

SUPERINTENDENT'S BULLETIN

APRIL 08, 2025
ISSUE 55

News for School Board Members and District Personnel



Dear Team Monroe,

I am excited to attend our annual Employee Recognition Banquet which will be held on April 11th at Hawks Cay to honor the hard work and dedication of our employees over the past year. This special evening will highlight the outstanding contributions of many individuals, with special recognition for our distinguished honorees:

District Teacher of the Year – Katharine Yarbrough
District Inclusion Teacher – Christina Guieb
Management Employee of the Year – Effie Jackson
School Related Employee of the Year – Zachary Graham
Principal of the Year – Tara Whitehead
Assistant Principal of the Year – Scott Meier
Student Services Employee of the Year – Kristy Linares
Social Worker Employee of the Year - Monet Ray

In addition to these honorees, we will celebrate many others who have been recognized by their respective schools and departments for their leadership and dedication.

This event is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on our accomplishments, express gratitude for the commitment of our employees, and recognize those retiring at the end of the year. Our employees dedicate their careers to supporting students and helping them in so many ways, whether it's by transporting them with care, preparing meals in our cafeterias, making sure learning environments and athletic venues are safe and sound or educating them in the classroom – it takes a team to accomplish what we do.

With great food, musical entertainment, and fellowship, we look forward to making this a night of celebration and appreciation. We can't wait to see you there!

Yours in education,
Terri Axford

ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

April began with the opening of the B.E.S.T. Writing Assessment window on March 31st, which runs until April 11th. Individual schools have shared their respective testing dates. Students in grades 4–10 have been working hard to prepare for this important assessment. Please note that this assessment is scored separately from the students' ELA score. Assessment results will be released before the end of June.

On April 14th, the FAST-testing window will open for students in grades K–2. Students will participate in STAR Early Literacy or STAR Reading, and STAR Math assessments.

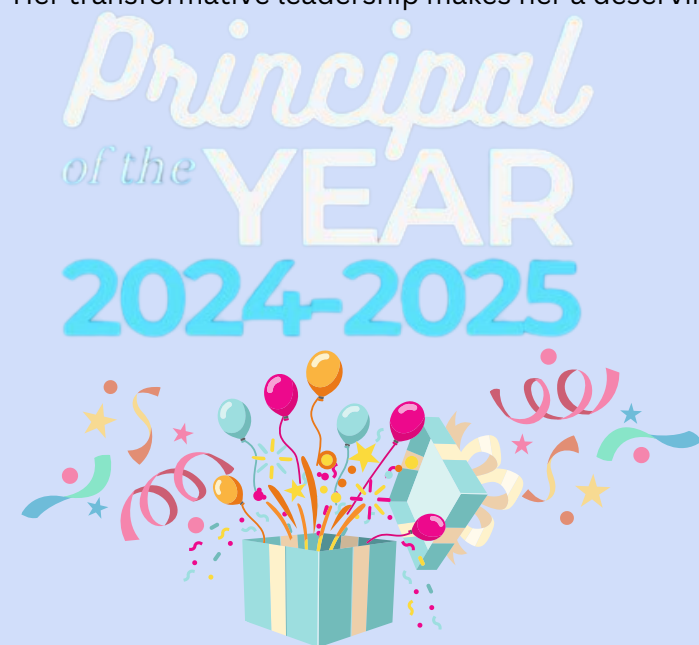
As we near the end of the testing season, the FAST-testing window for grades 3–10 will begin on May 1st. This includes FAST ELA, FAST Math for grades 3–8, and EOC Assessments in Algebra 1, Geometry, Civics, U.S. History, and Biology. Individual schools will provide families with specific assessment calendars. Please review these schedules carefully and avoid scheduling appointments on testing days. If a student must leave campus for an appointment during a testing session, they will not be allowed to resume the assessment once it has been interrupted.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Tara Whitehead, Principal of Poinciana Elementary and MCSD Principal of the Year, is celebrated for her dedication to academic excellence. Under her leadership, Poinciana rose from a C-grade to an A-grade school, supporting over 70% of English learners. Through innovative strategies like data-driven instruction, Pelican Prep, and the "I Believe" framework, she has improved student success and strengthened school culture.

Her initiatives, including the "I Believe" framework, have strengthened the school's culture and reinforced positive behavior. Tara also prioritizes leadership development, mentoring teachers and creating opportunities for professional growth within the school and district. She cultivates an engaging student activity culture, supporting clubs, honor societies, and cultural experiences that enrich the school environment.

Tara fosters leadership development for teachers, enriches student activities, and promotes strong community partnerships. Known for her empathy and accessibility, she has earned admiration from students, parents, and staff. Her transformative leadership makes her a deserving recipient of this prestigious award.

