



## **Board of Directors Meeting**

**March 14, 2013**

### **Media Items**

**Item V.G.**

#### **Tampa Bay Times: Early learning project honors Lew Williams, a "gentle giant"**

By Sylvia Lim, Times correspondent

Saturday, February 16, 2013

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/early-learning-project-honors-a-gentle-giant/1275398>

Lew Williams wanted to be an attorney.

As the oldest of seven kids in a single-parent household, he was planning to join the Army to get a college education. But his high school English teacher "saved" him in his senior year, handing him a college acceptance letter with a year's tuition paid.

"This inspired him to go into education," his widow Arthurene Williams said last week.

A 40-year Florida educator and a Pinellas County School Board member before his unexpected death in December 2011, Williams left such a strong legacy that district officials quickly vowed to start a program in his memory. In recent months it has started to take shape.

The Lew Williams Project aims to eliminate the achievement gap by leveling the playing field for 1- to 4-year-olds living in poverty, said Pinellas school superintendent Mike Grego.

Of the 8,007 children who entered Pinellas public school kindergartens for the 2011-12 school year, 2,171 were not ready, the district says. Most of them hail from the neighborhoods in southern St. Petersburg, Lealman, Largo, Clearwater and Tarpon Springs.

"If we do this right, if we get them early and ready for kindergarten, we're giving them the opportunity to graduate in 13 years," said Jim Madden, a recently retired deputy superintendent who has volunteered to keep working on the project.

Arthurene Williams said the project is a fitting tribute to her husband.

"He was a gentle giant in his field, and he wanted to make sure that every child had an opportunity to succeed," she said. "He was a struggling student, and all indicators in his life deemed that he was doomed to fail."

District officials have budgeted roughly \$2.5 million to renovate the Pinellas Technical Education Center St. Petersburg campus and the shuttered Kings Highway Elementary campus in Clearwater. The sites will accommodate 350 students, said Mike Bessette, associate superintendent of facilities and operations. The district also has set aside \$4 million to pay for teachers, supplies and utilities.

Costs for the project will be shared by the Early Learning Coalition, the Juvenile Welfare Board and the district, according to district records. District officials aim to open the PTEC site in August for the 2013-14 school year.

Classrooms will be staffed by certified teachers, Madden said.

"The key component is, everything we do will be research-based and based on best practices," said Gail Ramsdell, coordinator for early childhood education in Pinellas schools. "Hopefully, what we are learning and developing will be shared with other preschools and home day cares."

In the next five years, district officials want to expand the project to other locations and use the PTEC and Kings Highway sites as models for Gibbs High and St. Petersburg College students studying education.

The project is part of the district's ambitious plans to boost early learning options for students. Those plans include applying for grants totaling about \$70.3 million from the federal Head Start program.

"Think of it as a big umbrella, and under that umbrella you will have different ways to get services if you have a child who is four years old or younger," Madden said.

Arthurene Williams said her husband would be happy about how the project is coming along. Experience told him that learning needs to start before kindergarten, which was why he started a preschool and ran for school board, she said.

"One passion of his was making sure those kids have the tools they need to go into elementary school with ... so that they don't start at a deficit. It's keeping the main thing, the main thing."

***Early learning project honors Lew Williams, a "gentle giant" 02/16/13 [Last modified: Friday, February 15, 2013 5:52pm]***  
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## **Sun-Sentinel: Tana Ebbole: Importance of early child development**

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/opinion/fl-readers-view-childhood-development-20130216,0,4617447.story>

By Tana Ebbole  
February 16, 2013

We applaud President Obama's push to improve and expand pre-Kindergarten for all children. High-quality preschool can be an expensive proposition for any family; a universal component helps ensure all our children are better prepared when they begin formal schooling.

But anyone who's watched infants explore their world knows children's capacity to learn begins long before they turn 4 — even before they are born. Research tells us the foundation of children's brain architecture is impacted first in the womb by their mothers' health and stress level, and then in the home by their families' ability to care for them.

That's why Children's Services Council is especially encouraged by the president's proposal to expand services to families with children younger than 4, including evidence-based initiatives that have been shown to improve the health of women and babies, as well as better prepare new moms and dads for the big job ahead of them.

It just makes sense that children have a much better chance of success in school, and in life, if they are born healthy to loving and emotionally engaged parents who provide a safe home. This period of early childhood development, from before birth to age 5, is a time of children's most rapid cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and motor development.

By age 3, a child's brain has already grown to about 80 percent of its adult size.

So what does early childhood development have to do with school success? Children who are born healthy and grow up safe are much more likely to be prepared when they enter school. They'll have the capacity to learn because they'll be socially, emotionally and physically ready. They'll most likely be able to sit still long enough to listen to a story or follow a teacher's instructions.

That's why our community needs to continue helping pregnant women access early, consistent medical care. That's why we need to support parents with programs that encourage family literacy and parent-child bonding. That's why need to ensure that when parents work, their young children have safe, loving and developmentally appropriate care.

***Tana Ebbole is the CEO of Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County.***

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## **Tampa Tribune: Volunteer summer school could help struggling Pinellas students**

By ANASTASIA DAWSON|Tbo.com

Published: February 17, 2013

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/pinellas-news/2013/feb/17/volunteer-summer-school-could-help-struggling-pine-ar-637265/>

LARGO -- Pinellas County school leaders are hoping a new voluntary summer school program will help narrow the growing achievement gap among low-income and minority students.

The district hopes to offer the free, six-week course, called "Summer Bridge," to about 12,000 struggling students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

"I think we'll be able to reach a lot of children – more than we've ever been able to so far," said board chairwoman Carol Cook.

