

EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
Thursday, September 30, 2021, 6:30 P.M.
CITY HALL, 8th Floor Conference Room
100 North Andrews Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

Members	June 2021 – May 2022		
	Attendance	Present	Absent
Dr. Allen Zeman, Chair	P	2	0
Amy Ellowitz, Vice Chair	P	2	0
Heather Brinkworth	P	2	0
Ruchel Coetzee	A	0	2
Yolanda B. Francis	A	1	1
Leah Polhemus Hopkins	A	0	2
Tina Jaramillo	P	1	1
April Jeff	A	1	1
Colleen Lockwood	A	0	2
Tomislav Lukic	P	2	0
Lisa May	P	2	0
Vickie Melus	A	0	2
Dr. Jean-Jacques Rajter	A	0	2
Christopher Relyea	P	2	0
Betty Shelley	P	1	1
Lillian Small	A	0	2
Rory Sponsler	P	1	1
Dr. Michele Verdi-Knapp (arrived at 7:29 p.m.)	P	2	0
Moises Acosta	P	1	0
Denia Perloff	P	1	0

Staff

Zoie Saunders, Chief Education Officer, City of Fort Lauderdale
 Crysta Parkinson, Prototype, Inc.

Guests

Renee Jaffe, CEO of the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County
 Dr. Lori Canning, Broward Schools, Executive Director of Early Learning Language Acquisition
 Sharonda Bailey, Director Heard Start/Early Intervention
 Pablo Cava
 Dacha Steiner, FERN Collective

Welcome

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m. by Dr. Allen Zeman, Board Chair. He invited guests to introduce themselves.

Attendance and Roll Call, 21 appointed members; 10 needed for quorum

As of this date, September 30, 2021, eleven (11) of the 21 members were present, which constituted a quorum.

Board Chair's Minute

Dr. Zeman indicated there would be discussion regarding a fundamental issue where the City has an interest and ability to do something about it. As most people know, Florida runs the education through counties and counties getting funding, setting policies, and hiring and running schools. Cities are critically interested; Fort Lauderdale has made a dramatic change in the past few years, not just by hiring staff, but by engaging on topics, dedicating \$11 million to fields, playgrounds, and schools. Early Learning and Literacy before school starts is an issue for which they are going to see new data tonight based on last years tests for Kindergarten readiness. They are also going to hear about Stranahan High School. The Parks and Recreation Bond will not be discussed; that was a topic during the last few meetings. The City is gathering more information from neighborhood Associations and schools to make sure they understand the need that exists in great detail. This Board has been busy, but not active, partly because they felt Covid was not the right time to launch teams. The Board will be asked to fill out a list of organizations they belong to and a network tree of all the members will be built to find out what everyone is involved in. It is believed there is an opportunity to reach out with the right material and influence as to how members think, vote, and behave related to schools.

Ms. Saunders highlighted the following awards and accomplishments the City has achieved:

- Thurgood Marshall Elementary School is one of two schools in the County to improve a letter grade and that takes them out a failing status.
- The City of Fort Lauderdale was the Broward County Public Schools District honoree for a Florida Department of Education Award, called the Commissioner's Business Recognition Program. The District will present that award to the Mayor and City Commission on October 21, 2021, at the Commission meeting.
- A National Award was received for a volunteer project called the Fort Lauderdale Cares Project. The project won a Third Place Honor for a National Neighborhood Association Award through partnerships with the community, the Rotary Club, and volunteers spearheaded by their Chief Service Officer.
- The Aviation Project is reaching a critical milestone for this cycle. Their consultant will present a Needs Assessment to the Commission on October 5, 2021, sharing the projected documents in the Aviation Air Space Industry and contemplating the next phases when thinking about program design and feasibility and what roll the City must play in being a hub for a Training and Aviation Aerospace.

Additionally, results will be shown for the summer program. Many students maintained and increased in literacy and math and showed high satisfaction with the program itself; 90% indicating they enjoyed time with their teacher, had fun, and learned something new. Additional information will be shared at the next meeting.

Chair Dr. Zeman welcomed new member, Moises Acosta.

