized, alongside accountability for educators who express negative views on law enforcement or engage in indoctrination. The focus remains on protecting students and prioritizing their learning experience.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Jessica Vaughn, a member of the Hillsborough County School Board, has drawn criticism for encouraging parents to withdraw their children from classes as a form of protest, which disrupts educational opportunities. This follows a recent incident in Palm Beach County where a student was hit by a car while protesting during school hours. Concerns have been raised by the State Board of Education regarding school board members prioritizing their political aspirations over students' academic success. A notable example includes Tina Certain from Alachua County, who is campaigning for political office. Additionally, the Florida Education Association has faced scrutiny for endorsing student protests against law enforcement, perceived as prioritizing political activism over education. This situation highlights a broader issue of political indoctrination in educational settings.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that Florida leaders are advancing accountability and transparency in education through legislation with House Bill 995 and Senate Bill 1296, which require teacher unions to prioritize teachers and students. Recent changes to the Florida College System mandate public posting of syllabi and reading materials, improving visibility for stakeholders. The Florida Education Association and United Faculty of Florida have dropped their lawsuit against this transparency rule, following several legal defeats related to transparency measures and school closures during COVID that affected student learning.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that several school districts have yet to approve salary compensation increases for teachers, with delays attributed to the union's actions. It was noted that 11 districts were involved, and there has been little progress within a month, with 7 districts still awaiting pay increases. The commissioner emphasized the unacceptability of the union's role in delaying funds that became available on July 1st, arguing that these funds should directly benefit educators rather than being hindered by unions focused on increasing membership.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that in this budget proposal, the Governor is increasing teacher pay by an additional \$200 million, bringing the total to \$1.56 billion for the year, after investing nearly \$6 billion throughout his tenure. There is a call for the timely implementation of salary increases and accountability for unions. The board is also amending the Schools of Hope rule to better reflect district feedback, particularly on co-location issues. The revisions allow co-location in underutilized schools while introducing guidelines for identifying such facilities, limiting facility notices, and requiring management plans to be developed between districts and Hope operators. These changes aim to ensure that only qualified providers deliver a high-quality education while addressing district concerns and enhancing educational access for Florida students.

Commissioner Kamoutsas shared that in November, the board approved the History of Communism standards to educate students about the suppression of freedoms and abuses committed by communist regimes. During our meeting, the board will consider updates to these standards to include the fall of the Maduro regime, with the aim of providing modern examples and promoting understanding of contemporary communist atrocities.

Commissioner Kamoutsas recognized Monae Hylor for her inspiring college journey characterized by determination and resilience.

Commissioner Kamoutsas recognized Mathias Lumbi, a Poinciana Elementary student since kindergarten, for his curiosity, kindness, and love of learning. He was diagnosed with leukemia in September 2023. He faced the challenge with courage and resilience, continuing his second-grade education from home during treatment. His perseverance, strong work ethic, and the support of his classmates, and his dedication.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the commissioner's report. Mr. Foganholi made the motion with a second by Mr. Fuste. The motion passed unanimously.

## **Updates**

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

Chair Petty recognized President Madeline Pumariega of Miami-Dade College to provide an update on behalf of the COP. President Pumariega congratulated Commissioner Kamoutsas, on being recognized as the 40 under 40. Discussions were held with major airlines regarding the need for mechanics in aviation and aerospace to secure funding from Florida and the federal government for apprenticeship programs. She shared the significant economic impact of the Florida College System, contributing \$56 billion to the state's economy. Each dollar invested yields a \$13 return to taxpayers, while students experience a 21 percent return on their investments in education. The system focuses on equipping students for high-wage jobs in fields such as teaching, nursing, computer science, and aviation, thereby supporting Florida's workforce and attracting further investment from companies. St. Petersburg College, St. Johns River State College, Eastern Florida State College, Central Florida State College, and Daytona State College are all introducing new degrees and programs that will increase health care, legal services, agriculture, dental hygiene, aerospace, manufacturing, robotics, cybersecurity, radiology and imaging sciences, to meet all workforce needs in North Florida.