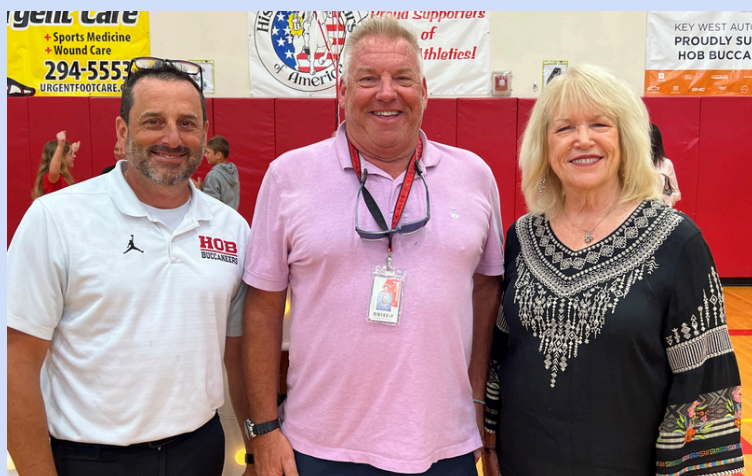


Pictured Above: Superintendent Theresa Axford and Tara Whitehead, Principal of Poinciana Elementary

Scott Meier, the MCSD Assistant Principal of the Year, is an accomplished AP, who empowers teacher leaders and fosters a culture of trust and collaboration, directly improving student success. He has led initiatives like station-based learning to enhance engagement and uses data strategically to address performance, discipline, and attendance. His efforts promote a positive, inclusive learning environment.

In addition to overseeing school safety and organizing training sessions, Mr. Meier recently took on the role of Athletic Director, managing scheduling and athlete eligibility with enthusiasm.

As a standout assistant principal, Mr. Meier's dedication and supportive nature make him an integral part of the Horace O'Bryant school community. A true team player, he demonstrates empathy and understanding in meeting the needs of everyone on campus. His ability to build strong, positive relationships with students and parents alike helps them feel valued and supported. Through his commitment to collaboration, compassion, and student-centered leadership, Mr. Meier has significantly elevated the school's culture, leaving a lasting impact on everyone he encounters.



2024-2025 ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR

Pictured Left: Brian Desilets,
HOB Assistant Principal, Scott Meier,
and Superintendent Theresa Axford



CONTINUED COMMUNITY RELATIONS

April is the Month of the Military Child, a time to recognize the resilience, sacrifices, and strength of children in military families. Our schools are proud to support these students by fostering a welcoming, inclusive environment that honors their experiences and unique challenges.

Key West High School, Horace O'Bryant School, and Sugarloaf School have been recognized as Purple Star Schools of Distinction, a testament to their commitment to serving military-connected students. Through specialized programs, mentorship, and dedicated resources, these schools ensure that military children feel supported, valued, and prepared for success.

In addition, our schools recognize and honor our veterans and active-duty service members, showing appreciation for their service and dedication. As we celebrate this special month, we reaffirm our commitment to standing beside military families and ensuring every child thrives, no matter where their journey takes them. We thank our military families for their strength, sacrifice, and contributions to our community.



Pictured Above: HOB Principal, Brian Desilets, KWHS Principal, Rebecca Palomino and SLS Principal, Trevor Tyler

EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION

The ESE department values and appreciates our Florida Department of Education partners from around the state, who continue to offer support, guidance, and targeted collaboration for our teachers, scholars, and staff district wide. Building off February's fantastic in-person visits and subsequent webinars provided by CARD (Center for Autism and Related Disabilities), the ESE Department hosted additional professional learning opportunities in March. We worked with FDLRS (Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources Systems – South) to provide training on implementing accommodations for our scholars with disabilities in the general education setting. We also worked with Project-10, specializing in ages 14 – 22, to train our teachers and staff on how to write effective transition individual education plans (TIEPs). Now, as we enter April and May, we will be working with our partners at FIN (Florida Inclusion Network) to assist our schools with preparing their master schedules for the 2025 - 2026 school year, with a focus on our ESE population. These are just a few of our many state partners, and we are happy to work with them all!

FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE

Risk Management is always in the process of identifying and assessing any potential risks that could negatively impact our organization. Be mindful of your surroundings, be aware of anything that could possibly be a contributing factor. Please do not hesitate to contact your Risk Manager to evaluate and work on strategies to minimize and possibly eliminate some of these risks.

The payroll and benefits teams have been working diligently to ensure that all employees pay, and benefits are as accurate as possible. We understand the importance of getting it right, and we are committed to providing reliable and precise support. If you have any questions or need assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us. The Finance Team is gearing up for a busy and productive season as we prepare for official budget meetings with our schools and departments in the coming weeks. At the same time, we are laying the groundwork for a strong close to the 2024-25 fiscal year. With a steadfast commitment to excellence and fiscal responsibility, we are well-positioned for another successful year ahead.

MIS has completed the last updates and submissions for Survey 3 state reporting of student and staff data. We would like to extend a special thanks to all Data Entry staff members at each school. Your efforts and collaboration in keeping this data clean and accurate are invaluable!

