



**MEETING MINUTES
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD
Thursday, April 17, 2025, 6:00 p.m.
101 NE 3rd Ave
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33311**

June 2024 - May 2025

Members	Attendance	Present	Absent
Chair Janet Gualtieri	P	8	0
Pamela Aiken (arrived at 6:15 pm)	P	5	3
Heather Brinkworth	A	7	1
Kristina Dever	A	6	2
John Gillen	A	5	3
Erin Gohl	P	7	1
Juliet Gray-Williams	P	7	1
Deborah Rosenbaum, Vice Chair	P	6	2
Kristin LaFleur	P	3	0
Pamela Vance	P	2	0
Cary Tabora	P	2	0

Also Attending

Susan Leon, Chief Education Officer
K. Cruitt, Recording Secretary, Prototype, Inc

COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION

Motion made by Ms. Gohl, seconded by Ms. Rosenbaum, to send formal communication to the City Commission requesting their support for the approval of the Education funding request of \$200,000 submitted for the purpose of providing funding for 2 Aviation Scholarships for \$5000.00, and for the implementation of the Barrington Irving Technical Training School that would be in a donated hangar at FXE. This will provide career/workforce development opportunities for youth and young adults interested in the aviation industry in FTL. The **motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION

Motion by Ms. Gohl, seconded by Ms. Gray-Williams, to formally communicate support for expanding the partnership between Fortify Lauderdale and The Underwater Project in schools and parks, emphasizing its educational value. The **motion** passed 7-1 by voice vote. Fortify Lauderdale and The Underwater Project are partnering to elevate awareness and focus on improving resilience to the impacts of climate change in FTL by bringing this exciting opportunity to more of our schools and parks. The Education Advisory Board supports this initiative and requests the Commission to support the approval of the funding request via the Cultural Affairs Division for the purpose of a school/park Engagement Campaign at up to 5 locations.

Call to Order and Determination of Quorum

Roll was called and it was determined a quorum was present. The meeting began at 6:08 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Gualtieri asked the Board to rise for the Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of the February 20, 2025 Minutes

Motion made by Vice Chair Rosenbaum, seconded by Ms. LaFleur, to approve the February 20, 2025, with spelling corrections as noted. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

Old Business

- **Aviation Scholarships/Barrington Irving Technical Training School – Update and Request**

Ms. Leon provided an update and request for support regarding the Barrington Irving Technical Training Program (BITTS) and its proposed expansion to the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport. She recapped the board's unanimous decision last fall to award two scholarships to graduating seniors pursuing aviation careers, in partnership with the BITTS program based at Opa-Locka Airport. While the scholarships were approved, funding had not yet been secured.

She emphasized that BITTS is a ten-week, intensive aviation training program for students who may not be able to afford college. The program has a strong track record—every graduate secures employment, and students can receive college credit from Miami Dade College and, in the future, potentially Broward College as well.

Ms. Leon stated that the team has been working closely with Dr. Hepburn, the school superintendent, and the Career Technical Education Department, both of whom support the program. She noted that a hangar at Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport has been donated as a location for the program, but funding is still needed for classroom tools, machinery, and equipment.

To help move the project forward, Ms. Leon submitted a \$200,000 budget request to the city and has been meeting with City Commissioners and the Mayor to build support. While the City Commission does not approve the budget directly, she requested that the board vote to send a formal communication urging the Commission to support the program financially. She also suggested leveraging private and nonprofit partnerships for additional funding.

Motion made by Ms. Gray-Williams, seconded by Ms. Gohl, to move forward in establishing the program and securing funding from the City Commission for the previously approved scholarships. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

Motion made by Ms. Gohl, seconded by Ms. Rosenbaum, to send a formal communication to the City Commission requesting their support for program funding in the amount of \$200,000. The **motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

Ms. Leon presented a draft memo intended for the City Commission regarding the City's potential support of the Barrington Irving Technical Training School (BITTS) at the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport (FXE).

The memo highlights the background and mission of Captain Barrington Irving, a trailblazing aviator and educator who was the first Black pilot and youngest person to fly solo around the world. Captain Irving is recognized for his commitment to STEM education and workforce development through initiatives like the Flying Classroom and BITTS, which offer intensive aviation training to youth and young adults.

