

NEWSLETTER JUNE 2025 ISSUE NO. 4

Dear PEN-Sarasota Partners and Friends,

Although many of us are troubled by current events affecting our public schools, Public Education Network (PEN) Sarasota, has quite a bit to be happy about recently.

LET'S CELEBRATE:



• Advocacy by PEN-Sarasota's partners and other organizations prevented the passage of three of the most onerous bills under consideration during Florida's 2025 legislative session and one other that may restore critical funding, namely **HB1529/SB1692** *Material Harmful to Minors* would have increased the number of challenged books removed from classroom and school libraries without consideration of literary, scientific, artistic or political value. **SB918/HB1225** *Employment of Minors* would have removed labor protections for minors and permitted them to work unlimited hours and days without breaks during the school year, without parental permission. A third, **HB1267/SB1708**, *Education* would have allowed Schools of Hope to co-locate inside traditional public schools at no cost. Also, as of this writing, Florida's Senate will restore 80% of the bonus funding for students passing accelerated courses like AP, IB and AICE, a provision in SB7030 that cut funding to 50%. The House proposes full funding!

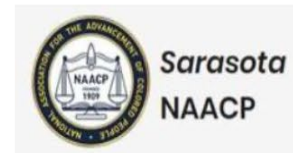
There's still more to celebrate:

- The Supreme Court's 4-4 decision to let a lower court decision stand that blocked the creation of the nation's first religious charter school.
- A recent ruling blocking an *Executive Order* to close the Department of Education. The Department acknowledged it is being compelled by *State of New York v. McMahon* "to restore [it] to the status quo such that it is able to carry out its statutory functions."
- The record Graduation Rate for Sarasota's district schools for the 2023-2024 school year. The Department of Education recently confirmed that Sarasota County earned a historic 92.5%!
- Sarasota County School District's publication of a community newsletter, *In Touch*.
- **Ilka Rodriguez** and **Christy Karwatt** joining PEN-Sarasota's Board of Directors.
- The first meeting of PEN-Sarasota's awesome Advisory Council, which includes **Andi Blanch**, **Jane Goodwin**, **Harriet Moore**, and **Theoni Soublis**.
- Our newest partner, the **Social Justice Alliance of the Florida Suncoast**.
- Formation of our Conference Planning Team for the **PEN-Sarasota Nov. 8, 2025 Conference**.
- AND The **2 year anniversary** of Public Education Network (PEN) Sarasota!

Thanks for all you do for Sarasota's district schools,
Jill



OUR PARTNERS



Your Organization
Could Be Posted
Here!



Your Organization
Could Be Posted
Here!



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority

Rose Washington and Carolyn Major-Harper

On January 13, 1913, twenty-two visionary college women founded Delta Sigma Theta Sorority on the historic campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. This international sisterhood celebrates one-hundred twelve years since being established. Today, with a growing membership of over 300,000 women, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority (DST) continues to attract the brightest college educated women. Delta has been shaped by its members, who are committed to a lifetime of public service.

The Bradenton Alumnae Chapter, which is the local Chapter of DST, has been a viable part of the Manatee-Sarasota communities since 1978. Today, local members, from a variety of professions continue the vision of our Founders through program offerings in our local community. As a partner with PEN-Sarasota, the local chapter is delighted to share some of the many activities that have been done to advocate for public education on a local and state level as well as share how students attending our community public schools have been supported.

Members of the local chapter participated in "Delta Days at the Florida Capitol," a legislative advocacy event. This event involves DST sorority members from across the state gathering in Tallahassee to interact with legislators to advocate for traditional public education and other

social action issues impacting their communities. About 200 DST members state-wide participated in this annual social action event. Local chapter members encouraged policy makers to support public schools in Sarasota (District 58) and Manatee (District 41) Counties and defend the rights of all K-12 students to access a fair and equitable education, which includes our migrant students.



Left to right: Rose Washington, Carolyn Major-Harper, Lora Manning attends a work session while participating in Delta Days at the Capitol (DDAC).



Left to right Carolyn Mason, Carolyn Major-Harper, Kimberly Albritton standing in front of Florida State Capitol preparing to engage in legislative advocacy and raise awareness about social action issues through DDAC.