Mr. Acosta introduced himself. He is on the Board of Directors for Riverside Park Residents Association and has been a resident for about ten years between there and Progresso. He is also on the Board of Directors for the Restaurant Lobbying Association and a few other Boards and Committees. He is the Director of Operations for Hand Crafts and Hospitality, which is Taco Craft and a few other brands. He has six children in the school system.

Chair Dr. Zeman asked Mr. Acosta to expand on eastern Fort Lauderdale schools.

Mr. Acosta indicated that he is passionate about Stranahan High School, Hollywood Hills, and several schools on the eastern side that he knows directly and has seen in past years. He is part of the Culinary Program, which is Pro-Start, and he goes to a few of the schools including JP Taravella, where he mentors.

Chair Dr. Zeman welcomed new member, Denia Perloff.

Ms. Perloff introduced herself. She has two daughters in Broward County Public Schools and is very involved as a member of the PTA for various schools.

Early Learning

Guest Speakers

- Renee Jaffe, CEO of the Early Learning Coalition of Broward County
- Dr. Lori Canning, Broward Schools Executive Director of Early Learning Language Acquisition
- Sharonda Bailey, Director Head Start/Early Intervention

Ms. Saunders introduced the guest speakers as well as Pablo Cava, taking pictures and documenting tonight's discussion. A presentation was prepared that shows available data around Early Learning, but they were here to help facilitate conversation with the Board.

Chair Dr. Zeman questioned who was responsible for building this presentation. He asked because a significant number of speakers talk at these meetings and often, they bring Broward County data. He thanked the guest speakers for breaking down the numbers to Fort Lauderdale students involved in different programs.

The guest speakers advised it was a collaborative effort.

Ms. Jaffe provided a brief overview of the services provided at the Early Learning Coalition (ELC). Statistics show that 90% of the brain develops before Kindergarten. They want every child to be successful in life and feel the key is to have high quality learning experiences. Along with partners in the community, they want to lead that charge and support their Early Education partners in providing quality services.

Dr. Canning mentioned the image of the Kindergarten Readiness Rate and showed the 2019 data, which was skewed due to Covid. They know 100% of the children were not able to take the Assessment because they were not back face-to-face, so parents had to bring their children to school specifically to take the Assessment and that is the reason the numbers were skewed. Data for 2019 was shown with the specific focus on Fort Lauderdale.

Ms. Jaffe read the lowest category schools regarding FLKRS results as follows:

- Cypress Elementary
- Dillard Elementary
- North Side Elementary
- Riverland Elementary
- Rock Island Elementary
- Stephen Foster Elementary
- Thurgood Marshall Elementary

Chair Dr. Zeman commented as they think through this and other work about Equity, these scores are no where close to other areas. The point is that they can do better. In some sense, these scores are alarming. He mentioned Virginia Schuman and Bayview with higher scores and Thurgood Marshall, which was missing by a factor of six. As a Board and their work with the City Commission and the Broward County School Board, this is an area where they can have a lot of influence and do things to improve the score. Scores are off in a long way; disparity between this test is six times lower in west Fort Lauderdale schools than in east Fort Lauderdale schools. From all education literature, it is difficult to catch up too much.

Dr. Canning explained that FLKRS stands for Florida Kindergarten Readiness Screen, which is given on the computer in the first 30 instructional days of school. The Assessment is for five-year-olds and it measures their readiness; everything they have done their first five years of life and what is determined by the State and Assessment people to mean ready. The Assessment shows targeted areas and data shows there is a significant area of need.

Chair Dr. Zeman asked if Fort Lauderdale has the highest and lowest FLKRS in Broward County.

Dr. Canning thought that was a good comparison. There is a correlation between how students enter Kindergarten and how they continue to score into third grade, elementary

school, middle school, and high school. It is critical the children have a strong foundation when they enter school. Last year, the Legislation passed how they look at how children are doing in the VPK Program, which would go into effect in July. This year is a plan year, but next year they will rule out a compilation of different Assessment tools when looking at a child in Voluntary Pre-K. They will look at where the child started and ended during the year, what their learning gains were, and use other measurements to get an idea of where a child is as they start to go to Kindergarten. There will be a piece where they would be able to early identify when a child needs extra support prior to Kindergarten. She mentioned House Bill 711, which will monitor children from the VPK Program from when they are four years old all the way through the eighth grade, so they would get to see impacts of all efforts towards literacy.