So far, more than 10,000 kindergarten through 12th grade students have been identified as eligible for the program, based on reading assessments, low Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test scores and end-of-course exam results.

About 5,700 of those students are in elementary schools and have already been invited to participate.

Classes will focus on reading, math and science and some middle-schoolers will be able to participate in other programs geared to preparing them for high school.

The program will require about 1,250 instructors, compared to last summer's 300.

Superintendent Michael Grego spent last week meeting with members of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association to organize pay schedules for the extra hours many will have to work to accommodate the program.

Instructors are entitled to their normal hourly rate in the summer, according to the Pinellas County teacher contract.

Grego will discuss the results of the negotiation as well as what it will take to pay for the program during the school board's monthly workshop on Thursday.

Though teachers don't seem hesitant to come back to the classroom, Grego's salary negotiations with the teachers union could influence how many students would be able to participate in the program, said school board member Linda Lerner.

According to the Florida Department of Education's 2012 FCAT data, 44 percent of third-graders in the district read below grade level and 52 percent of eight-graders scored below grade level in math. About 28 percent of Pinellas students don't graduate with their class.

The district hopes that more than 12,000 students -- about 10 percent of the total student population -- will take classes in 60 schools across the district this summer, Lerner said. About 700 students participated in the district's third-grade summer reading camps last year.

Cook said the fate of the Summer Bridge program won't necessarily be tied to attendance.

"I would assume that, even if enrollment isn't what we expected it would be, we would move forward with the program if it meets the requirements the board is looking for because there are students that are struggling and we need to meet their needs," Cook said. "If parents choose not to have their children come to the program, that's their option."

To accommodate the large number of students that are qualified, and keep them interested in learning over the summer, the district will need to find new resources and different learning environments, Cook said.

To that end, the district is seeking out community partnerships. The Juvenile Welfare Board, local YMCA's and R-Club, a bay-area daycare service, have all pledged their services to the district from sponsoring extra activities for the kids to providing after-hours childcare.

Schools will send information on the programs home with students this month and registration is tentatively scheduled to start in March. Though the district can't afford to run too many busses for the program, Lerner said some community members have discussed providing transportation.

"Some local churches may also be helpful," Lerner said.

The existing voluntary prekindergarten program, exceptional student education programs and other summer enrichment programs offered through individual schools won't be affected by the new addition, and Lerner said the logistics behind the move are still being discussed.

"I think we always needed more summer school, ...." Lerner said. "Now that we're looking at different parts of funding, like extended learning money that some schools still had, and then partnering with other organizations that also have money, I give Dr. Grego credit for moving it forward and making it work."

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## **Tampa Tribune: Pinellas may grow summer school**

By ANASTASIA DAWSON|Tribune staff

Published: February 18, 2013

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/education-news/2013/feb/18/memeto3-pinellas-may-grow-summer-school-ar-637344/>

LARGO -- Pinellas County school leaders hope a new voluntary summer school program will help narrow the growing achievement gap among low-income and minority students.

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## **Tampa Tribune: Pinellas dentists partner with county to treat low-income kids**

By JEFF SCULLIN| The Tampa Tribune

Published: February 18, 2013

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/2013/feb/18/memeto1-pinellas-dentists-partner-with-county-to-t-ar-637342/>

I'm not exactly "a regular" in the dentist's chair, so it was minor news in my house last week when a tooth lost its filling and I went to have it checked.

There's nothing but sheer laziness standing between me and regular cleanings and checkups.

But lots of kids in Pinellas County don't see a dentist regularly for different reasons. Their parents don't have insurance, can't afford routine care or simply don't understand how important regular dental care is, especially for children.

On Friday, dentists across the county are closing their practices and partnering with the Pinellas County Health Department to provide free dental care — and maybe prompt families to adopt a regimen of regular dental hygiene.

The effort is part of the Give Kids a Smile campaign started by the American Dental Association 10 years ago to provide dental services to low-income children. Throughout the year, about 40,000 volunteers nationwide organize more than 1,500 events and provide screenings, treatment and education to more than 450,000 children.

Locally, dentists have set aside Friday for examinations and cleanings and March 15 for more involved procedures. Families then will be connected to the health department, which can provide ongoing care on a sliding scale.

The goal is to see 200 kids, and — believe it or not — organizers are having a hard time signing up enough children. As of last week, only about 25 percent of the slots had been filled.

"People have taken their days off to give care, and we would love for these children to get treatment," said dentist Sanjie Jackson of The Dental Office of Dunedin, who is organizing this year's effort.

Organizers faced the same problem last year and dropped the number of slots from 300 to 200. They reached out to various groups and worked with school counselors and social workers in the fall to let students know about the program.

To qualify, children must be between 4 and 14; their families must be without insurance, including Medicaid, and fall between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

The easiest way to sign up or get more information is to contact your child's school counselor or social worker. Applications and information are available at [www.gkaspinellas.com](http://www.gkaspinellas.com).

People can sign up as late as Thursday evening. But if people come to a clinic Friday with paperwork filled out, they likely will be seen, Jackson said.

