



## Sarasota County School Board Report Card

The League of Women Voters of Sarasota has established an Observer Corps to monitor the Sarasota County School Board meetings. The goal of the Observer Corps is to objectively evaluate meetings for ethical, legal and professional conduct on the part of the board and chairperson with respect to the public comment session and the meeting agenda. This evaluation will be shared with the Board and the public following each meeting.

**Meeting Date: February 18, 2025**

**A = Consistently    B = Frequently    C = Occasionally    D = Rarely    F = Not at All**

<b>Board follows and advances a written agenda.</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>Board limits citizens' comments only to opinions on topics that are in the Board's purview.</b>  Most public commenters urged the board to be proactive regarding anticipated US Department of Education changes. Parents, students and community members passionately asked the board to be ready and offered support and assistance in retaining services and funding—especially for students with disabilities and in low income areas. Several people reminded the board that they had voted to ignore the extension of the Title IX protections. Now it was time to send a message that we protect our most vulnerable kids and not simply say "we'll follow the law." While most speakers linked their comments to existing agenda items, Mr. Edwards stopped one to remind them all that the first section of comments was to be for agenda items only. After that, the Chair tried to keep the comments to agenda items only.	<b>B+</b>
<b>Board Chair does not allow speakers to personally attack board members or use abusive language.</b>	<b>A</b>
<b>Board Chair treats speakers equitably.</b>  There have been glitches with the new comment signup and every effort was made to accommodate speakers who had run into trouble. Hopefully, the problems have been resolved.	<b>A</b>

<p><b>Board adheres to Robert's Rules of Order</b></p> <p>While not a rule of order issue, it was helpful for the public to hear from Counsel that each instructional material item had to be treated as unique and voted upon individually. This was long and tedious and it was hard to understand why it had to happen this way. However speakers waiting until the end of the meeting to address the board at least understood the rationale for the action.</p>	<p><b>A</b></p>
<p><b>The Board Chair runs an orderly meeting.</b></p>	<p><b>A</b></p>
<p><b>Board delegates operational and educational decisions to the professional staff.</b></p> <p>One speaker asked for information and returned email requests related to a student issue. There was no referral to staff for follow-up on that request. In addition, the issues USDOE brought before the board from concerned community members should have at least been referred to staff for investigation, monitoring and planning.</p>	<p><b>C</b></p>
<p><b>Board gives evidence of being responsive to public comment.</b></p> <p>In general, it didn't appear that the board actually heard what the public was saying. Speakers over and over again asked the board to be proactive regarding possible threats to federal programs that fund our low income schools and special needs children, that they be ready with a "Plan B", that they speak up publicly as a board for the protection of our children. Ms. Barker gave responsive comments to the public, acknowledging that the speakers' concerns were valid. Mr. Enos stated he would follow the law. Ms. Marinelli indicated that she would seek credible sources for information. Ms. Ziegler stated that what she heard from the public was not true. It was insulting and demeaning for speakers to be told that they didn't know what they were talking about, that they were misinformed, that their information was not true or creditable.</p>	<p><b>D+</b></p>

### **Additional Comments:**

Individuals speaking at the Board meetings have done extensive research on topics brought before the Board. The time and effort put into that research is never recognized by the collective board and even ridiculed by some individual members. It is clear that there is fear and confusion in the community about changes that will impact the district, and it is astonishing that the board sees no need to prepare for some possible scenarios that may be coming in the weeks and months ahead. We wonder if the majority of the board is truly unaware of what is at risk, or is not committed to maintaining the district's standing and the greater community support, or is fearful of taking a position that might run counter to some lawmakers.

### **Recommendations:**

The Board/Administration needs to open more effective lines of communication with the public. Office hours may help. Communication is needed for both hearing the concerns of the community and providing clear, concise and accurate information to various constituencies.

**Submitted by: Sarasota League of Women Voters School Board Observer Corps.**