The program aligns with the Broward County Public Schools' redefining initiative and represents a growing partnership among the City of Fort Lauderdale, BCPS Superintendent Dr. Hepburn, and Captain Irving. This collaboration is designed to increase exposure, awareness, and opportunities for local students in the field of aviation.

The Education Advisory Board (EAB) has already approved two \$2,500 scholarships for students pursuing careers in aviation. At this time, the EAB is formally requesting City Commission support for a \$200,000 education funding request submitted by Ms. Leon. The funding would assist in supporting the scholarships and the development of the BITTS training facility at FXE.

Motion by Ms. Rosenbaum, seconded by Ms. Gray-Williams, to approve the memo to the City Commission as revised and include it as an attachment to the minutes of today's meeting. The **motion** passed unanimously by voice vote.

Ms. Leon updated the Board on plans to present the Barrington Irving Technical Training School (BITTS) funding request to the City Commission, noting that students from the program may attend and speak at an upcoming commission conference meeting (tentatively May 6 or May 20). She encouraged Board Members to contact their commissioners in advance to help build support.

During the discussion, Ms. Aiken raised a key question about explaining the \$200,000 funding request, anticipating Commissioners would ask where the money is going. Ms. Leon clarified that:

- The total estimated cost to fully equip the classroom is around \$600,000.
- The City is being asked to contribute a portion (\$200,000) toward that startup cost.
- Broward County Public Schools is a partner, though their financial contribution is still being finalized.
- One of the FBOs at Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport has donated a hangar, which is a major asset.

Ms. Leon emphasized that this funding request is intended to support initial classroom build-out, not ongoing costs, though future smaller requests may arise (e.g., \$50,000 for equipment or upgrades). She explained this differs from previous scholarship funding requests, which were made after the City's budget was already finalized. In contrast, the current request is being submitted during budget development, offering more flexibility.

Additionally, Ms. Leon provided an update on the non-aviation scholarship program previously managed in partnership with the Broward Education Foundation, which matched City funds. That program supported 12 students with scholarships totaling \$38,000, while the City's contribution was only \$13,000. The selection process for those scholarships is still ongoing, with recipients expected to be announced in early May.

The Board briefly discussed the idea of recognizing scholarship recipients at a future City Commission meeting, which Ms. Leon volunteered to coordinate.

- **Fortify Lauderdale & The Underwater – Update and Request**

The Fortify Lauderdale & The Underwater update was deferred, as Ms. Leon had already begun discussing the next agenda item—the Broward Education Foundation Scholarship Update.

- **Broward Education Foundation Scholarship Update**

Ms. Leon confirmed that the scholarship process remains unchanged, including the requirement for students to complete the FAFSA to demonstrate financial need, despite recent changes at the Department of Education. She emphasized that the existing procedures are still valid and intact.

The discussion also touched on the importance of the aviation workforce development program, which serves as a critical pipeline to address high-demand aviation jobs in the region. Ms. Leon referenced a study commissioned by the City of Fort Lauderdale and conducted by Broward College, which highlights the growing need for skilled aviation workers—information that she included in her funding request to the City.

Board members noted that while startup funding is needed, future operating costs could be offset by student contributions or scholarships, making the program more sustainable. Additionally, Ms. Leon assured the group that the Broward Education Foundation would likely notify her before scholarship announcements are sent to schools. She also informed local schools about the scholarships and has already begun fielding calls from interested parties.

The discussion then returned to the previously deferred agenda item, “Fortify Lauderdale & The Underwater – Update,” following the completion of the Broward Education Foundation Scholarship update.

- **Fortify Lauderdale & The Underwater – Update and Request**

Ms. Leon revisited the discussion on Fortify Lauderdale, the City's initiative to address flooding, climate change, and rising sea levels through infrastructure improvements and community education. She also highlighted The Underwater Project, an art and awareness collaboration with the Cortada Foundation and Broward County Public Schools. This program uses murals, elevation markers, and school assemblies to educate students about their community's elevation and flood risks, while encouraging personal and collective environmental responsibility.