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

Chair Petty recognized Ed Tierney, Superintendent of Monroe County School District, to provide an update on behalf of FADSS. Superintendent Tierney shared the district's dedication to student success and recognized the passionate staff and supportive community. The presence of approximately 635 teachers, a considerable travel distance between the district's schools of 2 hours and 15 minutes, and annual bus travel of about 800,000 miles. He shared highlights of the strong career and technical education program, particularly the outboard marine engine program at Coral Shores High School, as well as efforts to expand advanced placement and dual enrollment opportunities in partnership with the College of the Florida Keys. The school district has the highest starting salary for teachers in the state and an A rating, along with a 5 percent increase in graduation rates. The low vacancy rate is due to a supportive teaching environment, a skilled school board, and community commitment. Student safety is prioritized, and the One Team, One Goal program enhances educational outcomes by promoting collaboration and personalized student scheduling, supported by a structured early literacy program.

### **Maritime Industry Workforce - Secretary Alex Kelly**

Chair Petty recognized Alex Kelly, Secretary of the Florida Department of Commerce, to address the board. Secretary Kelly shared initiatives that provide training platforms to enable individuals of all ages to pursue their career goals and dreams, facilitating access to

job opportunities and workforce pathways. He thanked the University of South Florida's Institute of Applied Engineering, particularly Chandler Johnston, for their assistance with this evolving presentation on the maritime industrial base. With a shift of employment towards commercial sectors, reducing the capacity for essential activities such as shipbuilding. Given the current need for this capacity, it is necessary to reconsider the infrastructure, workforce engagement, financing mechanisms, and the role of public-private partnerships. In April 2025, President Trump signed an executive order to revitalize the maritime industrial base, focusing on infrastructure and workforce development. This led to the issuance of America's Maritime Action Plan, which instructs the military and partners to enhance the sector, primarily through the U.S. Navy and support from federal entities. The initiative aims to create manufacturing jobs and workforce opportunities.

## **Action Items**

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

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Paul Burns, Senior Chancellor, for an overview of the amendment to 6A-1.0998271, Schools of Hope. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that this amendment adjusts Senate Bill 2510 by clarifying the roles of Schools of Hope operators and school districts, based on feedback since the previous amendment in September 2025. It establishes criteria for identifying underutilized district buildings, specifically targeting those with a utilization rate below 75 percent or a surplus of at least 400 student stations. Furthermore, it restricts Hope operators to five building notices per year and requires that a notice be withdrawn before submitting another, thereby preventing market saturation. Operators must ensure that their submitted notices are genuine, submit a governing board resolution and a staffing and enrollment plan draft, establish a mutual management plan with the school district, and ensure that the Hope operator's enrolled students achieve performance levels that surpass district and state averages. They must also demonstrate a college attendance rate exceeding 80 percent and have over 70 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Additionally, the operator must maintain good standing with state authorizers and ensure financial audit statements are free from material misstatements. Senate Bill 2510 aims to allow Hope operators to use underutilized district spaces without affecting services for district students, while districts can impose charges for documented extra costs due to School of Hope students.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the amendment to rule 6A-1.0998271, Schools of Hope. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Ms. Collins.

Chair Petty recognized Heather Felton, Caprice Edmond, and Damaris Allen in opposition.

Chair Petty recognized Sue Woltanski, and Kathleen Murray in support.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of New Rule 6A-1.0455, Middle School and High School Start Times**

Chair Petty recognized Senior Chancellor Burns for an overview of new rule 6A-1.0455, Middle School and High School Start Times. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that the proposed new rule regarding school start times for middle and high school students impacts health, safety, and academic performance. For the 2026-2027 school year, Section 1001.42 F.S. mandates that middle schools start no earlier than 8:00 a.m. and high schools no earlier than 8:30 a.m. Following the signing of Senate Bill 296 by Governor DeSantis in 2025, districts can achieve compliance by submitting a report to the Department by June 1, 2026.

This report must detail the start times for elementary, middle, and high schools, strategies considered for later start times, and the number of board meetings, public hearings, and opportunities for parent input. School districts are required to engage with stakeholders, including parents and teachers, to develop strategies for implementing these changes, such as bus routes, financial implications, and other scheduling factors, to ensure feasibility.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve new rule 6A-1.0455. Mr. Fuste made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi.

Chair Petty recognized Phil Ehr and Kerry Baker in opposition.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of Amendment to Rule 6A-1.09401, Student Performance Standards**

Chair Petty recognized Senior Chancellor Burns for an overview of the amendment to Rule 6A-1.09401. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that Florida's state academic standards, developed by local educators, aim to enhance teaching and learning for students, resulting in improved outcomes. A recent amendment to social studies standards, adopted in November 2025, includes new benchmarks on the history of communism in light of the fall of the Maduro regime in January 2026. This review identified opportunities to strengthen standards for high school students (Grades 9-12). He shared the proposed changes to educational benchmarks that aim to enhance instruction regarding the history of communism, emphasizing its detrimental impact on individual freedoms and American principles such as liberty and democracy. The changes encourage Florida students to recognize communism's global failures and prepare them to defend the American way of life against such threats.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the amendment to rule 6A-1.09401. Dr. Christie made the motion with a second by Vice Chair Magar.