***This week's get-together is back at Steam and Chill, at 7400 Gulf Blvd. in St. Pete Beach. I'll be there from 9 to 10 a.m. Stop by and join the conversation.***

###

### **New York Times Editorial: Getting Preschool Education Right**

Published: February 15, 2013

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/16/opinion/getting-obamas-preschool-education-plan-right.html?\\_r=2&adxnml=1&seid=auto&smid=tw-nytopinion&adxnmlx=1361110417-zP0KnxWy3G6kn0RMoGc4w&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/16/opinion/getting-obamas-preschool-education-plan-right.html?_r=2&adxnml=1&seid=auto&smid=tw-nytopinion&adxnmlx=1361110417-zP0KnxWy3G6kn0RMoGc4w&)

Even before the cost estimates and program details have been made public, President Obama's proposal for expanding high-quality preschool education has encountered criticism from House Republicans. Yet decades of research has shown that well-designed preschool programs more than pay for themselves by giving young children the skills they need to move ahead. The challenge at the federal level will be to make sure that taxpayer dollars flow to proven, high-quality programs instead of being wasted on subsidies for glorified day care.

Countless studies have found that preschool education has real value, both for the children and for society as a whole. But design is obviously crucial. The most famous and frequently cited program was conducted at Perry Elementary School in Ypsilanti, Mich., during the 1960s, where the teachers focused on a creative process in which low-income children were encouraged to plan, initiate and discuss their learning activities. In addition to teaching the children for 2.5 hours during the school day, the teachers regularly visited their homes to reinforce the lessons and forge partnership with parents.

Followed into adulthood, the Perry students were found to have lower dropout and arrest rates and higher incomes than those who had not attended preschool. Research led by James Heckman, the Nobel Prize-winning economist, concluded in 2009 that each \$1 invested in the Perry program had returned a value of \$7 to \$12 to society.



Unfortunately, preschool researchers say that few programs meet the standards of the Perry system. With mediocrity the norm for many programs — and with many educators habituated to mediocrity — a new federal preschool initiative is likely to come under heavy pressure to compromise downward.

Mr. Obama called for just the opposite in his State of the Union address on Tuesday. He wants to upgrade the preschool system through a cost-sharing partnership with the states to expand high-quality public preschool to all 4-year-olds from families at or below 200 percent of the poverty level. The proposal also contains an incentive for states to broaden participation to include additional middle-class families.

To be eligible for the program, the states would have to offer programs with well-trained teachers paid comparably to those teaching in kindergarten-through-12 classrooms, small classes and rigorous statewide standards for early learning.

The White House has yet to release cost estimates or say how the program would be financed. But officials have said the money could be found in the budget, and the program would not add to the deficit.

Given the current national emphasis on strengthening the public schools — and preparing young people to compete in the new economy — expanding preschool education would seem to be an obvious bipartisan goal. Instead of saying “no” right out of the gate, Mr. Obama’s critics should recognize the value in his proposal.

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***A version of this editorial appeared in print on February 16, 2013, on page A18 of the New York edition with the headline: Getting Preschool Education Right.***

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### **Tampa Tribune: Pinellas commissioner withdraws bid to lead welfare board**

By CHRISTOPHER O'DONNELL|Tribune staff  
Published: February 19, 2013

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/pinellas-news/2013/feb/19/pinellas-commissioner-withdraws-bid-to-lead-welfar-ar-638743/>

CLEARWATER -- County Commission Chairman Ken Welch has pulled out of the running to be the next director of the Juvenile Welfare Board, saying his application was miring the agency in controversy.

Welch, 48, sent a letter to the agency's board Tuesday announcing his decision. He was one of 11 finalists for the position to oversee the agency's \$50-million budget and staff of about 60 people.

"In the past few days the discussion has become more political, and now has become partisan," Welch wrote in his letter. "This is not what I intended or anticipated when I applied, nor is it the right path for the JWB.

"JWB's mission is of paramount importance to our community, and the organization has enjoyed broad community support by focusing on children and families and remaining apolitical."

A prominent Democrat with 12 years on the commission, Welch's bid for the job raised fears that the agency would be thrust into partisan politics and that his political connections gave him an advantage over other applicants. The director is appointed by JWB's board, which includes fellow County Commissioner Susan Latvala and Pinellas County Public Defender Bob Dillinger.

"It was becoming a very political process, and that's not in the best interest of JWB," Welch said.

The agency, which helps at-risk youths with services including early learning, mentoring and after-school programs, is facing a critical period for its future. In 2016, Pinellas residents will vote on whether to continue funding the agency through property taxes.

State Sen. Jack Latvala, a Republican, said he advised Welch to withdraw. He told Welch his appointment would have politicized the agency and may have hurt its chances with voters.

"To put someone in that office that might be running for office in St. Petersburg for mayor in a couple of years, it would be horrible and wrong and would potentially impact the referendum," Latvala said. "I counseled him against that. I think he had already come to that decision."

A St. Petersburg native, Welch is regarded as a future candidate to run for mayor of his hometown. After applying to head the welfare board, he ruled himself out of this year's election but said he might be a candidate in 2017.

Political concerns also could have influenced Welch's start date had he been hired. The welfare board expects to make a decision by April, and its current executive director, Gay Lancaster, is scheduled to retire in June. But Welch wanted to delay his start date until January so he could serve out the year as the county commission chairman.

Welch said critics of his application should remember that he has spent more of his life in the private sector. He worked for Florida Power for 14 years, according to his application.

"I wanted a fair vetting, like everyone else," Welch said.

Welch's future on the county commission, to which he was reelected in November, is still uncertain because of a lawsuit that accuses him and three of his colleagues - Republicans Karen Seel, John Morroni and Susan Latvala - of violating term limits.

Voters approved the term limits in 1996, but they've been tangled in litigation and not yet enforced. A victory for the plaintiffs, who include former Welch opponent Maria Scruggs, could mean the four would be forced from office.

"My plan was to finish this year as chairman," Welch said. "Nothing changes for this year, and we'll see what the future holds as far as term limits."