Continuing the local chapter's annual tradition of acknowledging the academic achievement of graduating senior girls in our community, twelve scholarships were awarded. Ten young ladies were presented individual scholarships to continue their education at post-secondary institutions of their choice beginning the fall of 2025. Two students entering their senior years at Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University (FAMU) and Florida State University (FSU) received their renewable scholarships for the 2025-2026 school year. The annual luncheon was held at the Double Tree/ Hilton Hotel Sarasota Airport, and Ms. Anayah Walker, Director of Student Programs for the Education Foundation of Sarasota County, was the speaker. Ms. Walker encouraged the young ladies to "Believe in themselves and maximize their full potential." There were approximately sixty people in attendance.

Since its chartering in 1978, Bradenton Alumnae Chapter Delta Sigma Theta has given back to Sarasota County and Manatee County communities through sisterhood scholarship, service and social action. The Chapter and its members focused on enacting laws and policies

- to sustain and expand the rights and privileges of citizenship to all people
- to protect the most vulnerable amongst us.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority will continue to make public education a priority and to engage the local community and policy makers to ensure this institution is accessible to all.

From Sarasota District School's Superintendent, Terry Connor, Guest Columnist for the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*,

SARASOTA SCHOOLS SET UP FOR SUCCESS DESPITE NEW CHALLENGES

Dire headlines about school closures and budget deficits can be alarming. But while Florida's public-school districts, including Sarasota County, are navigating complex financial and policy shifts due to the Florida Legislature, this moment offers something far more powerful than fear – opportunity. The future of public education in Florida may look bleak, but we are ready to rethink this idea.



Sarasota County Schools is well-positioned to navigate the wave of policy changes and emerge stronger. We have the people, the resources and the community support to remain the premier educational provider our families expect and deserve.

Our mission remains strong

Yes, public school enrollment is shifting: families are exploring private options, charter schools and homeschooling. But the core purpose of public education – serving every student, every day – hasn't changed.

And in Sarasota, public schools still educate most students: We serve roughly 74.5% of the 'market' of school-aged children within Sarasota County. Meanwhile, charter schools serve about 13.5%, private schools about 7.5% and home schools about 4.5%.

Instead of framing these changes as loss, we will use them to sharpen our value proposition by:

- Reinforcing the programs that families seek – like arts, STEM, 3DE, Early College, IB, AICE, dual language, and relevant Career and Technical Education certifications.
- Prioritizing transparency and data to show what students gain in the Sarasota public schools – college readiness, job skills, stability, community and a well-rounded education.

We can't out-market big-dollar charter and private education lobbies, but we can out-deliver.

We have the best talent, infrastructure and level of service, and that's what sets us apart from all others. I believe Sarasota County Schools will increase our market share as we rapidly evolve to offer what parents and students want in a high-quality education.

Difficult choices require clarity

Flat or reduced budgets force difficult choices, but they also compel systemwide clarity. This is a moment to stop funding what doesn't work and double down on what does.

In Sarasota, this looks like:

- Reallocating resources into direct student services.
- Expanding cost-effective, in-demand programs (health care, artificial intelligence and culinary).
- Partnering with local employers and higher education to stretch every dollar.

Let's act decisively

If we act decisively, this isn't austerity. It's smart reinvestment.

The Family Empowerment Scholarship program is affecting public school districts.

That's a fact.

But what's also true is that communities like Sarasota are beginning to understand the tradeoffs. When unregulated vendors get public money, public accountability suffers. When tuition-driven private schools raise prices mid-year, families feel the bait-and-switch. When students can't get the specialized support to meet their needs, they regress.

Rather than lament the system, we will lead the next conversation by:

- Calling for consistent standards across all schools receiving public funds.
- Advocating for performance metrics that apply to all students, not just those in public schools.
- Pushing for a funding model that rewards impact, not influence.

Optimism is something that is earned by taking action – and across Florida, local coalitions are organizing not out of despair but out of determination. In Sarasota, we've seen what happens when parents, educators and students mobilize. That momentum can continue to challenge flawed policies and champion practical reforms.

This isn't about nostalgia for what public schools used to be. This is about building what public schools can be: community-centered, outcome-focused, financially transparent and academically excellent.

Connor, T. , (2025, April 28). Your Turn. *Herald-Tribune*.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Superintendent Connor is correct when he says "We can't out-market big-dollar charter and private education lobbies, but we can out-deliver. As Peter Greene explains in the next article, "The free market does not foster superior quality; the free market fosters superior marketing."

The Perverse Incentives of School Choice

PETER GREENE

MAY 26, 2025

When researcher Josh Cowen is talking about the negative effects of school vouchers on education, he often points at "subprime" private schools-- schools opened in strip malls or church basements or some other piece of cheap real estate and operated by people who are either fraudsters or incompetents or both.

