



Children's Services Advisory Board Annual Retreat Meeting Summary

October 3, 2025

The Children's Services Advisory Board of Manatee County, Florida, annual retreat was held at the Lakewood Ranch Library, 16410 Rangeland Pkwy, Lakewood Ranch, Florida, on Friday, October 5, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL

CSAB Members Present:

Xtavia Bailey, Hon. Scott Brownell, Debbie Tapp, Laurie McCracken, Rita Smith, Jannon Pierce, Graham Ledger, Cassandra Mitchell, Connie Shingledecker, Heather Felton, Carolann Garafola; Absent/Excused: None; Absent/Unexcused: None

Also Present:

County Staff: Kristi Hagen, Melissa Bomar, Mark Dillon, Brenda Marquez Facio, Johanna Beville, Kendall Williams, Tracie Adams; Board of County Commissioners: Amanda Ballard; Members of the Public: Rachel Spivey, Michael Higley, Susan Ford, Melinda Thompson

WELCOME, ICE BREAKER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Kristi Hagen launched the retreat at 9 a.m. All staff, Board members, and Agency representatives introduced themselves for the benefit of new CSAB members joining for their first time. Mark Dillon facilitated an ice breaker activity for CSAB Members. At the conclusion of the ice breaker, Kristi reviewed the agenda and goals for the day.

PRIORITIES & TARGET DISCUSSIONS

CSAB Members were divided into four groups with a designated Member to help facilitate conversation. Staff were each assigned one of the four priorities and rotated every 15 to each group to discuss the priority/targets assigned. Detailed summaries from each priority/targets provided below

Priority A – Children are safe in their homes, free from abuse and neglect.

- Conversation on the importance of maintaining this priority
- Discussed concerns on the increase of Manatee County removals since the transition of Child Protection Investigators (CPIs) from the Sheriff's Office to Department of Children and Families.
- It was suggested as a potential consideration for future priority consideration (October 2028) to look at moving this under the umbrella of Health and Safety, currently Priority D.

Priority B – Children develop literacy skills necessary to be successful in school.

- Conversation on mental/behavioral health
- Cyberbullying and impact on youth
- Need for programs to specific, measurable targets to address behavioral health issues
 - Reduce cyberbullying
 - Manage substance use
 - Improve social-emotional regulation

Takeaways

1. Set clear and objective targets to measure success in addressing adverse behavioral indicators, substance use, aggression, and social-emotional skills
 - a. Aim to move the needle incrementally rather than complete resolution.
2. Growing issue - mental health challenges due to cyberbullying
 - a. Depression and anxiety (especially girls)
 - b. Statistics 88% of students recognize cyberbullying, 60% report it, 28% confirm they were victims.
3. Program accountability through quarterly reporting
 - a. Propose specific Results aligned with targets.
 - i. Reducing cyberbullying
 - ii. Teaching decision-making skills

Priority C – Children have the skills necessary to function appropriately in all environments.

- Most programs that select this work to reduce summer slide, increase literacy and reading levels (reduce reading gap)
- They must have measurable results
 - Objective verification
 - Program participants succeeding faster or at higher levels than others in their school
- Best partner options for gaining data on overall program success in this priority area
 - ELC for pre-kindergarten
 - Scoring Ready for Kindergarten
 - School District
 - State scores
- Discussed the issue of programs claiming this priority
 - Need staff training for selected curriculum
 - Need objective verification
 - Pre and post assessments

Takeaways

1. Meet with school district regarding program success (Focus)
2. For programs that are not achieving the priority/target based on data from the school district on served clients
 - a. County will purchase a curriculum, recommended by the school district, and share license with program (if possible)
 - b. Training session on how to implement use of the curriculum
 - c. There will be a probationary period
 - i. Still not successful, reconsider the program

Priority D – Parents and caregivers have the skills and resources needed to stop preventable child death.

- Sleep-related
 - Priority component focused on unsafe sleep seems to be working
 - For 2024 there were 5 deaths
 - To date (Oct 3, 2025) only one unsafe sleep related death
 - Increased concern for middle-class Parish area
 - Concern for incorrect information provided via social media
 - Need to continue parent education in all areas to supersede outdated information
 - Include grandparents, aunts/uncles, babysitters
 - Consider generational gaps in knowledge “that’s how we did it when...”
 - Continuing trainings
 - Train the trainer (home visiting and infant programs)
 - First responders
 - Hospitals and pediatrician offices
 - Babysitters
- Drowning prevention
 - Water safety initiatives
 - Door/window alarms
 - Water surface alarms
 - Bigger push in Spring 2026
 - Spring Break
 - Swim season
 - Consider partnerships with preschools and programs serving preschool children
 - Looking for programs to provide realistic, well-coordinated partnerships with preschools and community centers
 - Program that partners with school district children (Sarasota)
 - Pilot programs may be considered
- Other components to consider
 - Pedestrian education for young children
 - Community outreach campaign for water safety

INSTRUCTIONAL UPDATES – MANATEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Presented by Derek Jensen, Deputy Superintendent of Instruction
 - History of letter grades
 - Reviewed scores in various areas which provides the overall district grade (B for 2024-25)
 - Summer program success – attention on 3rd grade students
 - Importance of proper training for teachers
 - Highlighted next steps

APPLICATION SCORING REVIEW AND CONVERSATION

Members and staff reviewed the review and scoring process for new members and explained the guidance and the matrix. Members reviewed and discussed some of the application questions where scoring was significantly varied. It was determined that some of the guidance isn’t written very well/clear. The subcommittee will be reconvened prior to the next regular meeting to review the guidance and provide recommended edits. The recommended changes

will focus on guidance, not the questions.

Regarding scoring, members discussed whether bonus points would be awarded for programs that participate in and utilize Unite Us or if they would be a part of the 100 points. The recommendation that will be presented at the next regular meeting will be to reduce the number of points in another area and provide a small number of points to those participating in and using Unite Us. A recommendation will be provided on how many points Unite Us will count towards.

When application review meetings begin, CSAB members requested fewer applications for review in the first batches assigned.

It has been determined that a subcommittee should be convened to review the guidance and provide recommendations to clarify areas of that may need edits to help Children's Services Advisory Board members understand what is being considered.

DISCUSSION I – NEW REQUESTS VERSUS INCREASES

This conversation was brought forward to discuss whether there is a valid concern regarding considering new programs over the method used to consider increased recommendations. CSAB members quickly noted the number of increases is vastly higher than the number of new programs getting a recommendation. This will not go back to the CSAB for any action.

DISCUSSION II – CONE OF SILENCE

Through discussion, it is recommended that CSAB members limit interactions with Agency representatives and Program staff during the review season. If they are attending an event together, there should be no talk regarding the program and potential recommendation.

If CSAB members are interested in learning more about programs prior to the review season, they should reach out to Children's Services staff members to schedule visits.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Rachel Spivey shared her appreciation for having the opportunity to attend and hear all the great conversations. She wishes other Agencies would take advantage of the opportunity.

Susan Ford agreed with Ms. Spivey's comments and said thank you for allowing the public to attend.

NEXT MEETING

October 15, 2025 – 3:00 p.m., Manatee County Administration Building, Floor 5, Manatee Conference Room

Close

There being no further business, the retreat concluded at 3:22 p.m.

Meeting Summary Approved.

Chair

Date