



## NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2024 ISSUE NO. 1

Welcome...



... to Public Education Network, Sarasota! We are thrilled to have you join us in our shared mission to create a unified advocacy network that amplifies the voices of Sarasota's residents. By becoming a member of our organization, you are stepping into a powerful movement dedicated to informing, engaging, and empowering our community to actively shape the future of public education in Sarasota County.

Our mission is clear and vital: to ensure that every individual and organization in our community has the tools, knowledge, and support they need to make their voices heard. Together, we will work to foster a vibrant, inclusive dialogue that reflects the diverse perspectives and aspirations of Sarasota's residents. Through your participation, we can strengthen our collective impact and advocate for the educational policies and practices that will best serve our children and future generations.

As a new member, you bring unique insights and energy that are invaluable to our efforts. Whether you are here to learn more about local education issues, engage in meaningful advocacy, or collaborate with like-minded individuals and organizations, we are here to support you every step of the way. We encourage you to take full advantage of the resources, events, and opportunities for involvement that our organization offers.

Through our newsletter, social media, and website, you will receive information about how you can get involved, upcoming events, and ways to connect with other members of our community. We believe that your voice is a crucial part of the conversation, and we are excited to see the impact you will make as part of our network.

Thank you for joining us in this important work. Together, we will ensure that the voices of Sarasota's residents are heard loud and clear, shaping a bright and equitable future for public education in our county.

Warm regards,

Theoni Soublis, Ph.D  
Public Education Network, chair  
[theoni@pensarasota.org](mailto:theoni@pensarasota.org)

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# PEN – SARASOTA RECEIVES START-UP GRANT

## GULF COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Arthur E. and Audre B. Smith  
Charitable Fund

PEN – Sarasota is honored to announce it has recently received an \$8000 grant for advocacy work related to the upcoming 2024 Millage Referendum.

The letter is from Hollie Mowry, Community Leadersip Associate, Community Leadership Associate at the Gulf Coast Community Foundation.

Dear Theoni,

I am pleased to inform you that Gulf Coast has approved a grant to Public Education Network Sarasota in the amount of \$8,000 which is designated to be used for advocacy costs in support of Millage Referendum for Sarasota County Schools. This grant is made possible through the **Gulf Coast Community Foundation Fund** and the **Arthur E. and Audre B. Smith Charitable Fund**, which is a donor-established legacy endowment.

At Gulf Coast, we hold ourselves to the highest standard of excellence, accountability, and impact by voluntarily seeking accreditation by the Community Foundations National Standards Board. Through this process, we have updated our grant award communication to ensure we are following best practices for community foundations and in compliance with all IRS regulations...

We wish you every success in accomplishing the goals of this project and look forward to celebrating your progress.

Kind Regards,

**Hollie Mowry**

**Community Leadership Associate**

**Gulf Coast Community Foundation**

**OUR PARTNERS**



**JOIN US & SEE  
 YOUR NAME HERE**



**JOIN US & SEE  
 YOUR NAME HERE**

To learn more about becoming a PEN-Sarasota partner, contact us at [INFO@pensarasota.org](mailto:INFO@pensarasota.org)



is on

## *the Web and Social Media*



**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/publiceducationnetworksarasota](http://www.facebook.com/publiceducationnetworksarasota)

**Instagram:** [www.instagram.com/pen.sarasota/](http://www.instagram.com/pen.sarasota/)

**Web Site:** <https://pensarasota.org>

**OUR WEB SITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER:** *Anushka Nair is an artist, writer, and graduate of Ringling College of Art + Design ('22). She's known for her work in the Games & Animation industries, notably Blizzard Entertainment, and is a Student Academy Award finalist and SIGGRAPH winner. Additionally, she has contributed to social media initiatives for the celebrated nonprofit, Asian Queens in Animation.*



# REFERENDUM NEWS

## “Charting Success in Sarasota County Schools in 2024-2025”



Superintendent of Sarasota Schools Terry Connor discusses the significant impact of referendum funding on crucial initiatives dedicated to supporting student academic excellence. He will share how these funds have been strategically utilized to enhance educational programs, improve school infrastructure, and provide essential resources, ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed.