Ms. Jaffe stated the School Readiness Program is the subsidized childcare program for lower income children. There are education supports for children birth to five years old and there is also an afterschool component for low-income families. The Early Learning Coalition's roll is educational supports to the providers they work with as well as reimbursement to childcare providers around the County and in all municipalities for services they provide for each child. A breakdown was shown and there are still 379 children on the wait list despite pulling so many children off this year. There were over 3,000 children, but the hope is that those children will be enrolled this year. She assured there was more need than that in Broward County, and they will be going back to the State for more money to serve all the children in this County. They have contracts with 740 childcare providers, 71 of which are in Fort Lauderdale.

Dr. Canning indicated there are VPK Programs within Broward County Public Schools. They are the Grantee for Broward County Public Schools for Head Start and Early Head Start, so they can provide programs for their most fragile children eligible for Head Start. These programs are designated for families with income below the Federal Poverty Guidelines who are receiving public assistance that could be homeless, foster care children, or children with disabilities. The program provides an array of comprehensive services including education, health, family and community and program governance. They have eight schools in the City of Fort Lauderdale that have Head Start Programs, which are for three and four-year olds, and Westwood Heights has an Early Head Start Program. They also have VPK at some of the Fort Lauderdale schools. A map was shown, and the Fort Lauderdale school locations were pointed out.

Ms. Jaffe mentioned mentoring, coaching, professional development, and support programs for Directors and staff. Last year, 2,000 individuals were trained. There was inclusion work with children having challenges in the classroom and trauma was the focus. Additional services include advocacy, parent engagement, newsletters, working with municipalities and legislators, childcare resources, and a referral hotline. She highlighted collaboration with the Broward County Public Schools.

Dr. Canning announced the Count Down to Kindergarten campaign. Books will be distributed, which will help support Kindergarten transition.

Dr. Canning continued the overview of the presentation as follows:

- School Readiness Quality Data. The Child/Class Teacher Interaction Assessment was 4.38 in Fort Lauderdale in 2019 and 4.40 in Broward in 2019.
- Child Care Industry Challenges include:
 - Low reimbursement rates for SR and VPK
 - Low wages – High turnover & inability to find new quality staff
 - Covid impact on programs, children, and families

Dr. Canning indicated that most educators pay \$9 to \$12 per hour, and they are leaving to work in the service industry. There is an abundance of slots, but more funding is needed to pay staff better and to solve workforce issues. There is a 39% vacancy rate.

Ms. Jaffe continued with the presentation as follows:

- Using Federal Relief to Rebuild the Industry Assist Struggling Families

Things the Early Learning Coalition is doing to help were discussed such as background check costs, etc.

Dr. Canning announced the Broward Reads for the Record 2021, will be held on October 28, 2021. She invited Board members to participate and stated that 40,000 books would be given away in one day.

Chair Dr. Zeman suggested moving the next meeting to October 28, 2021, so they could discuss the experience. He requested the Board think about what else the City of Fort Lauderdale should be doing and to add any Legislative issues to their docket. He mentioned working with the Bezos Foundation to help fill part of this gap.

Dr. Canning thought what the Board was trying to do was great. So many families cannot afford childcare. Coming with a tested model that works and has standards in place could be a great opportunity for the County. Too many families spend too much on childcare and data suggests that many families in Broward County cannot afford childcare. There are so many ways they can strengthen the system; it must be seen from both sides.

Chair Dr. Zeman stated that the Board wants everything that could make education better. There are 3,000 children born in Fort Lauderdale per year, and many do not have academic enrichment activities early in their life.

Ms. Saunders mentioned the systemic challenge in funding high quality Early Learning programs statewide. A new model could be leveraged for systemic change for Early Learning. The program model is a full day, year around, and services many families that currently do not qualify for subsidized programs. The need is so great that there is a space for all players to operate.