This is a feature, not a bug. Because as much as choice advocates tout the awesomeness of competition, the taxpayer-funded free market choice system that we've been saddled with has built in perverse incentives that guarantee competition will be focused on the wrong things.

The free market does not foster superior quality; the free market fosters superior marketing. Now, the marketing can be based on superior quality, but sometimes it's just easier to go another way.

The thing about voucher schools is that quality is not what makes them money. What makes them money is signing people up. That's it. Voucher school operators don't have to run a good school; they just have to sell the seats. Once the student is signed up and their voucher dollars are in the bank, the important part of the transaction is over. There is no incentive for the school to spend a pile of money on doing a good job; all the incentive is for the school to come up with a good marketing plan.

Betsy DeVos liked to compare the free market for schools with a row of food trucks, which was wrong for a host of reasons, but one was the market speed. Buy lunch at a food truck, and you become part of the marketing very quickly. Within minutes, you are either a satisfied customer telling your friends to eat there, or warning everyone to stay away. Reputations are built quickly.

But for schools, the creation of a reputation for quality takes a long time, time measured in years. The most stable part of the voucher school market is schools that already have their reputation in place from years of operation. But if you are a start-up, you need to get that money for those seats right now. If you are a struggling crappy private school with a not-so-great reputation, you don't have time to turn that around; you've got to up your marketing game right now.

So the focus (and investment) goes toward marketing and enrollment.

Won't your poor performance catch up with you? Maybe, but the market turns over yearly, as students age out and age in to school. And you don't have to capture much of it. If you are in an urban center with 100,000 students and your school just needs to fill 100 seats, disgruntled former families won't hurt you much-- just get out there and pitch to the other 99,900 students. And if you do go under, well, you made a nice chunk of money for a few years, and now you can move on to your next grift.

This is also why the "better" private schools remain unavailable to most families holding a voucher. If a reputation for quality is your main selling point, you can't afford to let in students who might hurt that record of success.

Meanwhile, talk to teachers at some of the less-glowing private and charter schools about the amount of pressure they get to make the student numbers look good.

Because of the way incentives are structured, the business of a voucher school is not education. The business of the voucher school is to sell seats, and the education side of the business exists only to help sell seats. Our version of a free market system guarantees that the schools will operate backwards, an enrollment sales business with classrooms set up with a primary purpose of supporting the sales department, instead of vice versa.

Charter schools? The same problem, but add one other source of revenue-- government grants. Under Trump, the feds will offer up a half a billion dollars to anyone who wants to get into the charter biz, and we already know that historically one dollar out of every four will go to fraud or waste, including charter businesses that will collect a ton of taxpayer money and never even open.

"Yeah, well," say the haters. "Isn't that also true for public schools"

No, it is not. Here's why. Public schools are not businesses. They are service providers, not commodity vendors. Like the post office, like health care in civilized countries, like snow plows, like (once upon a time) journalism, their job is to provide a necessary service to the citizens of this country. Their job should be not to compete, but to serve, for the reasons laid out here.

And this week-ass excuse for accountability-- if you do a bad enough job, maybe it will make it harder for your marketing department-- has been sold as the only accountability that school choice needs.

School choice, because its perverse incentives favor selling seats over educating students, is ripe for enshittification, Cory Doctorow's name for the process by which operators make products deliberately worse in order to make them more profitable. The "product" doesn't have to be good-- just good enough not to mess up the sales. And with no meaningful oversight to determine where the "good enough" line should be drawn, subprime voucher and charter schools are free to see just how close to the bottom they can get. It is far too easy to transform into a backwards business, which is why it should not be a business at all.

If your foundational belief is that nobody ever does anything unless they can profit from it (and therefore everything must be run "like a business") then we are in "I don't know how to explain that you should care about other people" territory, and I'm not sure what to tell you. What is the incentive to work in a public education system? That's a whole other post, but I would point to Daniel Pink's theory of motivation-- autonomy, mastery and purpose. Particular a purpose that is one centered on making life better for young human beings and a country better for being filled with educated humans. I am sure there are people following that motivation in the school choice world, but they are trapped in a model that is inhospitable to such thinking.

Available at: https://curmudgucation.substack.com/p/the-perverse-incentives-of-school?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=1116865&post_id=164477723&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=2aizrm&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email

NEW FROM SARASOTA'S DISTRICT SCHOOLS



SARASOTA COUNTY'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS has a fantastic new community newsletter! It includes important information about what's happening in the school district. Each issue has a Letter from Superintendent Connor. Parents will find guidance on such things as registering their children for school. Prospective teachers, staff and volunteers will learn the application process. Also included are updates on district construction projects as well as highlights about specific school programs and teachers. Be sure to sign up to receive this valuable resource.