**September 19, 2024 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm**

**Selby Library 1331 First St. Sarasota, FL 34236**

Registration recommended to attend in-person event at Selby Library. Register at [lwvsrq.org](http://lwvsrq.org) or [https://lwvsrq.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=4008&club\\_id=324628&item\\_id=2332687](https://lwvsrq.org/content.aspx?page_id=4008&club_id=324628&item_id=2332687)

Speaker: Terry Connor, Superintendent of Sarasota Schools

### Speaker Bio:

Superintendent Terry Connor has spent his entire educational career serving students & families in the Sunshine State. Drawn to cultivating educational excellence in himself and others from an early age, he earned his Bachelor of Arts in Middle Grades Education from the University of North Florida, and his Master of Administration & Management from Nova Southeastern University. Superintendent Connor holds a number of educational certifications, including Educational Leadership (All Levels). Highly regarded for his conscientious and uplifting leadership style, Superintendent Connor is committed to reducing the achievement gap, leveraging resources to drive innovations in teaching & learning, and keeping student success at the forefront of Sarasota County Schools' goals and decisions. Every Student. Every Day!

Registration recommended to attend in-person event at Selby Library. Register at [lwvsrq.org](http://lwvsrq.org) or [https://lwvsrq.org/content.aspx?page\\_id=4008&club\\_id=324628&item\\_id=2332687](https://lwvsrq.org/content.aspx?page_id=4008&club_id=324628&item_id=2332687)

The presentation will be livestreamed, recorded and later posted to YouTube

# Referendum Community Forums – When and Where

ATTEND A COMMUNITY FORUM TO LEARN HOW SARASOTA’S STUDENTS WILL BENEFIT FROM THE 1MILL REFERENDUM

**AUGUST 29, 2024 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

## **VENICE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

1 Indian Ave building 5, Venice, FL 34285  
Located in Venice High School

**SEPTEMBER 10, 2024 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

## **PINE VIEW AUDITORIUM**

1 Python Path, Osprey, FL 34229  
Located in Pine View School

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2024 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