We are pleased to announce that Internal Services has a new Director. Joe Thomas has started his role as of 3/31/25, and is currently onboarding to learn the role. He looks forward to meeting everyone in the District in person and will hopefully be making some site visits before the school year is completed.

For the month of April, the Finance team would like to send out a friendly reminder that the following deadlines are fast approaching:

PURCHASE ORDER REVIEW

April 30th is the last day to review all open purchase orders dated February 1st or prior. If the Finance Department has not received a written request to keep a purchase order open, and agreed with the request, the purchase order will be cancelled. Please send email requests to Andrea Boggs and Maria Portal of the Accounts Payable Team.

REQUISITIONS

The final date for issuing requisitions against the 2024-2025 budgets is April 30th with the exception of the Maintenance Department, the Transportation Department, the Information Technology Department, the Food Service Department, and the Federal projects, which will have a final requisition date of June 13th. Requisitions after this date will not be processed until July 3 against the 2025-2026 budget.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Preparations are being made for the Superintendent to recommend instructional reappointments for the 2025-2026 school year at the May 6th Board meeting, which is no later than four (4) weeks prior to the teachers' last day of post planning. Reappointment emails have been sent to Principals and district leadership for return to the Department of Human Resources with educators and administrators being indicated as renewed, released, retiring, relocating, resigning or on-leave. Annual educators with requirements, that must be satisfied by June 30, 2025 to enable renewal of their educator contract, will sign Contingency Agreements. Release Notices will be signed by the Superintendent for distribution to those not being renewed by April 29th. Human Resources spearheads the NTO Planning Committee, which is gearing up for the 2025 New Teacher Orientation to be held on Monday, August 4, 2025 at Marathon Middle/High School. Businesses and colleges are welcome to sponsor and/or participate in this event to assist us in welcoming new educators to our Keys community.

OPERATIONS AND PLANNING

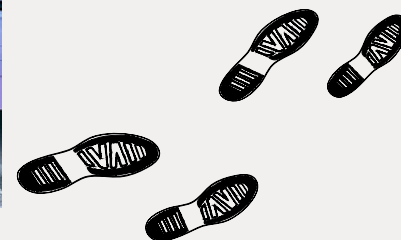
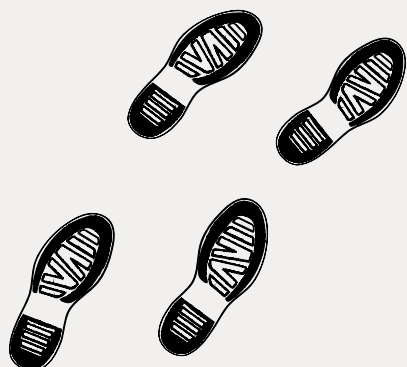
Having received contract approval from the School Board of Monroe County on April 9, 2024, Architectural and Engineering Professional Services for Reynolds School Renovations begins with the conceptual design phase. During this phase, a design team determines a clear understanding of the facility needs and design concepts to formally develop the initial framework in preparing specifications. The specifications will include a list of needs, uses and constraints to help transform the concept or idea into a visual media. Renovations will include alterations and improvements to the original 1927 school building while maintaining the historical elements of the original structure. The rear building addition, constructed in approximately 1950, will be replaced by new construction providing essential space for various maintenance trades. Director of Construction and Distribution Services, Doug Pryor says, “the final design will convert the historic building into a new ancillary facility for its intended use by Adult Education and the MCSD Maintenance Department.”



STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Senator Lauren Book, founder of the Lauren's Kids Foundation, kicked off the morning earlier this week teaching a lesson from our Safer, Smarter Kids curriculum to students in grades K-2 from Poinciana Elementary. The foundation provides our elementary schools invaluable lessons on abuse prevention, personal safety, and advocacy.

On April 2nd, we supported the kick off of the Lauren's Kids milestone TENTH 1,500-mile "Walk in My Shoes" journey across Florida with a start at the Southernmost Point in Key West! The walk will culminate in Tallahassee on April 30th.



TEACHING AND LEARNING

Students from Special Olympics, Key West High School's Jr. ROTC, the Sea Cadets, and participants in the Pilot for the Day program had an unforgettable experience on March 28! These outstanding young individuals were invited to a special practice demonstration of the air show, where they witnessed incredible aerial performances up close. Adding to the excitement, they had the rare opportunity to participate in a meet-and-greet with the legendary Blue Angels! This unique event allowed them to interact with the elite Navy pilots, get autographs, and gain inspiration from some of the best in aviation. A huge thank you to all who made this incredible experience possible. It was a day filled with excitement, inspiration, and unforgettable memories!



Gerald Adams' 21st Century program hosted a fun parent and family engagement event in partnership with the Key West Art and Historical Society. Families explored the life and work of iconic Key West artist Mario Sanchez, then let their creativity soar by crafting traditional Cuban kites. With art, history, and high-flying fun, our parents and students had a great time!

