

MEA Bargaining 2025-2026

Session #1

Wednesday, July 30, 2025

Those present: Pat Barber, Christina Britton, Valerie Finnegan, Silvana Ianinska, Derek Jensen, Helen King, Brian Kirchberg, Rob Lyons, Gina Malinak, Bruce Proud, Joe Ranaldi, Sharon Scarbrough, Rachel Sellers, Jon Syre, Dawn Walker and Mark West.

Meeting began at 4:18 p.m.

Mark began by stating that since this was his first time at the table in Manatee that he wanted each team to introduce themselves and to talk about anything either side has. Both sides will have the chief negotiators do the talking. If either side needs to caucus, we can do that and have separate places to meet. This year is not a year to look at the entire book.

Mark introduced Rachel who gave a budget overview.

RS – For the budget this year the revenue incoming from the state is not as large as an increase as it has been in the past. The School Board had their budget and millage hearing yesterday. We had 2 good prior years in a row. The prior year General fund (GF) budget reserve is tentatively projected at \$120M, a 15% reserve. Have to reappropriate and then carry forward to 25-26. Spend down of GF to achieve \$62M at June 30, 2026. Still close to what the board requires - 8.5% contingency. The Base Student Allocation (BSA) had only a slight increase of \$41.62/student. Last year it was \$197/student. That's \$5.4M in new money. There are additional expenditures including textbook adoptions, and interest on investments has not been as good as in prior years. Expenditures are more this year than last year like the classroom teacher supply increase. We needed to sharpen our pens when we brought the budget to the board. Tax collector started to take 2% commission off of millage. No notice. Started in November 2024. Some discussion with that. No traction for them to not do it. Still taking 2% in July 2025. Surrounding tax collectors do not take commission out of their referendum. More not taking 2% out of their millages around state. From June to July the property appraiser decreased projected tax revenue by \$1B. This changed the typical home tax increase in annual taxes to \$26.60 increase rather than \$120. This also caused local funding to drop \$3.5M. More expenditures in GF this year because of costs being picked up from referendum. Additional times – 15 minutes before and after. GF is going to pick up that time for SAMP and hourly non-bargaining. Had been part of referendum expenses in prior years. The referendum includes that extra time for teachers and paras. Did that for board's extra adds for security. Categories added in referendum – STEAM, athletics and 34 early learning coaches. GF picking up 17 of those. Charter school enrollment is projected to be higher. If they don't get that many students, we will find out in January. Textbook adoption this year. GF picked up teacher summer training at hourly rate. Before it was funded by grants. FRS increase of board share to 14.03%. Internal service budget which is the budget for health insurance. AON project costs for medical claims. The Health Insurance Committee (HIC) hasn't reached recommendation of what premium increase will be. HIC meeting 8/7/25. Internal service

fund will be running at a deficit. On 8/7 will get a percentage and will go somewhere with that and what additional cost will be.

MW – any questions?

BP – Lots of questions about the decision making and taking money out of referendum and putting it into the GF. If it's in the referendum why take it out of GF? That depletes the purpose of the referendum to begin with. You can't keep adding programs without the additional funding to do that. So now it seems like you're putting pressure on GF that weren't part of referendum to begin with. Some programs were paid by GF, some were added. Now it's shifting back to GF again without any discussion if programs are of value. Seems like you're running down a road that will make it hard to get the referendum approved again. You're putting pressure on the GF. And we just heard you don't have money in the GF. Part of reason is that you keep adding programs that have not been vetted in an appropriate way. We have raised this concern from the very beginning. This has an impact on people. Referendum is not something that is stable. It fluctuates up and down. Property values have impact on referendum, too. That means having more programs that you can't fund. I'm not really sympathetic to transferring things out of the referendum to the GF. What happened to the reserves? What transfers did you do to reduce reserves from \$120 down to \$65?

MW – We can research for you.

BP – What happened to teacher summer training?

MW – The District covered the cost of paying teachers for the training. You are probably cognizant of the Title dollars.

BP – You did the training without having the grants? That's another issue. Why would you do training if you didn't have the money in the first place?

MW – Title II was one area that was cut from the feds. That's training. This is what we're budgeting. Anticipating it coming back, but it's looking bleak from fed perspective and in other areas as well. Anticipate that we are going to have to look at narrowing down but have to have some place for money for training to come from.

BP – Or not do it. Why are they so important to do if not funding it?

MW – We want to provide the best training we can and support you as teachers. Have to look at that. Make sure it's rigorous and needed. We don't want to say we will cut teacher training.

BP – There ought to be a thorough review. See if it's valuable enough to come out of salary dollars. There is an awful lot of training done that teachers would say is not needed. So, all of things you have done is because of federal funding not coming through?

MW – No, it's more than just one thing. It's federal, state, everything.

RS – Group has been working on budget since February. Looked at different camps and which would stay and go. This is as of tentative budget. This will shift – in 4 weeks we will do the final budget. Have already

vetted. Started in April to see which would stay or go. This is reflective of federal cuts that had come down the pipeline.

BP – So when the request for bargaining next year comes before February don't be surprised. It's unfair to negotiations because you have already done it. Sooner or later the school board has to communicate better with legislators. Legislators are saying that there is so much money and school districts have to spend it. I've seen the letter from FLDOE saying that districts have all the money and districts and unions shouldn't delay salary increases.