The latest issue is available at:

<https://www.sarasotacountyschools.net/o/scs/page/in-touch-community-newsletter>

To sign up to subscribe to *In Touch*, use this link:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/db4313a2a77d412e87fba7f327c42bf1>

In Touch advertising opportunities can be found here:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/06934c406bfd4713818d03fd233b2ea8>

SARASOTA SCHOOL BOARD GETS ALL A'S ON LWVSRQ OBSERVER CORPS REPORT CARD!!

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: 5-20-25

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

Board follows and advances a written agenda.	A
Board limits citizens' comments only to opinions on topics that are in the Board's purview.	A
Board Chair does not allow speakers to personally attack board members or use abusive language.	A
Board Chair treats speakers equitably.	A
Board adheres to Robert's Rules of Order.	A
The Board Chair runs an orderly meeting.	A
Board delegates operational and educational decisions to the professional staff.	A
Board gives evidence of being responsive to public comment.	A

SPECIAL NOTE: This is the first time since the League started issuing the "report card" that we've had straight As. Well done!

Recap of key issues discussed at this meeting:

Superintendent Connor was aware of the anger generated by the proposed Student Code of Conduct that had been on the agenda. He opened his remarks addressing why that item was removed from the agenda and that it would be given full review before appearing again. It is unclear how satisfied some members of the public were with his remarks, but it's appreciated that he gave a full explanation and was willing to take responsibility for the problems that item created.

During the general comment section, ten people spoke on the proposed Student Code of Conduct section. The main issue is that the current language lists the specific classes of students who are protected. All commenters felt that language needed to be retained.

A thorough presentation was made about the improvement of the air quality at Garden Elementary School. One of the new business agenda items was the approval of the construction contract with Swift to build a new Garden Elementary which should be completed in about three years. Since this type of presentation and discussion normally occurs during a workshop and no speakers addressed this issue, it was puzzling to the audience as to why this item had so much time devoted to it at a regular meeting.

Nine commenters spoke of their concerns with the proposed increase to Before/After School Care fees and offered to work with the district to find sources of funding to avoid the proposed increase. (The board approved the fees to go up \$5 per week for next school year.

Several commenters addressed vouchers and “for profit” charter schools, the desire to go back to two board meetings per month, more meetings in south county, and school safety. It should be noted that the tone of many of the comments was in the form of offering to help in finding solutions to the challenges of the district. There were also requests for the district to track and inform the public on the specific impacts of state and federal cuts especially for special needs students.

During board comment, Ms. Marinelli stated that the community needed to answer the question “Why are so many parents taking their students out of public schools?” She seemed to be saying that problems within our schools were the issue. Ms. Barker said that statistics show parents are not taking their children out of public schools in great numbers. Most vouchers, for example, are going to students who never were in public schools in the first place. She continued that the number of students attending charter schools is small compared to the large number of students in our public schools and those public schools are being asked to do more with less year after year.

Tom Edwards responded to community requests for more frequent meetings of the board during this critical time and stated he will continue to advocate for two meetings per month.

Additional Comments:

Mr. Enos continues to oversee a well-run meeting. He treats everyone with courtesy and follows the guidelines regarding the public comment section with respectful reminders to the public.

Bridget Ziegler was present by phone at the beginning of the meeting via phone and voted yes on accepting the amendments to the agenda, but she was not present for any other board discussion or votes during the rest of the meeting.

Recommendations:

There is expertise within our community that could be called upon to address issues such as the cost of meals and before and aftercare. It would be wise of the superintendent and board to reach out for help if they cannot solve the problem themselves.

OUR DISTRICT PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET

Buried within the U.S. House Version of the budget now being considered by the U.S. Senate is a national voucher program, H.R. 833 - Educational Choice for Children Act of 2025 (ECCA). This bill creates a national school voucher program, as it would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow a credit against tax for charitable donations to nonprofit organizations providing education scholarships to qualified elementary and secondary students. 119th Congress (2025-2026). We are opposed to this bill for the reasons noted here.