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## **Tampa Bay Times: Ken Welch bows out of bid to lead Juvenile Welfare Board**

Anna M. Phillips, Times Staff Writer

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/ken-welch-bows-out-of-bid-to-lead-juvenile-welfare-board/1275779>

Tuesday, February 19, 2013 4:05pm

Pinellas County Commissioner Ken Welch took himself out of the running to be the next executive director of the Juvenile Welfare Board on Tuesday, saying he was sparing the agency a political fight with Tallahassee.

Welch, who has served on the commission for 12 years, applied for the job earlier this month, propelled by uncertainty surrounding the outcome of a term limits lawsuit against him and three other commissioners. Knowing that the lawsuit could force him out of office, Welch decided to try for a new job and an early exit in January 2014.

It was a bold move for a politician who shuns risk, and it did not go as planned.

On Tuesday, Welch sent the board a statement saying he was withdrawing his application.

"It has become obvious that, in the minds of some, my political persona overshadows all other aspects of my business, managerial and professional experience," he wrote, singling out an editorial that ran in the Tampa Bay Times. The editorial questioned whether the board would be swayed by Welch's prominence and hand him the job without seriously considering other applicants.

In an interview on Tuesday, Welch said he had received calls from Tallahassee objecting to him making a bid for the job. Claiming he did not want to "fan the flames," he refused to say whether the political pressure came from state elected officials, the governor or both.

These "party loyalists," as he called his opponents, did not like the idea of a high-profile Democrat leading the agency, he said, adding that some Republicans believe he played a back-

room role in getting two Democrats elected to the commission in November and resent him for it.

"We haven't weighed in on this appointment," said Jackie Schutz, a spokeswoman for Gov. Rick Scott. "We haven't told anyone to withdraw their name or application."

Opposition to Welch taking the JWB post materialized before he even submitted his resume and cover letter to the search committee. Hearing that Welch might apply, state Sen. Jack Latvala, a Republican, said he called several JWB board members to warn them it was a bad idea. Last Friday, he said, he talked directly to Welch to make his opinion clear.

"I think Ken Welch is a very competent public official," Latvala said. "I just told him I thought there were some unfortunate consequences if he were to get that job."

As Latvala sees it, if Welch, the county's most prominent Democrat, were given the job and granted the delayed start date he requested, it would thrust a nonpartisan agency focused on improving the lives of poor children and families into the political fray. The fact that Welch plans to run for mayor of St. Petersburg in 2017 only made the political tension worse, Latvala said. "I thought this appointment and the fact that he could be running for office could potentially hurt JWB," he said.

Though Welch's appointment was not a foregone conclusion, he was among 11 semifinalists the board had selected to begin interviewing for the job. But by last weekend, some board members said they began to hear that he might bow out, said Dr. Jim Sewell, who is leading the search committee.

"I think all of us were a little bit concerned about this," he said.

Other board members were surprised.

"I'll never understand the political thing," said Ray Neri, president of the Lealman Community Association and a JWB board member. "I just thought: Here's a quality guy who's on the market, and why else not be able to give him a shot as well as everybody else?"

***Times staff writer Steve Bousquet contributed to this report. Anna M. Phillips can be reached at [aphillips@tampabay.com](mailto:aphillips@tampabay.com) or (727) 893-8779.***

***[Last modified: Tuesday, February 19, 2013 10:45pm]***

####

## **Tampa Tribune: Lax attendance worries Pinellas teachers**

By ANASTASIA DAWSON|Tribune staff

Published: February 20, 2013

Updated: February 20, 2013 - 9:08 AM

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/pinellas-news/2013/feb/20/1/lax-attendance-worries-pinellas-teachers-ar-638843/>

CLEARWATER – The Pinellas County School District will install new locks and doorbells in some schools during the next few weeks to help keep intruders out, but many teachers are more worried about keeping students in.

Some students already have missed more than 40 days of school this school year, a sign that Pinellas County's reputation for poor student attendance may be repeating itself, Kim Black, president of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association, said during last week's school board meeting.

During the 2010-11 school year, the most recent year for which data is available, Pinellas had the worst attendance rate among Florida school districts with more than 100,000 students, according to the state Department of Education. That school year, 13 percent of students were classified as "chronic absentees," missing 21 days of class or more.

"Teachers are being held accountable for students whether they're in class or not," Black said in an interview Tuesday. "It's really an impact to our community and economy when our students aren't getting the education they need. Whether it is working on our policies or our communication with parents, something needs to change."

Last March, Black asked then-schools Superintendent John Stewart to create a task force to research the issue, and the school board held a forum in June to get parent and community input.

School board member Rene Flowers said she hopes to discuss the attendance issue at Thursday's monthly school board workshop.

Schools need to call parents only if a student has five absences and are required to send letters home if students have five unexcused absences in a month, though they can enforce stricter policies, according to the district's attendance policy, updated in 2010.

At 15 unexcused absences, students between 15 and 18 will have their driver's licenses or learner's permits suspended and continued absences can lead to truancy hearings or criminal prosecution of parents.

Black said she hopes the school district makes changes.

"Teachers are calling me concerned that their students aren't learning what they're supposed to and won't perform well on tests when they're chronically absent," Black said. "Teachers are

responsible for providing makeup work when they come back, and this all takes time. ... We really need to start talking to students to figure out why they aren't coming."

Part of the problem might be communication. Schools used to call parents on days their children missed school. But that rarely happens now, Flowers said.