The discussion emphasized:

- The program's success in increasing climate awareness through youth engagement.
- Its expansion potential into Fort Lauderdale parks and more schools.
- Funding is being requested by the City's Cultural Affairs Division, with no impact on other city funds.
- Some board members raised concerns over the cost per mural (~\$10,000 per location at a discount), especially in light of other funding needs like scholarships.
- Clarification was provided that the funds are pre-allocated within the cultural arts budget and cannot be redirected to other uses.
- The board discussed supporting the initiative generally, without endorsing specific funding levels.

Motion by Ms. Gohl seconded by Ms. Gray-Williams, to formally communicate support for expanding the partnership between Fortify Lauderdale and The Underwater Project in schools and parks, emphasizing its educational value without referencing specific funding amounts. The **motion** passed 7-1 by voice vote.

Chair Gualtieri asked to clarify her vote against the motion, explaining that she is involved with another resilience group offering similar school programs at no cost, and questioned the need for city funding when free alternatives are available.

Following the motion of support for the Fortify Lauderdale and Underwater initiatives, members discussed how best to communicate this to the City Commission. Ms. Leon volunteered to draft the letter on behalf of the Board, summarizing the Board's support for expanding these initiatives in schools and parks. The draft would highlight the importance of youth engagement, community awareness, and support for the Cultural Affairs Department's funding request.

Motion by Ms. Rosenbaum seconded by Ms. Gray-Williams, to present and submit in writing to the City Commission in support of the initiative and the funding request submitted by the Cultural Affairs Department, targeting either the May 6 or May 20, 2025, commission meetings. The **motion** passed 7-1 by voice vote.

New Business

None

Chief Education Office Update

- **Volunteer Opportunities Update**

Ms. Leon provided an update on efforts to engage City of Fort Lauderdale employees in schools, in response to a previous board initiative. While weekly in-school volunteering isn't practical due to job constraints, she is exploring partnerships with Junior Achievement and city departments to create field trip-style visits where students tour departments like Public Works and complete related school projects. Board members expressed strong support, with Ms. Gohl and Ms. Aiken emphasizing how valuable it is for students—especially in middle and high school—to interact with professionals on campus. Ms. Vance noted that other government agencies, like DCF, have allowed monthly volunteer hours, suggesting a precedent exists. Ms. Tabora shared that city staff already participate in school career fairs, though some staff may not be aware due to internal school silos.

Ms. Leon also mentioned a proposed Public Works pipeline program involving apprenticeships and technical training, pending funding approval. Overall, the Board voiced support for initiatives that foster more consistent, structured engagement between city staff and students.

- **Redefining Schools Update**

Ms. Leon shared that Phase II of the Redefining Schools initiative is expected to begin in May or June 2025, but there's still little clarity on Phase I. Partners like the Museum of Discovery and Science and the principal at North Fork Elementary remain unsure about the current status, suggesting a lack of transparency in district communications.

Ms. Leon, who now sits on the Broward Estates Early Learning Center planning committee, noted strong engagement from the City of Lauderhill and local PTAs. Ms. Vance provided historical context on how Lauderhill gained oversight of the area and emphasized community ties to Broward Estates, especially among multi-generational families.

Board members raised concerns about family support during the school transitions. Ms. Gohl recalled parents feeling unsupported in navigating new school options like MLK Montessori or Plantation Elementary. Ms. Leon acknowledged these issues haven't been revisited in planning meetings. Ms. Gray-Williams added that many of the district's ideas, like the Flying Classroom at Silver Shores STEAM K–8, remain unfunded, suggesting that budget constraints may delay implementation.

Overall, the board expressed concern about the lack of communication, adequate support for affected families, and the feasibility of plans without clear funding.

Member Discussion

Ms. Aiken clarified for the record that her name is spelled A-I-K-E-N to ensure accuracy in the minutes.

Chair Gualtieri then brought up a question about a reported salary increase for the Superintendent. The board discussed that the raise was approximately \$10,000, believed to be a 3% cost-of-living increase, similar to what teachers received, along with a contract extension through 2030, reflecting confidence in his performance.

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for May 15, 2025.

[Minutes prepared by J. Burnham, Prototype, Inc.]