H.R. 833 Would Have a Disastrous Impact on Tax Revenue and Public Education

- Reductions in Overall Funding for Public Schools: The proposed federal tax credit vouchers would reduce tax revenue that supports education and other governmental functions, cost \$136.3 billion in lost revenue over the next decade, by \$10.6 billion in 2026 and by \$136.3 billion over the next 10 years.
- Reductions in Support for Students with Exceptional Needs: Diverting federal dollars to private school vouchers takes funding away from much-needed education services, like IDEA and 504 plans, as funds are moved from those essential programs to make up for budget shortfalls.
- Oversized Benefit to Wealthy Families: This proposal would create a lucrative tax shelter for wealthy families as a way to drive interest in private school vouchers. while greatly reducing federal and state revenue and harm public education across the country.
- Harm to Public Schools: Shifts in enrollment have caused chaos in many districts that, as a result of school closures, have had to change boundary assignments for students remaining in the public schools. High rates of returns to the public schools from students in private or home-schooling settings are disruptive. Many returning students require remediation due to inadequate education in the private or home-schooling setting.
- Selective Admission: Public schools are for ALL students. Private schools can choose only certain students and reject others. They are not typically equipped to educate students with special needs. ECCA would funnel of public dollars into private schools that discriminate.

- Unsafe Environment. Even if a private school should accept students with special needs, it would not be required to offer any protections from harassment or discrimination for those with disabilities, English learners, or other marginalized students. It can violate Title IX requirements without penalty.
- Loss of Access for Rural Communities: ECCA Vouchers would force the closure of many public schools as they lose enrollment, yet it would not provide an actual choice for students living in rural areas. Unlike the typical suburban middle class or urban family, rural families have little access to schools other than their in-district local public schools. To use a voucher, students would often be required to endure long, costly commutes.
- Loss of Other Services in Rural Communities: As voucher programs cause public schools to close, rural communities face social and economic consequences not felt in more populated communities. Rural public schools are often the primary employer of small communities, may provide healthcare for children and adults, food pantries, breakfast or lunch programs and night classes. These services would be lost or significantly reduced.
- Disregard for Separation of Church and State: Most voucher funds go to private religious schools, weakening the idea of separation of church and state enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. In Florida to avoid directly funding religious schools, separate Scholarship Funding Organizations must be used to funnel the funds. They charge high processing fees, increasing costs.
- Reduced Quality of education: Lack of accountability requirements leads to uncertain outcomes. Many private schools do not have certified teachers nor a curriculum that follows state standards. Home schooling is even more difficult to assess. It would use tax dollars to fund school vouchers to private schools that have no accountability for student achievement, teacher quality or school safety.
- Noneducational Expenses Paid With Vouchers: Especially with home schooling, funds have been used to purchase golf instruction and course memberships, trips to theme parks, home trampolines and big screen TVs as well as other questionable items. The cost of controlling these expenditures is significant.

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN CONGRESS TO LET THEM KNOW YOU ARE OPPOSED TO H.R. 833 AND ANY NATIONAL VOUCHER PROGRAM BECAUSE OF THE HARM IT WOULD DO TO OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

**Visit our website: www.pensarasota.org
Follow and Like us on Instagram**

Lawmakers and judge push back on Education Department's gutting, citing inefficiency

Naaz Modan

Published May 30, 2025

The Trump administration's decision to gut federal programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education and lay off half of the agency's staff in an attempt to increase its efficiency has been met with resistance from lawmakers and, most recently, a federal judge whose court order brought efforts to close the department to an abrupt halt.

In an update required by a May 22 court order, the Education Department posted on its website that it has notified its employees of the court-ordered reversal of the reduction in force that left the agency with only about 2,183 out of 4,133 employees. The department on May 27 acknowledged its being compelled by the order in *State of New York v. McMahon* "to restore the Department to the status quo such that it is able to carry out its statutory functions."

U.S. District Judge Myong Joun, in temporarily reversing the reduction in force, said gutting the department would lead to "irreparable harm that will result from financial uncertainty and delay, impeded access to vital knowledge on which students and educators rely, and loss of essential services for America's most vulnerable student populations."

"This court cannot be asked to cover its eyes while the Department's employees are continuously fired and units are transferred out until the Department becomes a shell of itself," Joun said in his decision.

The Education Department appealed Joun's ruling the same day it was issued. The agency did not respond to K-12 Dive's request for comment. Delays in distributing grant funds
The decision came on the heels of a May 16 letter sent by Democratic lawmakers to U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon. They claimed the Education Department was delayed in distributing grant funding for the 2025-26 school year. The delay gives states and districts less time to allocate funds meant to help students experiencing homelessness and other underserved students the grants are meant to help, they said.

"States and school districts are best able to plan to most effectively use federal funds with advance knowledge of expected funding, as Congress intends by providing funds on a forward-funded basis," said Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, Sen. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, and Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut in the letter.