MW – I think we are more on the same page than not.

BP – I'm looking at \$60M in reserves. The requirement is 3% from state.

MW – Correct, there is a state requirement of 3% but that is NOT the same as board policy, as Ms. Sellers mentioned.

BP – You could tell board they need to do something different, like you do at any board meeting. We're here to negotiate salary increases; cost of living keeps going up. There is an endless need for things but pay is not rising as quickly. The last few years have been scarce in good times. It all can't be based on the referendum. Real concern that there needs to be salary dollars put in place. Also need to address compression. That's what the board wants. Costs money to do compression on the salary schedule. Spent money on all people at the bottom. Only impacted people under \$47,500 for many years. Teachers still rank 50th in the country in teacher pay. Manatee is still not anywhere near the top in average salaries. Competing with school districts ranked 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 8th in the local area. Retention is a real concern. From data I've seen we're not retaining people very well. Schedule is very bottom heavy. If there is a need for an increase in health insurance (HI) it's not good for salaries if all of the salary increase goes to HI premiums. Board's contribution has gone down from one year to next because fewer people are participating with and without dependents. The Board has fewer and fewer contributions to make. These bargaining conversations include paras as well as teachers. We have data from April. Specific data from then is what I will use for proposals. Unfilled positions – asked for that data and know that there are still unfilled positions.

MW – Will try to get as much info for you. Don't think anyone on this side will disagree re: retention – want to do everything we can. Salary schedule was made bottom heavy. Feel like I keep blaming legislature or state but when the gov says we will have this starting schedule. That's interesting that you say we're 50th in teacher pay. Where is that from?

BP - It's from DOE on data they provide.

MW - Based on base salary? Was the referendum supplement reflected in that; it is not reflected in those numbers.

BP - Average salary per teacher.

MW - Health insurance – right, skyrocketing everywhere. Tough to say that whatever raise could be eaten up by HI increase. I feel like you've given us good things to look at and vet what we need to vet and be as

efficient as we can with dollars. 80% of budget goes to people not programs. Want to make sure we're spending on people as much as we possibly can. Any additional issues you want to bring up?

BP – Anything in Article XII. Payroll delivery is not any way we would want it to be. Don't believe people need to wait for following year to be paid for this year. This seems to be the only district that has this problem. Have looked at everyone else's contract. They have 24 pay with smooth pay. Going to 26 pays did not solve problems; it created more.

MW – I'm new to the game on how you're paid. Smooth pay is most important to you. The early paycheck that you get before your normal paycheck you wish was not skinny check but smooth pay. There is statutory language about not paying before you actually work. Looked at other districts to see if anyone was able to grant what you have wished. Seminole doesn't do it anymore. Sarasota that was proposal that was made but at the same time with not skinny at beginning. Will result in more paychecks but smaller and extends through entire year.

BP – Who are you trying to explain this to? Where do you think the issue comes from? District created this by changing the cycle of pay. You're trying to pay 10-month people in a 12-month system. Holding teachers' pay well beyond when it's earned doesn't sit well with me. I have data that shows that if you have 10-month people paid on 24 pays it works!

MW – I asked you what districts. No other district does exactly what you request.

BP – Concern is smooth pay. Concern is trying to do 26 pay on 12-month cycle that doesn't fit 10-month employees. Not required somewhere else than this school district.

MW – If you can find a school district that is doing exactly what you want us to do, we will have them school us.

BP – Probably want to talk to them if they're willing to do a 10-month schedule.

MW – I apologize if I insulted any of you; that wasn't my intent.

BP – Does the district have other things outside of Article XII they want to discuss?

MW – No, I don't think so at this time.

Caucus at 5:06 p.m. Reconvened at 5:47 p.m.

MW – Thank you for the opportunity to talk a little bit. Don't disagree on philosophical part of what we want to do with employees.

RS – Ending balance at end of '24-'25 was \$120M and at end of '25-'26 it's projected to be \$65M. \$30M is related to restricted programs that gets reallocated into the new year. Happens year over year. You will see that recouped at the end of the year, but we have to account for that. Allocations – we do budget based on allocations we start with. On 6/18 I emailed Bruce. That is what is used to build the budget. If we have vacancies that may not all be spent but we have to account as if it will all be spent. Will be saving if we don't fill positions.

BP – So I need last year's allocations.

MW – We can get that for you. In wrapping up our part we want to talk about money to give you something to work with. Maybe look at dates for the whole team. Have budgeted and get with board – for teachers – \$5.5M including all benefits. FICA, FRS and WC. Paras - \$540,000 based on ratio wise. We will get you updated allocations from last year for comparison.

BP – Housekeeping – In past negotiations we have agreed to have Dawn take notes and share with you to see if you have revisions before the next session.

MW – Agreed to have Dawn take notes and send to Derek to distribute to team.

Pat offered 8/13, 8/21, 8/25, 8/27, 8/28 as potential bargaining dates. Would like to caucus at 4:45 and then start at 5:45. Mark said that he would get with management's team to confirm future dates.

Meeting adjourned at 5:56 p.m.