Chair Petty recognized Kathleen Murray in support.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of Request by Miami Dade College for a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene**

Chair Petty recognized Dr. Alwyn Leiba, President of Miami-Dade College's medical campus, for an overview of the request from Miami-Dade College for a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene. Dr. Leiba shared that Miami-Dade College provides the largest dental hygiene program in Florida, graduating the most dental hygienists. The proposed bachelor's degree builds on the existing associate's degree, focusing on advanced practice and career opportunities. Employment for dental hygienists in the region is expected to grow by 14.1 percent by 2031, addressing local demand and aligning with industry needs. Additionally, the lack of a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene program in South Florida creates a gap for graduates seeking further education locally, as many prefer in-person instruction to online formats. Our program aims to meet the demand for local, affordable, and workforce-aligned education in Dental Hygiene. This degree offers greater professional opportunities in fields such as public health, education, and administration. With a significant number of faculty retiring, there is an urgent need to prepare future dental hygienist educators. This initiative aligns strategically with Miami-Dade College's position as Florida's largest dental hygiene program.

Dr. Becky Smith of the American Dental Hygienists Association and a hygiene educator at Miami-Dade College, shared that Miami-Dade College's Dental Hygiene Program, established over 50 years ago, is the largest in Florida, with a distinguished curriculum for associate in science students. The faculty comprises of seven members, all of whom hold doctoral degrees, a unique distinction among similar programs. The American Dental Hygienist Association (ADHA) supports expanding the curriculum to include a Bachelor of Science degree completion program, aligning with its policy since 1986 to promote formal dental hygiene education. Recent policy adoptions further advocate for professional autonomy, which a baccalaureate degree would enable. The proposed BSDH program at Miami-Dade College includes courses in advanced theory, research, and leadership for dental hygiene. The ADHA supports this initiative because it efficiently enhances career advancement opportunities for students.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Miami Dade College's request for a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of New Specialized Associate in Arts Transfer (SAAT) Degree Program(s) in the Florida College System, "Lake-Sumter State College - Biology & Health Sciences"**

Chair Petty recognized John Temple, President of Lake Sumter State College, for an overview of the New Specialized Associate in Arts Transfer (SAAT) Degree Program(s) in the Florida College System, "Lake-Sumter State College – Biology & Health Sciences." President Temple requested two specialized associate in arts transfer degrees in Biology and Health Sciences, developed with the University of Central Florida (UCF). This initiative builds on a successful partnership, by enhancing structured transfer pathways for students to achieve junior standing upon transfer. A recent discussion highlighted the need for these programs, as a student's failure to meet prerequisites resulted in delays despite following correct procedures. The proposed programs may require 80 to 87 credits, which are critical prerequisites aligned with university standards to facilitate smooth transitions. He shared that the workforce data highlights a strong demand for biology and health sciences, with projected growth and numerous annual job openings in Central Florida. This demand is compounded by population growth, an aging demographic, and an expanding healthcare infrastructure. Proposed SAAT programs aim to enhance collaboration, align with regulations, and remove barriers for students, thereby strengthening transfer pathways and supporting workforce priorities in Florida.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve the New Specialized Associate in Arts Transfer (SAAT) Degree Program(s) in the Florida College System, "Lake-Sumter State College – Biology and Health Sciences". Ms. Collins made the motion with a second by Mr. Fuste. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of A.A.A. Scholarship Foundation - Florida, LLC as a Scholarship Funding Organization for 2026-27**

Chair Petty recognized Senior Chancellor Burns for an overview of the next three items. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that this is the annual approval of scholarship funding organizations associated with school choice programs, specifically mentioning Step Up for Students and AAA.

