

Editorial Opinion

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Collier County Public Schools Superintendent earned high marks from board

Collier County Public Schools Superintendent Kamela Patton has received mostly supportive evaluations from School Board members, praise that she clearly deserves.

Considering the ever-present conflict between factions on the five-member School Board, that's no easy feat.

In the evaluations, on the agenda for discussion at Tuesday night's School Board meeting, Patton received an overall score of 3.69 out of 4 points. Regarding her performance on meeting goals spelled out a year ago, her rating was 3.97, with 4 meaning these were completely met. On the professional conduct portion, her rating was 3.42, with 4 signifying "excellent" and 3 "good."

After a series of changes in the superintendent's office in the past decade, Patton has provided Collier County Public Schools welcomed stability. As the person ultimately accountable for an estimated \$950.5 million budget and a staff of about 7,100 employees working with some 45,000 students, her responsibility is tremendous.

A year ago, board members recognized her value to the district when they extended her \$214,000 annual contract by two years to June 30, 2018. Her evaluation rating this time surpasses the approximately 3.24 score she received from the previous School Board, one that was far more often in lockstep than this newly constituted board.

Patton came to Collier four years ago from Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Her hiring came after the end to the tumultuous term of Dennis Thompson as superintendent.

What a positive change to where we are now from where we were then.

The accolades

Some of the on-point observations of board members in their reviews:

■ Board member Roy Terry says of her relationship with the community: "This area is Dr. Patton's best." Addressing the goal of improving district talent: "Developing new leaders continues to improve. This was one of our weakest areas when Dr. Patton arrived." Regarding her goal to improve college and career readiness: "... a major objective of this superintendent. In my travels around the district, I see more students leaving high school with a plan for their future."

■ Board Chairwoman Kathleen Curatolo on Patton's leadership: "... her instructional acumen coupled with her effective management skills have been the foundation for exceptional continuous improvement in student learning."

■ Board member Erika Donalds on college and career readiness: Patton "has done an excellent job with expanding and promoting districtwide academic competitions, which I believe are very important."

■ Board member Kelly Lichter on fiscal duties: "I am pleased to see the initial effort to reduce costs," although she adds she would like to see this addressed at the district administration level, not just at schools.

The criticisms

Communication-related issues seem to be the main criticisms, with Donalds and Lichter leading the way. Lichter was the only board member to give Patton the lowest possible mark in any specific category.

"Those who support the new board members are often ignored," Lichter wrote. "As a board member, I do not believe there has always been open and honest communication, and there isn't much trust here."

The evaluations

When board members meet Tuesday night, we encourage them also to evaluate the evaluation form as they are setting Patton's goals for next year.

The superintendent's old 2014 evaluation has, for example, some metrics directed at classroom improvement in key subjects such as reading, writing, math and science. If individual teachers can be judged on classroom performance, and schools in turn by cumulative scores, shouldn't the superintendent be judged in that regard as well?

The tireless Patton would have fared well this year, as evidenced by excellent grades achieved by high schools. But it's a criterion that seems worth considering.

Importantly, a year from now, we'll be at the doorstep of a 2016 campaign for two School Board seats. Now is the time to make clear exactly what's expected of this outstanding superintendent, not a year from now.

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LETTERS

Linda Oberhaus, Naples
Executive director,
The Shelter for Abused Women & Children

Dangerous ruling

The June 1 Supreme Court ruling in favor of convicted cyberstalker Anthony Douglas Elonis will have a profound impact on victims and survivors of online abuse.

Elonis was originally convicted for a Facebook post that included self-styled rap lyrics, including death threats against his ex-wife, co-workers, law enforcement agents and a kindergarten class. He claimed he was merely exercising his First Amendment rights and did not intend to follow through with his threats.

In his appeal, Elonis claimed prosecutors should have to prove he actually intended his statements to be a "true threat."

In a 7-2 ruling, the Supreme Court agreed; however, the justices did not define the threshold required for conviction, leaving that determination to the lower courts. The fallout has yet to be seen, but this ruling has the potential to jeopardize stalking laws nationwide.

Stalking is a serious crime that can have profound physical, psychological and financial impacts on victims. It is also a key indicator of lethality.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, a 19-city study of intimate partner homicide found that 76 percent of women killed by intimate partners and 85 percent of women who survived such murder attempts were stalked by their murderers.