"In all these downsizing efforts we've lost some of that ability to communicate with parents ... rather than parents first finding out that their children haven't been going to school at report card time," Flowers said. "... And then that also plays into, in my opinion, suspensions, which is a policy we need to examine along with this. If a student is being suspended that's also time they're not in class."

Though the school district keeps records of student attendance, initiatives to keep students in school are passed off to private agencies such as the Pinellas County Juvenile Welfare Board.

The taxpayer-funded organization creates and funds after-school programs to prepare children for school and make sure they're successful, said spokesman Benjamin Kirby. Students who do well in school generally don't have attendance problems, he said.

But the recession has hit the welfare board hard, Kirby said. In late 2011, the welfare board lost \$766,000 that funded its three biggest truancy programs.

"It's not like we just cut them," Kirby said. "We worked with the school board to make sure those programs are still functioning, maybe just not in full force so students stay motivated and stay in school. ... We think the more helping hands and the more partners working together to fix this problem, the better."

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## **Tampa Tribune: 200-plus apply to head Children's Board**

By Tribune staff

Published: February 20, 2013

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/breaking-news/2013/feb/20/200-plus-apply-to-head-childrens-board-ar-639597/>

TAMPA -- Members of the Children's Board of Hillsborough County will meet March 6 to name five finalists to be the agency's executive director. They'll have plenty of people from whom to choose.

A total of 211 people have applied to head the agency, which has been without a permanent director since Luanne Panacek resigned last summer after complaints about no-bid contracts and low employee morale. Former Tampa mayor Pam Iorio has been serving as the interim director.

Applicants include everyone from officials with similar non-profit agencies to a warden of an Illinois prison to a Pasco school principal.

The board is scheduled to name 5 finalists on March 6 and pick a new director on April 5.

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### **Tampa Bay Times: Hundreds apply for CEO opening at Hillsborough Children's Board**

Times staff

Wednesday, February 20, 2013 4:32pm

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/hundreds-apply-for-ceo-opening-at-hillsborough-childrens-board/1275938>

The Children's Board of Hillsborough County had no shortage of applicants for its vacant chief executive officer position.

More than 200 people — from a tire salesman to a current Children's Board staffer to a University of Kentucky professor — have applied for the job vacated by Luanne Panacek, who resigned last year amid questions about how the agency had been handling contracts, spending money and dealing with employees. Former Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio has been running the agency on an interim basis.

The list has some familiar names in government circles: Don Dixon, a former Children's Board executive who works for Hillsborough County; Jim Farrelly, executive director of the Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando; and Steven Van Gorden, a former Zephyrhills mayor who resigned as Zephyrhills High School principal last year amid allegations of sexual harassment. Other applicants include Joanne Lighter, former president of The Spring of Tampa Bay, a domestic violence shelter.

A search firm is whittling the list down to about a dozen, and the Children Board's directors are scheduled to meet March 6 to select five finalists.

Officials expect the board to approve a contract with their top pick on April 5.

*[Last modified: Wednesday, February 20, 2013 11:07pm]*

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## **Tampa Bay Times: Report: Florida students out-gain peers in other large states**

Lisa Gartner, Times Staff Writer

Thursday, February 21, 2013 12:00pm

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/testing/report-florida-students-out-gain-peers-in-other-large-states/1276044>

A first-time report released Thursday on the nation's five most heavily populated states, or "megastates," shows that Florida students made some of the most significant gains over 19 years on closely-watched federal tests.

Of these large, diverse states, only Florida saw its fourth-graders come from behind to surpass the national average in reading. A 16-point gain on the 500-point National Assessment of Educational Progress — often nicknamed "The Nation's Report Card" — brought Florida's fourth-graders from well below the national average to just above.

"I am fairly confident in saying there is something real going on there," said Jack Buckley, commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics.

Florida's eighth-graders, alone among their megastates peers, showed a statistically significant improvement on the reading test. Climbing eight points, they now meet the national average.

In math, Florida was the only one of the five states to see its fourth-graders claim larger gains since 1992 than the rest of the nation. Florida eighth-graders also improved their math scores, although they still fell short of the national average.

The report, produced by the U.S. Department of Education, compared Florida with California, Illinois, New York and Texas. Combined, the five megastates enroll nearly 40 percent of the nation's public school students and are home to almost one-third of the nation's public schools.

Beyond their size, the five states are the prime caterers to student groups educators are struggling to reach. The megastates serve more than half of the country's English language learners, and about half of each state's students qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch, an indicator of poverty.

For these reasons and many more, megastates often do not beat the country on the Nation's Report Card. In addition to math, Florida's eighth-grade students fell short on the science exam.

That makes Florida's 16-point jump in fourth-grade reading even more notable.

Buckley said he was "skeptical" of anyone who ventured to link these scores to policy decisions. But that hasn't stopped Florida's policymakers from doing so.

In a statement, Education Commissioner Tony Bennett pointed to the state's third-grade reading retention policies and A-F school grades as two causes of the growth.



"While there may not be a strict causal relationship between these actions and Florida's steady improvement, we cannot ignore that prospect," Bennett said.

Critics of Florida's education reforms have typically credited smaller class sizes for performance increases.

Thursday's megastates report uses data running from 1992 to 2011. The 2011 results were first released for all states in November of 2011, revealing that Florida had "plateaued," according to a statement from former Gov. Jeb Bush. For the second testing cycle in a row, Florida's math and reading scores were mostly flat after a decade-long climb.