Murray is vice chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, of which Baldwin is also a member. DeLauro is ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee.

"We believe you need to immediately change course and work in partnership with states and

school districts to help them effectively use federal funds,” the lawmakers wrote in their reprimand of the department’s delay.

By the lawmakers’ count, the department took three times as long under this administration to distribute Title I-A grants than under the Biden administration. Whereas the former administration took two weeks to distribute the funds after the appropriate law was signed in 2024, the current administration took more than 50 days after the enactment of the 2025 appropriations law to distribute Title I-A funds. The program provides \$18.4 billion by formula to more than 80% of the nation’s school districts.

The department also delayed applications for the Rural Education Achievement Program, which funds more than 6,000 rural school districts. It opened applications to REAP’s Small, Rural Schools Assistance program nearly two months later than the Biden administration, and gave districts half the time to apply — just 30 days compared to 60 in FY 2024.

AASA, The School Superintendents Association, said it was aware of this delay. “We understand this release date is significantly later than usual coupled with a shortened application window, so it is important to ensure all eligible districts are aware of this change,” the association said in a May 7 post, prior to the application’s release on May 14. The deadline for program applications is June 13.

These delays in funding distribution and last week’s letter from Democrats come as the department bumped funding for charter schools by \$60 million this month.

In April, the department also abruptly canceled billions in federal pandemic aid reimbursements for COVID-19 spending, a move that was met with pushback from Democratic lawmakers and states. Sixteen states and the District of Columbia sued for access to the funds and scored a victory earlier this month when a judge ordered a temporary reversal of the administration’s cancellation as the litigation is pending.

The lawmakers blasted the department’s reduction in force as the culprit behind the delays. “We were told your Department’s work would be efficient, particularly after the reduction in force in which you reduced half of the Department’s workforce, but that does not appear to be the case here,” the lawmakers wrote in their letter.

Following the layoffs, education policy experts worried the department’s efforts to prevent waste, fraud and abuse by eliminating key federal programs and employees would backfire, as a reduced workforce could lead to less oversight and delayed support for states and districts. However, the department has repeatedly said its decision to push out nearly 1,900 employees would not impact its ability to deliver on its responsibilities required by law.

Available at: https://www.highereddive.com/news/education-department-mcmahon-layoffs-reduction-in-force-resistance-court-order-status-quo/749364/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Issue:%202025-06-02%20Higher%20Ed%20Dive%20%5Bissue:73652%5D&utm_term=Higher%20Ed%20Dive

Meet the New PEN – Sarasota Board Members



Ilka Rodriguez is currently President of I. Rodriguez & Associates, a consulting firm focused on personal and organizational development through leadership and management training, talent acquisition, and organizational readiness. Ms. Rodriguez has over 35 years of public speaking and training experience and has presented to organizations which include the Association of Latino Professionals for America, the National Society of Hispanic MBAs, Prospanica, HealthCare Associates Credit Union, and the Civil Air National Services Organization. But the issues upon which Ms. Rodriguez speaks are not for her just academic. By the time she retired, after a 36 year career, they were part of what she dealt with on the job, as the first Latina from Human Resources promoted to the Senior Intelligence Service, the executive cadre of the Central Intelligence Agency, aka CIA. With her son attending our districts, Ms Rodriguez has a natural interest in and appreciation for the complexities of public education and the challenges it faces today.



Christy Karwatt grew up in the small town of Stanford, Kentucky. Upon graduation from high school, Christy explains, I ventured to Florida to study at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida where I met my husband Steve, a graduate of Riverview High School. He convinced me to move to Sarasota where I began my career in education. We have two wonderful children who received excellent educations attending Sarasota public schools and three beautiful grandchildren, two who will soon attend Sarasota public schools. While my children were growing up, I became a typical soccer mom. Yet, it was not just soccer, but baseball, football, basketball, volleyball, and horseback riding/jumping. I helped coach most of the teams for which my daughter played until she was in high school and I helped coordinate activities for the travel baseball team my husband coached. My teaching, parenting and life experiences have made me a strong advocate for public education. My maternal grandmother taught in a one room schoolhouse and my mother was a life-long elementary teacher. My great uncle was a school superintendent in rural Kentucky, and I have many aunts and uncles who worked at all levels of education including the Kentucky State Department of Education. I retired from Sarasota High School in August 2023 and have spent most of my time enjoying time with my family and pets, reading, working out and practicing yoga. I started a part-time job tutoring for resident students at the Safe Child Coalition's Youth Shelter in April, a job I thoroughly enjoy.