Requiring proof of intent to act on threats of violence is extremely difficult, if not impossible. We cannot condone the manipulative behavior of abusers. As a society, we must demand zero tolerance toward all forms of abuse.

MaryBeth Strom, Naples

Emergency signals

Recently, while driving north on Livingston Road, I noticed the impressive new firehouse that looks ready to function. I also noticed especially that there is an emergency traffic signal so that the firefighters can egress the station in a timely and safe manner when called out for an emergency.

As you drive through North Naples, all stations except for Station 42 on Immokalee Road have a traffic signal to halt passenger traffic and permit fire crews to enter traffic safely. Station 42 was renovated about 12 years ago and a signal was requested, but the request was denied for lack of funds.

Since then, Immokalee Road has been widened and traffic has increased greatly as a result of all the construction occurring east of Interstate 75. It is extremely difficult for Station 42 crews to exit their firehouse. A traffic signal is

Letter of the Day

Bill Schoeler, Naples

Try this

A number of us sporadically receive telephone calls we don't want.

The caller might offer to fix our computer that is showing a virus. The caller might indicate we have a tax problem. The caller might try to sell us an extended warranty on our car when we already have one.

Try this:

Tell the caller you are really interested. However, you have just one question before we get started.

"Spell scam for me."

Watch out, the words will come flying your way.

You will feel real good having outfoxed the fox.

mandatory here. What can we do to obtain one? Since the firefighters protect us, shouldn't it be our job to keep them safe by providing a traffic signal?

God bless them and keep them safe at all times.

Editor's note: North Collier Fire Chief Orly Stolts said the \$375,000 for the traffic light is now budgeted and the emergency light will be added at this location.

Ronald Diorio, Naples

Dennis Hastert

The scandal surrounding former House Speaker Dennis Hastert's paying of well more than \$1 million in extortion money to "Individual A" is causing the airing of a lot of dirty linen.

One batch of laundry that hasn't been touched yet is the money itself.

Mr. Hastert, according to a Wikipedia search, came from a middle-class family, worked as an educator in a public school system and then went directly into his political career. None of his career positions pay the kind of money that would allow him to accumulate seven-figure wealth. Yet here he is, pulling this large sum out of his personal assets.

He could be a really good investor or even a prodigious saver. Or, his wealth came to him in other ways. I think the media should not ignore this question. Hopefully it has a simple and honest answer, but until we know where his money came from, my curiosity will continue.

Dave Pfaff, Naples

East and central

Hey, let's get on the same page about where future development is likely in Collier County, our part of Florida which, by itself, is

roughly the same size as the state of Delaware.

It's realistic to say that growth and development is not going to happen in what frequently is described as "eastern Collier County."

That's because that area is primarily owned by the federal and state governments and assorted conservation entities. Look at a map. State Road 29 between Immokalee and Everglades City describes a pretty accurate north-south central dividing line.

East of S.R. 29 (to the right from above) is what's already in development-use-denied ownerships. Western Collier, on the left, is where almost all the people live and where you'll find most past and future development. Because of the major differences between the coastal and interior portions of western Collier, it might be useful to define a "central Collier," arguably from Collier Boulevard (County Road 951) to maybe Turner River Road.

That would distinguish the obvious west-Collier, already "urbanized" area in which most live from a "central" zone of Immokalee, Orangetree, Ave Maria, Golden Gate Estates, etc., that, certainly in its northern portion above Interstate 75, encompasses what is most available for future population and is going to be a high-tension zone between those wanting to preserve/conservate and others wanting to facilitate growth.

Those boundaries could concentrate our attention and move the cannot-be-touched eastern Collier out of day-to-day conversation.

Media and governmental recognition of these "boundaries" will help us focus on where things can and will be happening. It can be amazing what happens when we use common definitions and start talking about areas we all accept.

John Thomas, North Naples

Money in politics

It is so sad to open my emails every morning and find 40 to 65 Democratic politicians hoping, pleading and begging for \$3 or more to continue their campaign and represent the policies I believe in.

I then look at the news and find that any Republican who chooses to run can go to a billionaire, sell his soul to a person to whom he will be indebted forever and then tell the public that he will represent them.

The old American concept of "one man, one vote" is dead. How did the GOP "Extreme Court" get in lockstep with the Republican Party and GOP governors and GOP legislators to so radically change our country?

Will the "Extreme Court" ever see the damage their policies have done to the USA? I would love to see a recall of the four extremists on the court. Impeach them and get some reasonable and sane people who will include everyone in their rulings.