



Hernando School District

School Board Informal Meeting

Minutes - Draft

Tuesday, August 11, 2026

1:00 PM

District Office-Board Room
919 N. Broad Street
Brooksville, FL 34601

CALL TO ORDER

Present

Board Chair Kayce Hawkins
Vice Chair Shannon Rodriguez
Board Member Michelle Bonczek
Board Member Susan Duval
Board Member Mark Johnson

GENERAL DISCUSSION

An informal meeting of the School Board has been scheduled for general discussion among Board Members on Educational Matters

Dr. Danielle Thomas, Sunrise Consulting Group, joined the meeting virtually to provide a legislative update and facilitate discussion regarding the School Board's legislative priorities. Dr. Thomas provided an overview of significant legislation from the 2026 Florida Legislative Session. She highlighted legislation commonly referred to as the School Board Bill of Rights, which requires that when a School Board member requests information from district staff, both the question and the response be provided to all Board members. She noted that school districts across the state are working through implementation procedures to ensure compliance with the new requirement. Dr. Thomas reviewed a draft legislative platform prepared for Board consideration and discussion.

Assessment:

Dr. Thomas recommended removing the Board's longstanding platform item related to reducing assessment and progress monitoring requirements. While acknowledging concerns regarding instructional time lost to testing, she explained that the Legislature and Department of Education currently support the progress monitoring system and there is little support for revisiting the issue. Board members discussed the matter and generally agreed that retaining the item would likely not result in legislative action at this time.

Transportation:

The Board reviewed its existing legislative priority related to reducing transportation distance requirements for elementary students. Dr. Thomas indicated the issue continues to generate productive discussion and recommended retaining it on the platform.

Veteran Teacher Compensation:

Discussion occurred regarding continued funding to address salary compression resulting from

increases to base teacher pay. Dr. Thomas noted that the Legislature recognizes the issue and expects discussions regarding veteran teacher compensation to continue. Board members expressed support for retaining this platform item.

Cameras in ESE Classrooms:

Dr. Thomas reviewed a proposal supporting the use of cameras in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) classrooms, with parental consent, as a safety measure for students and staff. The Board recessed at 1:17 P.M. due to technology issues and reconvened at 1:21 P.M. Board members discussed the proposal, including: The necessity of parental consent; Legislative history of previous bills; Funding concerns related to implementation; and Practical considerations regarding classroom operations and consent procedures. The Board expressed support for retaining the item for legislative consideration.

Family Empowerment Scholarship Funding Transparency:

Dr. Thomas discussed a proposal to establish a separate funding category for Family Empowerment Scholarships to increase transparency and accountability. She indicated the issue has received support in the Florida Senate and may receive additional attention under upcoming House leadership. Board members supported continuing discussion of scholarship funding transparency as a legislative priority.

Safe Schools Allocation:

The Board reviewed a proposal supporting full funding of the Safe Schools Allocation. Discussion focused on ensuring districts have sufficient resources to invest in personnel, technology, and emerging safety solutions. Board members emphasized the need for flexibility to adopt new safety technologies and resources as they become available.

Additional Funding for ESE Teachers:

Board Member Michelle Bonczek recommended exploring additional funding opportunities for ESE teachers and staff. Discussion included: Teacher retention challenges within ESE programs; Potential salary supplements for ESE teachers; Recognition of ESE as a critical shortage area; and Historical examples of state funding provided for other critical shortage instructional areas. Dr. Thomas advised that the proposal could be incorporated into the platform as either additional language under teacher compensation or as a separate legislative priority. Board members expressed support for adding language addressing support and retention of ESE teachers.

Full-Day VPK:

Chair Hawkins proposed adding legislative support for fully funded full-day VPK programs. Dr. Thomas discussed previous legislative conversations regarding the significant cost of implementation but noted the long-term educational benefits associated with expanded early childhood education opportunities. By consensus, Board members supported adding the issue to the legislative platform.

Athletic Eligibility for Home-School and Virtual School Students:

Board members discussed recent statutory changes allowing home-school and virtual students greater flexibility in selecting schools for athletic participation. Concerns were expressed regarding unintended consequences, including: Student athletes transferring to virtual or home-school

programs to participate with specific athletic programs; Competitive imbalance among schools; Potential impacts on students attending their zoned schools. Dr. Thomas recommended that the issue be included both on the district legislative platform and submitted to the Florida School Boards Association (FSBA) for statewide consideration. Board members agreed to pursue both avenues and encouraged outreach to other districts experiencing similar concerns.

Dr. Thomas agreed to revise the draft legislative platform to incorporate Board feedback and distribute an updated version for review prior to formal adoption.

Additional Topics of Discussion:

Student Screen Time:

Board Member Bonczek referenced recent actions by neighboring districts to reduce classroom screen time and expressed interest in examining screen usage throughout Hernando County schools. Discussion included: The balance between technology use and traditional instructional methods; The importance of hands-on learning and student engagement; Possible impacts of increased technology use on students; and The role of educational technology and artificial intelligence in classroom instruction. Gina Michalicka, Assistant Superintendent came forward. Elementary screen time associated with programs such as i-Ready is monitored and measurable. Secondary screen use varies based on instructional practices and course requirements. No significant concerns regarding excessive screen time have been reported by teachers, administrators, students, or parents. Board members requested information regarding current district expectations and requirements for student screen time to better understand existing practices. Board members also discussed: The increasing role of artificial intelligence in education; The need for students to develop technology skills while maintaining critical thinking and writing abilities; and The importance of evaluating educational outcomes when considering future technology-related decisions.

[27-4020](#) Handouts from the Informal Meeting of 08/11/26.

Attachments: [08-11-26 Informal Handouts - D. Thomas](#)

ADJOURNMENT

Superintendent

Board Chair

Mission Statement

The Hernando County School District Collaborates with students, parents and other community stakeholders to effectively prepare all students for a successful transition into a diverse and changing world.