Meet the PEN – Sarasota Advisory Council

About the Advisory Council

PEN-Sarasota's Board of Directors is pleased to announce the formation of our Advisory Council, members of the Sarasota community who possess the desire to serve the community and who can support the work of our organization by providing their expertise and professional knowledge. While our Advisors aren't voting members of PEN-Sarasota, we believe they will play a crucial role in providing expertise, spearheading projects, fundraising, serving as a sounding board, and more to help further our organization's mission. We look forward to their programmatic recommendations and their assistance with relationship building in Sarasota.

Meet the PEN-Sarasota Advisory Council Members



Dr. Andrea Blanch has lived in Sarasota for twenty-five years. A psychologist with nationally recognized expertise in public mental health, trauma-informed approaches, and systems change, she has served as primary consultant for the Charles and Margery Barancik Foundation and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation in their efforts to strengthen the Sarasota mental health system. She also founded and is currently board chair of SRQ Strong, a nonprofit organization promoting stronger, healthier communities through trauma-informed, resilience-building practices. Prior to moving to

Sarasota, she served in senior administrative roles in state mental health systems in New York and Vermont and as deputy commissioner for mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services in Maine. She has done significant work for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, where she wrote a number of seminal policy documents, and was a founding member of the national advocacy organization Campaign for Trauma Informed Policy and Practice. She was active in second wave feminism and the disability rights movement, and has published numerous articles, book reviews, and book chapters on women's mental health, empowerment, social change, and trauma-informed approaches. She was a 2009 Fellow in the Women, Religion and Globalization program at Yale University, was awarded the 2010 annual Duisberg Peace Award by the Southwest Florida Coalition on Peace and Justice, received the 2012 Elisabeth Schilder Memorial Scholarship Award for her interfaith work, and was highlighted by Sarasota Magazine in 2023.



Dr. Harriet D. Moore, a Sarasota native, is celebrated for her exceptional ability to coach, train, and train, and mobilize educators and community members. With over 20 years of experience, Dr. Moore is a nationally recognized inspirational and transformative speaker. She excels in guiding leaders, educators, and community stakeholders on the importance of dignity and human self-worth, fostering a culture of belonging and fairness, and enhancing organizational effectiveness and productivity. A servant-leader at heart, Dr. Moore is dedicated to building successful leadership and staff capacity around equitable practices.

Her extensive educational career spans K-12 and collegiate levels, as a teacher, school leader, district administrator, and adjunct professor. She has successfully transformed schools with fixed-mindset staff

and underperforming students. Notably, she was Sarasota County Schools' first Director of Innovation and Equity, where she created the district's first Educational Equity policy. Currently, Dr. Moore serves as the district's first Director of Strategic Engagement, overseeing the Offices of Community Involvement, Volunteers, and Parent and Family Engagement. In this role, she is pivotal in fostering strong relationships between the school district and its various stakeholders, ensuring an educational environment that is supportive, inclusive, and responsive to the community's needs.

Dr. Moore holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, a Master's in Education, and both an Education Specialist and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. She has completed the Best Practices Institute on Academic Diversity at the University of Virginia and holds the Leadership: Evolving Vision certification from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Additionally, she is a graduate of the Florida Department of Education's Brian Dassler Leadership Academy and serves as class president of Leadership Florida Education Class 7 and served as a Board member. Dedicated to the growth and development of her community, Dr. Harriet Moore serves as an Elder in her church, and is also the proud mother of Senior Airman Joseph A. Haygood.



Dr. Theoni Soublis is a decades long resident of Sarasota County. She attended Sarasota public schools. After earning her BA degree in education from Florida State University, she taught at Riverview High School. A lifelong learner, Dr. Soublis went on to earn her MA degree in Education from the University of South Florida. She completed her Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction from USF in 2001. She is a Professor of Education at the University of Tampa where she is the Director of the Master's Degree Program in Curriculum & Instruction. She also teaches graduate courses in Public School Law & Professional Ethics and Social Justice Education. Dr. Soublis is the co-founder of Public Education Network (PEN) Sarasota, an advocate for the preservation of public education, and a fierce supporter of teacher's & student's rights. Dr. Soublis' daughter is currently a student in Sarasota's public schools.