## **RIVERVIEW PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

1 Ram Way, Sarasota FL 34231  
Located in Riverview High School

**SEPTEMBER 17, 2024 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

## **SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOLS BOARD CHAMBERS**

1980 Landings Blvd, Sarasota 34231  
(black awning building)

**SEPTEMBER 18, 2024 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

## **NORTH PORT PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

6400 West Price Blvd, North Port FL 34291  
(located at North Port High School)

**OCTOBER 8, 2024 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

## **SARASOTA HIGH SCHOOL THEATER**

1000 S. School Ave FL 34237

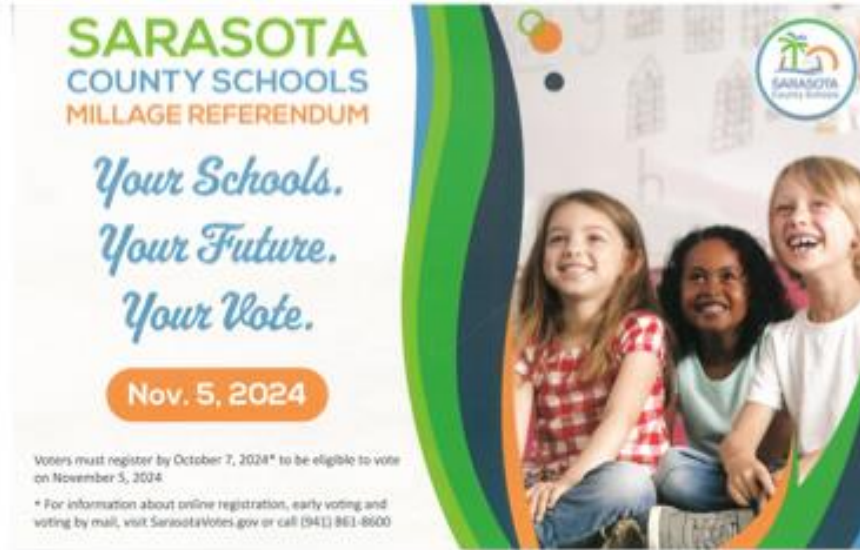
**OCTOBER 10, 2024 6:00 PM – 7:00 PM**

## **BOOKER VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS CENTER**

3201 N. Orange Ave, Sarasota FL 34234  
(located in Booker High School)

## PEN-SARASOTA'S CURRENT INITIATIVES

We're working hard to Get Out the Vote. We're also distributing this card (front and back shown here) so voters will know about the Millage Referendum and how the district will use these critical funds to benefit students throughout the district.

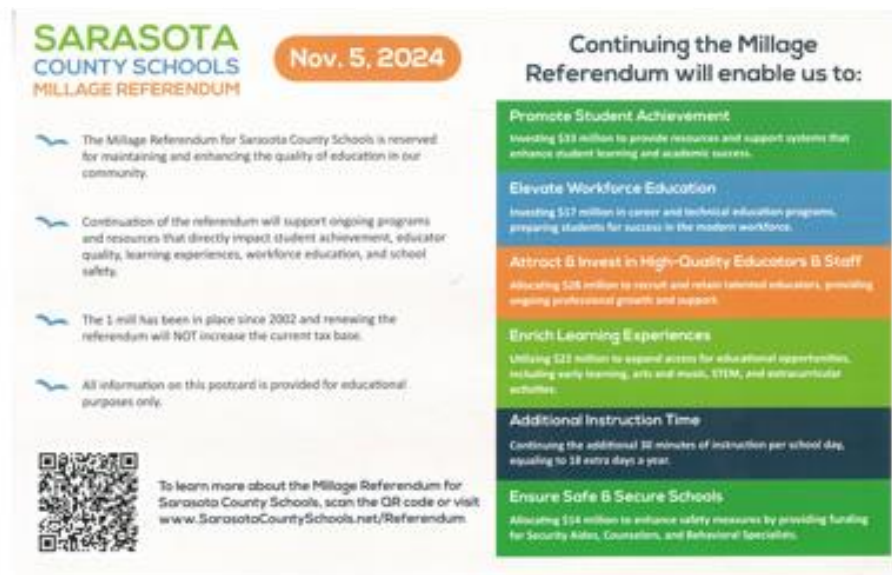


**SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOLS**  
MILLAGE REFERENDUM

*Your Schools.  
Your Future.  
Your Vote.*

**Nov. 5, 2024**

Voters must register by October 7, 2024\* to be eligible to vote on November 5, 2024.  
\* For information about online registration, early voting and voting by mail, visit [SarasotaVotes.gov](https://SarasotaVotes.gov) or call (941) 861-8600



**SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOLS**  
MILLAGE REFERENDUM

**Nov. 5, 2024**

Continuing the Millage Referendum will enable us to:

- Promote Student Achievement**  
Investing \$33 million to provide resources and support systems that enhance student learning and academic success.
- Elevate Workforce Education**  
Investing \$17 million in career and technical education programs, preparing students for success in the modern workforce.
- Attract & Invest in High-Quality Educators & Staff**  
Allocating \$26 million to recruit and retain talented educators, providing ongoing professional growth and support.
- Enrich Learning Experiences**  
Utilizing \$22 million to expand access for educational opportunities, including early learning, arts and music, STEM, and extracurricular activities.
- Additional Instruction Time**  
Continuing the additional 30 minutes of instruction per school day, equating to 18 extra days a year.
- Ensure Safe & Secure Schools**  
Allocating \$14 million to enhance safety measures by providing funding for Security Aides, Counselors, and Behavioral Specialists.