*Staff Writer Cara Fitzpatrick contributed to this report. Contact Lisa Gartner at [lgartner@tampabay.com](mailto:lgartner@tampabay.com). You can also follow her on Twitter (@lisagartner).*

*Report: Florida students out-gain peers in other large states 02/21/13 [Last modified: Thursday, February 21, 2013 12:00pm]*

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*Carrera Website: St. Petersburg, FL City Council Honors Dr. Carrera*



*"[Dr. Carrera's] strategy of creating a nurturing and supportive environment for at-risk children, whom he sees as 'at-promise children,' has been successful in preventing teen pregnancies as well as preventing young people from dropping out of school."*

February 15, 2013

The St. Petersburg, Florida City Council presented Dr. Carrera with a key to the city in honor of his lifetime work to eradicate adolescent pregnancy. Dr. Carrera spoke to an audience of over 150 educators, doctors, nurses, social workers, and others who are interested in learning more about CAS-Carrera's unique, holistic approach to preventing teen pregnancy.

The Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County is partnering with the Pinellas County Health Department to replicate Florida's only CAS-Carrera site, based at Johns Hopkins Middle School.

The program begins its work with students in middle school and follows them through high school graduation and college completion.

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### **TBN Weekly Newspapers: Pregnancy prevention pioneer visits Pinellas**

Article published on Friday, Feb. 15, 2013

[http://www.tbnweekly.com/editorial/health\\_news/content\\_articles/021513\\_hth-04.txt](http://www.tbnweekly.com/editorial/health_news/content_articles/021513_hth-04.txt)

ST. PETERSBURG - Dr. Michael A. Carrera, a visionary in the field of adolescent pregnancy prevention, is visiting St. Petersburg. He was recognized at the Feb. 14 St. Petersburg City Council meeting and he will speak at All Children's Hospital on Feb. 15.

The Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention began in New York more than 25 years ago as part of the citywide Children's Aid Society.

The local program at the Pinellas County Health Department replicates his nationally recognized program that is now in 20 states throughout the nation. The Pinellas program is the only one in Florida.

Carrera is the Thomas Hunter Professor Emeritus of Health Sciences at Hunter College of the City University of New York and Adjunct Professor of Community Medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York.

Since 1970, Carrera has directed the Adolescent Sexuality and Pregnancy Prevention Programs for The Children's Aid Society in New York. He is serving as vice president and director of Adolescent Services at the Children's Aid Society in New York.

Carrera's program works with a selected group of middle-school students and provides them with cultural, physical and educational opportunities until they reach college age. His strategy of creating a nurturing and supportive environment for at-risk children, whom he sees as "at-promise children," has been successful in preventing teen pregnancies as well as preventing young people from dropping out of school.

Many of Dr. Carrera's program graduates have pursued college careers in a variety of fields.

The Pinellas County Health Department's Carrera program is funded by the federal Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) Teen Pregnancy Prevention Grant through the Juvenile Welfare Board and the Children's Services Council of Pinellas County. The program is implemented locally by the Pinellas County Health Department and is based at John Hopkins Middle School in St. Petersburg.

*For more information on the program, visit [www.stopteenpregnancy.childrensaidsociety.org](http://www.stopteenpregnancy.childrensaidsociety.org).*

*For information about the Pinellas County Health Department, visit [PinellasHealth.com](http://PinellasHealth.com).*

*Article published on Friday, Feb. 15, 2013*

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**Tampa Bay Times: GRADEBOOK: Pinellas school board examines mental health services**

Lisa Gartner, Times Staff Writer

Thursday, February 21, 2013 10:32am

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/pinellas-school-board-examines-mental-health-services/2106258>

After the shooting in Newtown, Conn., there's hardly a school district that hasn't asked itself: Are we doing enough to keep children safe? Pinellas school psychologists and social workers wish they had more time to counsel students with potential mental health issues, student services executive director Donna Sicilian told the school board Thursday morning. But she also pointed to dozens of community organizations that are stepping up to provide those services and fill these gaps. In the end, she didn't call for an overhaul of the school system's mental health services.

Instead, Sicilian told the board, her staff would meet with more outside agencies and consider providing counseling to students before and after school rather than during class; often students who need counseling also are struggling academically, and she was hesitant to keep pulling them out of class.

The district doesn't have enough money to put a full-time social worker and psychologist in each school. But Sicilian said a tiered staffing model generally makes sure that schools with the need for these counselors get them. For social workers, the school system examines the number of English-language learners and the proportion of students living in poverty, as well as special-needs like autism. When staffing psychologists, administrators tend to focus on FCAT scores, because mental health issues are sometimes associated with testing stresses.

"What that results in is sort of a ranking of schools based on their assumed need," Sicilian said. Still, she acknowledged that oftentimes psychologists and social workers get bogged down in academic counseling and paperwork. "You came into the field saying 'I want to work with kids, I want to counsel kids.' You probably didn't come into the field saying you wanted to work on reports."

About 30 outside agencies currently offer mental health services to Pinellas students, with about seven specifically focused on counseling. Sicilian said these therapists often use school-time for visits, but she wants to look at before and after school time to avoid pulling students out of class.

School board member Rene Flowers said she wanted staff to be mindful that sometimes very smart, high-performing children are struggling with mental issues. She also wanted to make sure

**teachers were not dismissing students who acted out as simply unruly. "It's not disobedience. It's far more than that,"** Flowers said.

Robin Wikle, also on the school board, called the briefing "educational" and praised staff for being "preventative" rather than reactive. "Research shows most criminal activity starts with a childhood trauma," she said. "There's research on that."

The school board may pick up the discussion at a future meeting, but did not make specific plans to continue the talk.