Jane Goodwin, served 3 terms on the Sarasota County School Board from 2010-2022. She worked tirelessly for passage of 6 referendum in Sarasota public schools. She served as President of Florida School Board Assoc. (FSBA), the Florida Music Education Assoc. (FMEA) and the Consortium of Florida Coastal Counties. Ms. Goodwin has served on numerous boards of non-profit organizations in Sarasota County. She remains an ardent advocate for public education. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia. Her professional experience includes working as a high school teacher, as the director of marketing and community relations at the YMCA of Sarasota, Ms. Goodwin remains an ardent advocate for public education. She began her devotion to the welfare of students more than 20 years ago, when she first began mentoring young students — a love she has never forgotten or stopped.

Meet Our Student Intern



Mackenzie Stencik just graduated from Sarasota's Riverview High School with an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma. Where she was in the top 5% of the senior class. She is headed to FSU in the fall as an Honors Legal Scholar. While at Riverview, Mackenzie served as a member of the Youth Leadership Team at Teen Court of Sarasota, providing support to at-risk youth. She was involved in many organizations at Riverview, including National Honor Society, National English Honor Society, National Science Honor Society, Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica, Rho Kappa, Social Media Coordinator of Creative Writing Club. We are excited to have Mackenzie on board as our volunteer Student Intern.

SAVE THE DATE:

NOVEMBER 8, 2025

PEN-SARASOTA CONFERENCE

Conference Planning Team

Debbie Blackwell	AAUW- Venice
Serena Cannarelli	Social Justice Alliance of the Florida Suncoast
Vicky Ferguson	Social Justice Alliance of the Florida Suncoast
Amie Granger Welch	Families for Strong Public Schools
Pam Hart	PEN-Sarasota Board of Directors
Jamie Kattrein	Girl's Inc
Carol Lerner	Support Our School
Jill Lewis-Spector	League of Women Voters
Deb Metheny	PEN-Sarasota Board of Directors
Ilka Rodriguez	PEN-Sarasota Board of Directors
Lynda Weston	AAUW- Venice
Robin Williams	Jewish Alliance

Visit our website: www.pensarasota.org

Follow and Like us on Instagram

A vibrant purple poster for Camp True Colors Summer 2024. At the top is a black and white checkered border. The main title 'Camp TRUE COLORS' is in a large, stylized font, with 'Camp' in black script and 'TRUE COLORS' in multi-colored block letters. Below it, 'SUMMER 2024' is in black. The poster is decorated with various colorful icons: a yellow star, a rainbow, a stack of orange discs, a yellow smiley face, a pink flower with a face, a yellow starburst, and a purple starburst. A central yellow speech bubble contains the camp's description. The dates and times are listed below, followed by information about registration and activities being free of charge. The website for registration is provided at the bottom.

Camp
TRUE COLORS
SUMMER 2024

A DAY CAMP FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH & THEIR ALLIES, AGES 10-14

CRAFTS, GAMES, STEM AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES IN A SAFE & INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

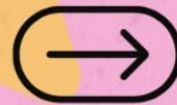
July 14th - 18th
9 AM - 3 PM
aftercare available from 3-5 PM

REGISTRATION, LUNCH, CRAFTS, AND ACTIVITIES ARE ALL PROVIDED FREE OF CHARGE.

REGISTRATION REQUIRED - www.alsoyouth.org

REGISTRATION REQUIRED – www.alsoyouth.org

STUDIO TO SPOTLIGHT



**All skill levels
welcome & encouraged**

Art Center Sarasota and
ALSO Youth are proud to
collaborate this summer on
"Studio to Spotlight," a series
of 8 art classes culminating
in a gallery exhibition at
Art Center Sarasota.

**SATURDAYS
06/07-08/02**

- 10 AM - 1 PM
- No class on July 5
- ALSO Youth Gallery Show Opening on August 21
- Ages 13-24

707 N Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL 34236

* ADULTHOOD * 101

Wednesdays
7-8 PM

June 4th, 11th, 25th
July 2nd, 9th, 23rd



Address key life and career skills to help youth ages 16-24 prepare for and tackle adulthood. _____

- job interview skills
- building a resume
- money management
- home maintenance
- cooking and nutrition
- coping with stress



VIRTUAL ONLY

links provided after registration



REGISTRATION REQUIRED - www.alsoyouth.org



Board of Directors (2025)

Jill Lewis-Spector	Chair
Pam Hart	Secretary
Nancy Swart	Treasurer

Damaris Allen
Christy Karwatt
Carol Lerner
Deborrah Metheny
Ilka Rodriguez
Katrina Ward

PEN – SARASOTA ADVISORY COUNCIL

Andrea Blanch
Jane Goodwin
Harriet D. Moore
Theoni Soublis

Newsletter Editor

David Spector

Website/Social Media

Anushka Nair

Student Intern

Mackenzie Stencik