The Millage Referendum for Sarasota County Schools is reserved for maintaining and enhancing the quality of education in our community.

Continuation of the referendum will support ongoing programs and resources that directly impact student achievement, educator quality, learning experiences, workforce education, and school safety.

The 1 mill has been in place since 2002 and renewing the referendum will NOT increase the current tax base.

All information on this postcard is provided for educational purposes only.

To learn more about the Millage Referendum for Sarasota County Schools, scan the QR code or visit [www.SarasotaCountySchools.net/Referendum](https://www.SarasotaCountySchools.net/Referendum)

IF YOU WANT CARDS TO DISTRIBUTE CONTACT US AT: [jill@pensarasota.org](mailto:jill@pensarasota.org)



Please see inside to understand the effects your choice will have on:

- The future of public education in Florida.
- Who can vote in future school board elections.

#### Anticipated Ballot Language:

*“Proposing amendments to the State Constitution to require members of a district school board to be elected in a partisan election rather than a nonpartisan election and to specify that the amendment only applies to elections held on or after the November 2026 general election. However, partisan primary elections may occur before the 2026 general election for purposes of nominating political party candidates to that office for placement on the 2026 general election ballot.”*



**ELECTION DAY IS  
NOVEMBER 5, 2024**  
**EARLY VOTING BEGINS  
OCTOBER 21 THROUGH  
NOVEMBER 2, 2024\***

\*CHECK DATES & LOCATIONS IN YOUR COUNTY



#### About the League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters was founded more than 100 years ago to educate voters and to defend democracy. The League is non-partisan and does not endorse or oppose any candidate for public office. However, after in-depth research, the League does take positions on issues of importance to voters.

In November of 2024, Floridians will vote on a far-reaching constitutional amendment to require partisan school board elections. The League of Women Voters of Florida urges voters to carefully consider the issues outlined in this brochure.

**After careful study, the League recommends a “NO” vote to keep school boards non-partisan.**

For more detailed information, use the QR code below to read the LWVFL’s white paper on partisan school board elections:



SCAN ME

[lwvfl.org](http://lwvfl.org)

**In November 2024, Florida voters will answer this question on a ballot referendum to amend the Florida Constitution:**

**SHOULD SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS IN FLORIDA BECOME PARTISAN, OR SHOULD THEY REMAIN NON-PARTISAN?**



#### **YOUR VOTE IS YOUR VOICE.**

Which do you think will be better for public education?

Your choice will have long-term effects for students, parents, and educational professionals.

## TRIFOLD ON AMENDMENT 1 TO SHARE Front (top) & Back (below)

#### Who can vote in nonpartisan school board elections now?

Local school board elections in Florida are currently nonpartisan. All registered voters regardless of party can vote in the primary and general election for the candidates of their choice.

#### What’s new for voters on the November 2024 ballot?

Floridians will vote on **Amendment 1** to the State Constitution. This would require district school board elections to be **partisan**. If passed by 60% of the voters, future ballots would list each candidate’s political party. This would make school board elections part of Florida’s **closed** primary system.

#### How will Amendment 1 change who can vote in school board elections?

- In a **closed** primary, only voters registered with a political party can vote for candidates of that party.
- Voters registered as No Party Affiliates (NPAs) or with minor parties, by law, cannot vote in a closed primary election. This excludes 30% of Florida’s voters.
- If only one party has candidates, the primary would be open to all voters. This is called a **Universal Primary Contest (UPC)**.
- **BUT** Florida’s **write-in loophole** provides a way to close the UPC primary. A write-in candidate specifies no party affiliation and runs only in the general election. The write-in candidate often doesn’t even campaign.
- **Yet the write-in candidate loophole gives voting rights only to members of the party holding the primary.** Over 8 million voters were excluded from voting in Florida primaries as a result of the **write-in loophole** from 1998-2022.

