



CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE

**MEETING MINUTES
CITY OF FORT LAUDERDALE
EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD
Thursday, January 15, 2026, 6:00 p.m.
101 NE 3rd Ave
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33311**

June 2025 - May 2026

Members	Attendance	Present	Absent
Chair Janet Gualtieri	P	4	1
Brian Bender (arrived at 6:04 pm)	P	1	0
Heather Brinkworth	P	3	2
Kristina Dever	P	5	0
John Gillen	P	4	1
Erin Gohl	P	4	1
Juliet Gray-Williams	P	4	1
Deborah Rosenbaum, Vice Chair	A	1	4
Kristin LaFleur (departed at 7:11 pm)	P	4	1
Lacresha Cooper	A	3	2
Cary Tabora	A	3	2
Pamela Vance	P	4	1
Jose Ruggiero	P	1	0

Also Attending

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

COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMISSION

Motion made by Heather Brinkworth, seconded by Erin Gohl to communicate to the City Commission that while Dillard High School is a beautiful campus, and we are grateful for their willingness to open their facility to multiple graduations, we recognize that there are inequities in the venue assignments for graduations across Broward County Public Schools. The Education Advisory Board respectfully requests the City Commission explore City partnership venues to provide alternate graduation opportunities for the three traditional Broward County public high schools within the City of Fort Lauderdale. We are looking to provide an equitable, safe, dignified and

celebratory experience for the graduates and families. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

Call to Order and Determination of Quorum

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. Roll was called and it was determined a quorum was present.

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Approval of November 20, 2025, Minutes

Motion made by Pamela Vance, seconded by Jose Ruggiero to approve November 20, 2025. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

Members introduced themselves to the two new members, Brian Bender and Jose Ruggiero, who were welcomed by Chair Gualtieri.

Old Business

Chair Gualtieri opened the discussion regarding the proposed use of a school district education department facility for a police and fire training center. Chief Education Officer Leon explained that the City Manager and City Commission agreed to explore potential locations and that the item is on an upcoming School Board agenda, with decisions pending.

Chair Gualtieri asked if there was any opposition. Chief Education Officer Leon stated she was not aware of any, and Ms. Gohl noted the proposal appears to have broad support. Chief Education Officer Leon clarified that some programs may be located on the Whiddon campus, the facility would be operated by the City of Fort Lauderdale Fire/Police Department, and a lease agreement has not yet been finalized. She also noted the Mayor submitted a letter of support.

Ms. Brinkworth shared concerns raised at a City Commission meeting regarding the potential cost of the property and encouraged members to emphasize the project's community importance. Chief Education Officer Leon stated that a final decision regarding the North Fork site is expected Wednesday and that the Superintendent is supportive. She confirmed that additional proposals are still being accepted and that

Junior Achievement remains under consideration, with North Fork serving as an alternate site similar to Seagull.

- **Redefining Schools Update – Chair Janet Gualtieri**

Chief Education Officer Leon advised that the Redefining Schools discussion is scheduled for the School Board agenda on Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.

Chief Education Officer Updates – Susan Leon

Chief Education Officer Leon reported that the scholarship agreement with the Broward Education Foundation was renewed for the current year. Chair Ms. Gualtieri clarified that twelve scholarships will be awarded again to high school students.

Chief Education Officer Leon provided an update on the newly approved aviation program, which received School Board approval. Although the hangar at FXE is not yet ready, program planning is underway. The ten-week after-school program will serve up to 40 primarily senior students, with a hybrid format combining remote instruction and on-site learning at FXE/various locations. Funding includes a Florida Department of Education Enrichment Grant, allowing 23 students to participate in paid internships. Applications will be issued, transportation assistance is being explored, and the program is scheduled to begin end of March, with summer internships starting after the school year ends. Additional adult training opportunities at FXE are also being considered. Chief Education Officer Leon noted coordination with community partners and City leadership to support program implementation.

Members discussed student selection criteria, noting the program is intended for students not planning to attend college, with no GPA requirement, and is focused on aviation-related careers rather than pilot training. Chief Education Officer Leon also noted that a similar program is currently operating at Opa-locka Airport and that an aviation exposure event was recently held at Embraer.

Chief Education Officer Leon announced that Fort Lauderdale students will be recognized at an upcoming City Commission meeting, along with Teacher of the Year recognition scheduled for February 3rd.

Discussion followed regarding the sunset of the Cambridge magnet designation. Chief Education Officer Leon confirmed the magnet portion will be phased out, while Cambridge coursework will remain available at all schools. Members discussed transportation impacts, financial considerations, and the importance of communicating the program's continued availability.

Additional updates included a brief discussion on magnet versus innovative choice programs, legislative activity for the current session (with updates to be provided when available), and a request for an update on the state of education in Florida.

Chief Education Officer Leon also noted that Ms. Rosenbaum's term will conclude next month and recommended discussion of the Vice Chair position at the next meeting.

New Business

Chair Gualtieri announced that elections for Vice Chair will take place at the next meeting. Ms. Brinkworth noted receiving multiple inquiries regarding graduation venues and recommended the city provide alternatives to the gym at Dillard, suggesting the War Memorial as an option. Chief Education Officer Leon noted the War Memorial has a capacity of 1,500 and the Parker is smaller. Ms. Vance added that the Dillard Symphonic Band was asked to perform at all graduations, which is a large commitment given the number of events (over 14).

Members discussed venue capacities, alternate locations, and the new convention center. Mr. Bender raised concerns regarding debate venue changes due to lost referendum dollars. Ms. Vance noted rising venue costs. Ms. Gohl commented that decisions had been made previously, and Chief Education Officer Leon confirmed all nine School Board members were in favor. Mr. Bender noted that western schools would continue holding graduations at Nova.

Ms. LaFleur requested that Chief Education Officer Leon verify the War Memorial's capacity, noting her website indicated 3,400 seats. Ms. Brinkworth noted that two schools, Cypress Bay and Stoneman Douglas, will hold graduations at Hard Rock Live, highlighting inequities among schools. Ms. Vance added that all Pompano schools will graduate at Blanche Ely. Members discussed these equity concerns further.

Chief Education Officer Leon referenced a standard response drafted by the city to address venue questions, which was emailed to the Mayor and City Commission and discussed at a prior Broward School Board workshop. She stated that the district will continue to explore alternatives where feasible for students and families.

The discussion concluded with consideration of a motion for the committee to communicate concerns to the City Commission regarding graduation venue arrangements.

Motion made by Heather Brinkworth, seconded by Erin Gohl to communicate to the City Commission that while Dillard High School is a beautiful campus, and we are grateful for their willingness to open their facility to multiple graduations, we recognize that there are inequities in the venue assignments for graduations across Broward County Public Schools. The Education Advisory Board respectfully requests the City Commission explore City partnership venues to provide alternate graduation opportunities for the three traditional Broward County public high schools within the City of Fourt Lauderdale. We are looking to provide an equitable, safe, dignified and celebratory experience for the graduates and families. In a voice vote, the **motion** passed unanimously.

Member Discussion

None

There being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

The next regular meeting is February 19, 2026.