[Last modified: Thursday, February 21, 2013 11:29am]

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### **TBN Weekly Newspapers: Welch closes door on JWB job**

By SUZETTE PORTER

Article published on Sunday, Feb. 24, 2013

[http://www.tbnweekly.com/pinellas\\_county/content\\_articles/022413\\_pco-01.txt](http://www.tbnweekly.com/pinellas_county/content_articles/022413_pco-01.txt)

When Ken Welch applied for the job as executive director for the Juvenile Welfare Board, he didn't consider that act might become a point of partisan bickering and political speculation.

The longtime Pinellas County Commissioner explained in a Feb. 22 interview that he only agreed to apply after members of the JWB Board of Directors and others urged him to do so.

"First of all, JWB was not on my radar until after January," he said, countering media speculation on his motives.

Several board members approached him because they believed JWB would benefit from Welch's leadership due to his political savvy, which he said was one of the qualifications listed on the job application.

JWB will be asking residents to approve a referendum in 2016 that will help maintain and expand services to poor and working class families and at-risk children in Pinellas. The board is looking for someone that can help push that cause forward.

Welch said he did not apply until after JWB extended the application period. He said he studied the matter and felt his qualifications were a good match for the job. Welch served on the JWB board for six years including a stint as chair of the finance and audit committee.

"I didn't expect this to become a political and partisan issue," he said.

But after receiving a phone call from state Sen. Jack Latvala and enduring criticism from some in the Republican Party and the media, Welch, who is one of three Democrats on the county commission, decided his leadership would not be best for JWB and its future.

“JWB’s mission is far too important,” he said. “I pulled my name from the applicants.”

In a letter to the JWB board, he thanked them for the support he received since applying for the job as executive director.

Welch wrote, “I believe my skills, knowledge and experience would serve the JWB organization well.

“Since applying for the position, however, it has become obvious that in the minds of some, my political persona overshadows all other aspects of my business, managerial and professional experience – including 14 years of progressive and diverse experience with Fortune 500 companies and six years on the JWB board.”

While disappointed, Welch said he is at peace with his decision. But, it is obvious that he was very interested in the possibility of leading JWB after longtime executive director Gay Lancaster leaves in June.

He called the job a “unique situation,” adding that in his view a community’s “most valuable investment is in our children.” Money spent helping a child is a better buy than funding jails, legal systems and health and human services, he said.

In some ways, the JWB job would have been going back to his start toward public service. Welch ran for school board in 1998 and was defeated in a run-off election by Republican and former county commissioner Nancy Bostock. Welch comes from a family of educators. His dad and siblings are teachers and principals.

“I really believe in the importance of education,” he said.

JWB plays an instrumental part in helping underprivileged kids get ready for school. Welch said serving on the JWB board made him aware of the importance of its mission. Serving as chair of the finance committee brought him in tune with the financial challenges.

Welch is one of four commissioners facing lawsuits challenging the legality of their service due to a 1996 term limits referendum that was ultimately found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The court overturned its 2002 decision in May of 2012.

If the plaintiffs win, Welch, as well as Commissioners Susan Latvala, John Morroni and Karen Seel could be removed from office or barred from running for reelection in the future.

Welch said the lawsuit had some impact on his decision to apply for the JWB job.

“But term limits was not the driving factor,” he said. “It was my past experience with JWB and my passion for youth services and education – big issues that we face as a county.”

Welch still has documents from his time on the JWB board. He reviewed those documents, as well as the organization’s strategic plan.

“There were so many synergies with what the county is doing, especially the Healthy Community Initiatives,” he said.

In fact, the five areas the county targeted – East Tarpon Springs, North Greenwood, Highpoint, Lealman Corridor and South St. Petersburg - are the same as JWB’s.

Welch said if you added his private sector experience to his belief in the mission, the job was a “good fit.” He regrets that partisan politics stood in his way, especially since the former Republican has friends in both parties.

“It’s a shame I couldn’t get to the point where they could judge me on my qualifications,” he said.

Welch, who serves as chair of the county commission this year, also weathered some criticism for perceived willingness to leave county government.

“I remain focused on the commission,” he said, adding that his intent was never to leave before the end of the year, even though JWB needs a new executive director by June.

Following his path

Welch never intended to have a career as an elected official. Things just fell into place.

After his defeat in the school board election, Sen. Latvala asked if he would be interested in serving on the St. Pete College Board of Trustees, a position that required Senate confirmation. Soon after, Pinellas County voters approved adding two single member districts to the county commission, including one in St. Petersburg, Welch’s hometown, “where I rode my bike as a kid,” he said.

He successfully ran for office and, at the time, only intended to serve one term.

“But as I got into my shoes and got projects going, I ran again,” he said.

The rest is history.

Welch confessed that even before lawsuits were filed that put his service to the county in jeopardy, he had decided not to run again.

“Four terms is enough,” he said.

Welch, the only African-American on the commission, has long been an advocate of the homeless and those less fortunate. He has worked to push the county toward new technology. He believes in a progressive Pinellas.

He said the county has become more partisan in recent years, as evidenced by the attempts to block social action funding, affordable housing and transit. He said one local group had gone so far as to post on its website, “our mission is to stop Ken Welch.”

Despite the controversy and uncertainty, Welch remains committed to his job.

“I want to continue the fight for housing, transit and services we need as a community,” he said.

He is encouraged to be one of three Democrats on the commission. For the first time ever, two Republicans lost their seats on the commission in the last election.

“We used to be progressive Pinellas and we’re going back to that now,” he said.

When asked about media reports that he has long intended to run for mayor of St. Petersburg, he admitted he is interested, but said it wasn’t necessarily a life-long dream.