Chair Petty recognized Kim Dyson with the AAA Scholarship Foundation. Ms. Dyson expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to represent AAA and the families served. She

shared that their secure online scholarship management platform (SMP) has seen a nearly 42 percent increase in Florida applications for the '26-'27 year compared to last year, with an influx of new schools. She thanked Governor DeSantis for Florida's participation in the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit Program, which is viewed as a groundbreaking opportunity for citizens to invest in scholarships at no cost to themselves or the state. We urge you to support this initiative by contributing the maximum allowed of \$1,700 per taxpayer to the AAA Scholarship Foundation starting January 1, 2027, and encourage others to do the same.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve A.A.A. Scholarship Foundation – Florida, LLC as a Scholarship Funding Organization for 2026-27. Mr. Foganholi made the motion with a second by Mr. Fuste. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of Step Up for Students, Inc. as a Scholarship Funding Organization for 2026-27**

Senior Chancellor Burns provided an overview of the Step Up for Students, Inc., proposal to be a Scholarship Funding Organization for 2026-27.

Chair Petty recognized Gretchen Schoenhaar, President and CEO for Step Up for Students. President Schoenhaar expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to present their work supporting Florida families and ongoing performance improvements. Step Up oversees more than 500,000 education savings accounts across five programs and one stipend, ensuring close compliance with all relevant laws and regulations. This year, the Scholarship Funding expects to process approximately 10 million financial transactions, along with numerous interactions with constituents. The demand for scholarship programs is increasing as Florida remains a leading state for educational choice. In the school year '25-'26, our commitment to improving performance is highlighted by processing applications for nearly 650,000 students in an average of three days, significantly faster than the previous ten days. We processed 99.9 percent of tuition payments in 2.1 days and anticipate processing 2.7 million transactions on MyScholarShop, totaling over \$425 million, without charging fees. MyScholarShop features 160 vendors offering over 80,000 educational products. Additionally, we project to process over 4.5 million reimbursement requests, reflecting a five-fold increase. Notably, 49 of Florida's 67 public school districts now provide scholarship students with unbundled classes and services, a unique achievement in the nation.

Chair Petty recognized Damaris Allen in support.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Step Up for Students, Inc. as a Scholarship Funding Organization for 2026-27. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of Sunshine State Kids as a Scholarship Funding Organization for 2026-27**

Senior Chancellor Burns provided an overview of Sunshine State Kids' request to be a Scholarship Funding Organization for 2026-27. Sr. Chancellor Burns shared that approval of a new scholarship funding organization, Sunshine State Kids, is the final action item. Unlike previous items, which were renewals, this action involves establishing Sunshine State Kids as a new SFO. Representatives from the organization are present and are invited to the stage.

Chair Petty recognized Yossi Rosengarten for an overview of the proposed. She shared that they are aiming to assist around 5,000 children in Florida in its initial year, with plans to scale to 10,000-11,000 in three years. She emphasized collaboration with the established national organization, Odyssey, to implement the program effectively.

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve Sunshine State Kids as a Scholarship Funding Organization for 2026-27. Dr. Christie made the motion with a second by Mr. Fuste. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Consent Items**

Chair Petty called for a motion to approve consent items 12-22. Vice Chair Magar made the motion with a second by Mr. Foganholi. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Member Comments**

Vice Chair Magar shared that the U.S. Department of Education, led by Under Secretary Kent, visited Florida colleges to evaluate the state's strengths in higher education and Career and Technical Education (CTE). This progress is credited to the Governor's leadership and educational leaders. A notable case presented was a student trustee from Palm Beach State, who thrived academically despite a challenging background, aided by committed teachers and counselors. His achievements highlight the significant influence educators have on students, underscoring the importance of their support. Ms. Collins thanked CFK for hosting the meeting, and while we often notice the challenges, we must also recognize the ongoing efforts behind the scenes, particularly from the Department of Education, that enable us to find solutions month after month. Mr. Foganholi emphasized the importance of listening to public comment and acknowledged the concerns of the community. Additionally, he reflected on the impact of the February 14th tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, stressing the lasting memory of the event and the families affected, particularly within the Broward community. Dr. Grazie Christie shared that it is an honor to be involved in Florida's educational initiatives, which are vital to the state's and nation's future, and how much the Department of Education is dedicated to combating the politicization of education. Ms. Fritz-Ochs emphasized the importance of serving students, educators, and communities in Florida, and highlighted that 50,000 more students are now proficient readers and 20,000 more are performing at or above grade level in math. Additionally, commend the Commissioner for being named 40 Under 40, recognizing his impactful leadership in education. Mr. Fuste expressed his gratitude for the opportunity and reflected on the positive experience during his brief time on the board. Chair Petty expressed his gratitude, recognition, and congratulated the Commissioner on his award and echoed the members' remarks.

Chair Petty announced that the next meeting would be on April 17, 2026, in Naples, FL.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Having no further business, Chair Petty adjourned the meeting of the State Board of Education at 12:52 p.m.