



## Cynthia Saunders Superintendent of Schools **Biography**

Since being sworn in on June 28, 2018, Superintendent Cynthia Saunders has led the School District of Manatee County with foresight, energy and imagination. Drawing on more than 30 years of service in education in Florida, Ms. Saunders has guided the district to impressive improvements academically, financially and in introducing innovative new programs and initiatives.

When Ms. Saunders arrived in Manatee County as Executive Director of Secondary Schools in 2013, the District had 18 “D” or “F” schools. By the end of her first year as superintendent, the District had eliminated all “F” schools and reduced the number of “D” schools to two. During her tenure as Superintendent, the district’s ranking amongst the 67 school district’s in Florida based on student achievement on the Florida Standards Assessment, has risen from 33<sup>rd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> – the district’s highest ranking ever.

Financially, the district raised its positive fund balance from \$30.2 million when Ms. Saunders took office to more than \$34.7 million by the end of her first year. She has also worked with the School Board to increase pay for all employees each year as Superintendent, especially teacher pay. Pay for starting teachers in Manatee County now ranks among the highest in the state and the increase in compensation helps the district attract and retain high-quality teachers and support staff.

Perhaps Ms. Saunders’ most monumental impact has been in introducing exciting new learning opportunities to the approximately 50,000 students in the Manatee District.

In 2019, the district collaborated with Apple Inc., co-founder Steve Wozniak to make Palm View K-8 the very first WOZ Ed Career’s Pathway school in the state of Florida, a program which prepares students for the jobs of the future by offering educational opportunities in areas such as coding, engineering, drones, cyber-security and mobile development. Also in 2019, the district launched its first Community Partnership School at Manatee Elementary; its first Dual Language Program at Daughtrey Elementary and transformed Blackburn Elementary School into a Cambridge International School.

Since February 2020, Ms. Saunders has been a leader in facing the challenges related to COVID-19. In March 2020, the district was one of the first to make the move to full-time eLearning in Florida by using creative strategies to distribute more than 11,000 computer devices and deliver more than 860,00 meals to students during April-May 2020. When the 2020-2021 school year began, the Manatee District was one of the first in the nation to reopen its doors to students returning to campus. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, she has kept Manatee District schools open and serving students, she has ended each school year on time and provided Manatee County high school graduates in-person graduation ceremonies to celebrate their success

In December 2020, Ms. Saunders was named the 2020 STAR Superintendent of the Year by the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations for her strong support and dedication of the Manatee Education Foundation. Superintendent Saunders was presented the award during the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Joint Conference of the Florida School Boards Association and the Florida Association of District School Superintendents,