“To be mayor of my hometown and have the opportunity to move the city forward is something I’d like to consider, but I’ll wait for 2017 and see,” he said. “It depends on who wins (in August). (Former state Rep. Rick) Kriseman is a good friend.”

For now, Welch plans to focus on commission business, transportation and emergency medical services among others. He said he is ready for the challenges.

And, if need be, the 47-year-old father of two can always go back to the private sector where he can put his more than 14 years of experience in accounting and technology skills to work. In addition, he’s been working on some business models for his family’s business – taxes and accounting.

“That’s dad’s business. He’s 85 now,” Welch said.

Welch isn’t overly worried about his future. He knows when one door closes, another opens.

“We never know what God has in store for us,” he said. “I’m at perfect peace with this. It happened for a reason.”

*Article published on Sunday, Feb. 24, 2013*

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## **Tampa Tribune: 211 line up to be Children's Board chief**

By STEVE OTTO| The Tampa Tribune

Published: February 25, 2013

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/breaking-news/2013/feb/25/otto-211-line-up-to-be-childrens-board-chief-ar-642620/>

A week from Wednesday the search firm hired by the Children's Board of Hillsborough County will show up at a board meeting and present about 10 to 12 candidates for the position of executive director.

Out of that, board members will be asked to come up with five finalists.

You might have heard that jobs are scarce and you might not think it necessary to hire a head hunter to round up candidates for a job that paid its last director \$164,000 plus expenses. Silly you.

The board shelled out \$24,000 and came up with a list of 211 candidates. I won't toss out any names that might doom them from consideration.

But the candidates include a bank vice president, an Army officer, the assistant manager of a "Stuff Shop," a manager from Tire Kingdom, someone from the Junior League, an analyst from the Iowa National Guard, a congressional aide, an officer from Central Command, a Post Office plant manager, an assistant manager of a Red Robin restaurant, a Target store team leader, a director from "Way Off Broadway," and an Illinois prison warden.

You might save the date March 25, when there will be a community reception for the five finalists from 4-6 p.m. I hope the board will have its candidate by April to allow interim director and former Mayor Pam Iorio to get on with the business of being available to run for governor.

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## **Tampa Bay Times: James Sanderlin inducted into Florida Civil Rights Hall of Fame**

Times staff

Thursday, February 28, 2013 7:22pm

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/humaninterest/james-sanderlin-inducted-into-florida-civil-rights-hall-of-fame/1276993>

As a young lawyer, James B. Sanderlin led school desegregation efforts in Pinellas County and established himself as a local civil rights giant. Later, he became the county's first African-American judge.



On Thursday, Gov. Rick Scott selected Sanderlin to be inducted into the Florida Civil Rights Hall of Fame. A renowned leader of local civil rights efforts, Sanderlin was among three people chosen for induction in the Hall of Fame from a list of 10 nominees.

"As Florida marks its five hundred year anniversary, we want to honor individuals who have stood for equality in our state's history, even in the face of adversity," Scott said in a news release. "These champions of freedom have paved the way for equal rights among all Floridians."

More than 20 years after his death, Sanderlin's legacy is still seen in St. Petersburg and Pinellas County.

A native of Petersburg, Va., he came to Pinellas County in 1962, forgoing a career as a lawyer in the nation's capital in order to help spur the area's budding civil rights movement.

He sued the Pinellas County School Board to bring an end to separate schools based on race. The effort led to a federal desegregation order.

He also represented the city's sanitation workers, most of whom were black, in a bid to bring them equal pay. And he sued the city on behalf of 12 black police officers so that they could earn professional advancement by patrolling the entire city rather than just black neighborhoods.

In 1972, Sanderlin was elected Pinellas County's first black judge. In 1985, Gov. Bob Graham appointed him as the first black judge to sit on the 2nd District Court of Appeal.

*[Last modified: Thursday, February 28, 2013 10:09pm]*

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### **Tampa Bay Times: Agriculture commissioner touts schools' free breakfast**

Meredith Rutland, Times Staff Writer

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/agriculture-commissioner-tauts-schools-free-breakfast/1276901>

Thursday, February 28, 2013 11:08am

ST. PETERSBURG — Empty stomachs lead to low test scores.

That's the point Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam and other officials emphasized Thursday as they celebrated Pinellas County Schools' breakfast initiative.

The school system recently made breakfast free for all students.

Food services director Art Dunham said the idea was to put everyone on the same level so kids who were on free and reduced lunch wouldn't feel like the poor kids.

Putnam said Thursday that the strategy has worked. In the past year, the number of kids who eat breakfast at school has gone from 16,000 to 25,000.

"Your mom, your grandmother: They're all right," Putnam said at Bay Point Elementary School on Thursday. "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

Putnam greeted children as they hopped off their yellow buses and lined up at an outdoor breakfast cart.

The commissioner bent down to say hello to a waist-high youngling with a too-big Dora the Explorer backpack.

He held out two pouches of juice to another girl. Apple or orange? She chose the citrus.

Putnam said he chose to tout Bay Point Elementary School's breakfast program at the Thursday news conference because they have found innovative ways to make food available and to make kids want to eat it — which he said can be a battle all its own.

Felita Grant-Lott, Bay Point Elementary principal, said this year the school has gone from 100 kids eating school breakfast to more than 200. She said the school has several initiatives, including the "grab-and-go" cart, which holds fresh fruit, juices and snacks like Pop-Tarts.

"We want our kids to be nourished and ready to learn," she said.

*[Last modified: Thursday, February 28, 2013 10:37pm]*  
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