Mr. Relyea commented that opportunities could be identified. He reminded everyone not to forget looking for volunteer opportunities, specifically for students. Thousands of students want and need to volunteer and there are limited opportunities because of Covid. There is a challenge to tap into that potential.

Dr. Canning mentioned Hands on Broward.

Ms. Jaffe explained the program and indicated that families go on the website and believe they qualify, but they go on a waiting list.

Ms. Brinkworth mentioned it is inclusive of Broward County Public Schools.

Ms. Jaffe stated there is no waiting list for VPK; it is an entitlement and there is no limit. Historically, 77% of the four-year-olds were enrolled, and last year there was nowhere near that percentage.

Ms. Brinkworth advised that some of those students could be in public schools. It was noted that the best and brightest children are not going to be in early grades; the system is set up that way so they can work on advocacy.

Ms. Jaffe indicated that staff in Early Learning Programs around the County are leaving to work at the School District. Until early educators are treated like professionals, and they are paid more, they will continue to have issues; quality cannot happen.

Chair Dr. Zeman asked the Board to be expansive in their thinking.

Stranahan High School SMART Bond Update

Ms. Saunders provided the most recent updates. She went before the School Board at the Workshop meeting and there was unanimous support expressed for replacement. The School Board did not want to move forward with a renovation option until they could get a higher return on their investment. She continued to debate about the actual design and the School Board requested staff pursue some cost saving options for comparison. A Community Construction meeting is currently going on and the community will have a lot of debate. An update will be provided at the next meeting.

Ms. Brinkworth advised that a community member requested the Board add funds to DEFP, which did occur, and was a huge accomplishment.

Chair Dr. Zeman indicated they are at the goal line, but not over the line yet. This is a win, win for everyone and it was great to hear.

Ms. Saunders stated that tremendous progress has been made. Cost saving options were discussed by community members and she will send out a link to the conversation.

NEW BUSINESS: EAB Engagement Opportunities

Chair Dr. Zeman advised there are ways to get active in assisting Ms. Saunders. If she had a volunteer who could help, that would be a way of magnifying our talented and dynamic staff member to make her work even more impactful. He stated there is a significant influence and asked how close they were to getting to the limit of what they could do. He shared a list of organizations they are engaged with and used Mr. Sponsler as an example. His concern was that they do not tap enough talents to leverage, and he noted that volunteers make a difference. He requested the Board send an email by this time next week, with a list of three to ten things they could get involved with and things they may be interested in. Each of their strategic initiatives could use a volunteer.

Strategic Initiative Updates

Ms. Saunders mentioned the following projects:

- Joint Use Parks: Ms. Saunders has been doing her due diligence.
- Regarding Stranahan, options need to be reviewed with the Board prior to going back to the School Board for consideration.

Chair Dr. Zeman suggested October 28, 2021.

Ms. Saunders stated she had two dates available and would confirm.

- A presentation of the Aviation project will be shared with the Board.
- Regarding the Asset Based Community Development project, training will begin with organizational partners and shared with interested groups in collaborating new ways.

Approval of Last Meeting Minutes: August 19, 2021 and May 20, 2021

Ms. May advised she was present at the August 19, 2021 meeting, not absent.

Motion by Ms. Perloff, seconded by Mr. Lukic, to approve the May 20, 2021 minutes. **Motion** passed unanimously.

Motion by Vice Chair Ellowitz, seconded by Mr. Lukic, to approve the August 19, 2021 minutes as amended. **Motion** passed unanimously.

Closing

Mr. Lukic announced that Sunrise Middle School is celebrating 25 years since establishing the first Montessori Program in the County.

Chair Dr. Zeman indicated there is a significant emphasis on the first year of school and research shows the biggest difference is on 6th and 9th grade. He questioned what percentage of their teachers are certified in Montessori.

Mr. Lukic stated he would find out.

Chair Dr. Zeman questioned if Broward County pays for those teachers to get their Masters, and noted it is not a cheap program.

Chair Dr. Zeman was not sure of the date of the next meeting, but it will be announced.

Adjournment

Chair Dr. Zeman adjourned the meeting at 7:59 p.m.

[Minutes prepared by C. Guifarro, Prototype, Inc.]