#### Arguments for school boards to remain nonpartisan (A “NO” vote on Amendment 1):

**\*All registered voters, regardless of party affiliation can vote in nonpartisan elections.** Nearly 4,000,000 NPA voters in Florida would be excluded from voting for school board candidates in primaries if school board elections become partisan. In some circumstances, only voters of one party would have a say in selecting candidates.

**\*Nonpartisan boards may have more incentives for collaboration and compromise.** An effective school board requires collaboration and compromise for the greater good of the district and its students. Partisan members may make decisions based on the ‘party line’ and could increase political polarization, resulting in problems not solved and needs not met.

**\*Nonpartisan elections maintain local control.** Partisan candidates may support their party’s agenda rather than using first-hand knowledge and experience of the local district’s needs, issues, and best interests to provide the appropriate guidance and leadership.

**\*Nonpartisanship promotes a school community with diverse perspectives and experiences.** Partisan elections may create a politically charged school environment. This may reduce applications from potentially exemplary board members, highly qualified teachers, effective school administrators, and community volunteers.

**DID YOU KNOW?** New legislation passed in 2023 permits candidates from outside your county to run for your local school board. They need to move only if elected. Non-resident partisan candidates may be unfamiliar with your local district and may choose to focus more on a narrow political agenda than on local needs.

#### Arguments for school boards to become partisan (A “YES” vote on Amendment 1):

**\*Partisan school boards may contribute to transparency.** A candidate’s party affiliation may predict how they will vote on controversial school board issues.

**\*Partisan school boards are a logical outgrowth of the politicization of education.** Since public education in Florida has become politicized with ideological differences reflected in new legislation, most school board elections have already become partisan.

**\*Partisan school boards will align with other partisan races.** Other local offices such as county commissioners and sheriffs are already partisan. School board races should be no different.

**References:**  
<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/31/ByVersion>  
<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/31/ByVersion>  
[https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/FileStores/Web/HouseContent/Approved/Web%20Site/education/fact\\_sheets/2011/documents/2010-11%20Florida%20District%20School%20Boards\\_3b.pdf](https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/FileStores/Web/HouseContent/Approved/Web%20Site/education/fact_sheets/2011/documents/2010-11%20Florida%20District%20School%20Boards_3b.pdf)  
[https://ballotpedia.org/Florida\\_Ballot\\_Access\\_Public\\_Campaign\\_Finance\\_and\\_Election\\_Process\\_Revisions\\_Amendment\\_11\\_\(1998\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Florida_Ballot_Access_Public_Campaign_Finance_and_Election_Process_Revisions_Amendment_11_(1998))  
<https://dos.myflorida.com/elections/data-statistics/voter-registration-statistics/voter-registration-reports/voter-registration-by-party-affiliation>





## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEN-SARASOTA PARTNERS

PEN-Sarasota Board Member Katrina Ward has been selected to attend a national public education advocacy and organizing retreat, hosted by Partnership for Equity and Education Rights (PEER) from November 13 through



November 15 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. PEER is a national network of organizers, advocates, lawyers and community leaders focused on reinvestment in public education. Provided in partnership with Families for Strong Public Schools, the retreat will include training in the areas of grassroots engagement, strengthening coalitions, and lifting up leadership from local communities. These powerful training sessions will also provide participants with opportunities to share policy expertise and strategies that are being successfully implemented across the country to advance innovative solutions for equity

and education rights and increased school funding for public schools.

**From PEER:**

**Every child deserves an education that helps them reach their full potential, no matter their race or the community they live in.**



**PEN-SARASOTA  
WISHES ALL STUDENTS,  
TEACHERS, AND STAFF  
A TERRIFIC SCHOOL YEAR  
2024-2025**



(left to right) Katrina Ward, Theoni Soublis, Nikki Rivera, Lisa Schurr, Jill Lewis-Spector, Nancy Swart, Pam Hart

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