

Q3b) What plan of action would you take to implement Florida's Race to the Top initiatives successfully?

First, I would want to review the RTT (Race to the Top) scope of work that has already been completed. The hard work that has already occurred was collaborative, and I believe it would be critical to assure that the bargaining units are still on the same page as we move forward.

Florida's RTT initiative is a broad reform with significant impact across the entire educational community. For these reasons, my plan of action would be a collaborative one where I would reach out and engage members of multiple groups. This plan will change the educational culture of the past and for that reason, parents, students, teachers, community members, bargaining units, administrators and the Board must be involved in the process.

The RTT process is very similar to a complex grant with milestones that must be reached with numerous budgets and reporting requirements which must be adhered to in order to continue with the project. As a result, the project must be carefully monitored. I would envision having a project lead from the Administrative Staff that would have oversight responsibility for the project.

Race to the Top initiatives must also be based on effective practices and proven research as well. Educating shareholders and gaining their support along the way is critically important to the success of this project. Race to the Top really represents planning for and then implementing major reform efforts which will change the way we use technology in the classroom, evaluate and compensate teachers and administrators, and prepare students for the future. All of this presents a broad spectrum of change and must involve the entire educational community and the community at large to be successful.

Finally, the successful implementation of RTT will be about collective agreement and strong support from the Board, Superintendent, District Leadership and Bargaining Unit. The use of collective wisdom allows the best thinking to emerge.

Q9) Will you allow teachers to provide input and have a voice into matters that concern them? How will you go about this? How will you determine if there are legitimate issues and concerns at the teacher/staff level?

One of the themes you will hear from me has to do with getting input from those that are closest to the implementation of the decision. Consequently, having input from teachers and other staff will be very important as we move forward. Teachers are the backbone of our educational system and must have input into matters that concern them.

In fact, research by the Gallup Organization has shown that highly effective teachers remain at schools and with school districts where they feel their input is valued. To go about establishing the mechanisms to gather input from teachers, I would begin with establishing the clear expectation that teacher input matters and is valued by this organization. Teacher involvement at the school level in major decisions would be an expectation. Many schools have established leadership committees in order for this to be accomplished. This best practice would be a District standard. Additionally, teacher involvement opportunities would be established at the District level to provide input into major decisions impacting the District. Board advisory committees, District curriculum committees, and Labor/Management committees are just a few of the many ways I would actively engage teachers in the decision-making process. On an informal level, I am very accessible to all community members and actively seek out input from teachers on many issues. Determining whether a concern is legitimate or best handled at the teacher/staff level is one where I have ample experience. Generally, school-based concerns are best handled at that level since locally developed solutions tend to be more successful and preserve the local relationships better than a district-devised solution imposed on a single school. On the other hand, decisions that have district-wide implications must have more wide-spread involvement.

The bargaining units will be critical in collecting information and sharing issues and concerns in the negotiating process. Building leadership will bring issues forward to assure that the building personnel are heard. As Superintendent, I will meet monthly with building principals and district level administrators. I also hope to establish monthly meeting with the bargaining unit leadership. It will be critical in the first year to get out to as many schools as possible to meet and establish a face to face opportunity for me to learn as much as possible from our employees. Positive two-way communication will be important to the success of the new Superintendent.

Q10) How will you handle a difficult parent? Define "difficult parent". How will you handle five individual personalities on the School Board?

There is no such thing as a difficult parent. It is my experience that parents just want what they feel is right for their child. Often just listening and giving parents a chance to have input may resolve the complaint. I will assure that the school district will respond within 24 hours to concerns. The key to resolving 98 percent of school issues is to get the school principal and parents together.

When handling individual personalities, clear, concise communication is the key to a positive board/ superintendent relationship. It would be my responsibility as Superintendent to work with the board to understand the issues that emerge and

provide the individual board members or entire board all the information so we can make informed decisions. It has been my experience that every board member only wants what is best for our students, and it is from that position where sound decisions are made.

Finally, developing strong working relationships with Board members is critical to my success as a Superintendent as it is to the success of each Board member. Communication is critical and I would work to establish regular communication patterns with each individual Board member. It is also important to keep each one of them fully informed as to important operation aspects that occur with the District. Most importantly, it is important to listen. Board members hear from the community on a daily basis. Their input into the process is vital. Listening to their concerns and taking action to address these concerns is a priority. Finally, I would work toward the goal of moving from five individual Board members and a Superintendent to a cohesive team. Again, we all have a common interest of children in mind; and by working together, we often will be able to develop alternative solutions that in the end are better solutions than ones we may have previously developed in isolation.

Q14) How do fine arts and performing arts fit in to your overall plan for a school district?

I was very fortunate to have been the principal of the first performing arts high school in Lee County. Fine and performing arts are critical to the overall health of a vibrant school system. Fine arts and performing arts are a critically important component to any well-rounded educational system. We must always strive to develop "hooks" which are activities which interest and engage students in the educational process. Research has shown again and again that students involved in the Fine and Performing Arts are more successful and engaged in school. For this reason, cultivating an active and thriving arts program is essential. In the School District of Lee County, we developed Fine and Performing Arts programs in the elementary, middle, and high schools to provide access to the highest quality arts classes for all students. Students interested in pursuing educational opportunities in these areas could choose to attend one of these schools in their local area. I believe the expansion of these highly motivating programs during my tenure as Superintendent in Lee County was one of the many reasons why the graduation rate increased significantly and the drop-out rate decreased. Student achievement also improved in all areas as these programs increased in number.

Finally, you only have to watch one performance or go to one art exhibit to know what those programs mean to students, parents, and the community.

Q16) Discuss the experiences you have had in working with the special needs of exceptional education students and language enriched pupils (LEP). What initiatives have you implemented in your current district to meet the special needs of exceptional education students and limited English speaking students? What were the results?

a) ESE

Exceptional student education (ESE) provides services for students with disabilities. Those services are provided based on the unique needs of the child. ESE services are designed to help students with disabilities participate in regular classes and in activities of the school. As principal of Fort Myers High School, I was fortunate to have the Edison Learning Center (ELC) as part of the regular high school. This began my belief that inclusion of special populations was very important to the growth of all students in the school.

The Lee County School System has been a leader in the philosophy of inclusion and has trained over 80 percent of all schools in this method of educating its student populations. Seeking the least restrictive environment (LRE) for children is critical in order to accommodate future growth and development of students. During my tenure as Superintendent, we implemented electronic IEP forms to assist teacher and IEP committees with preparation of the IEP document. The second big change that we implemented was the response to intervention (RTI) process. This required district-wide training and change of mindset for all employees. This has been the largest change in ESE services in over 30 years. In terms of initiatives, the one that has had the biggest impact on me, and I hope the community, was the Superintendent Task Force on Autism. This group of parent and community members developed and designed brochures and presentations to give to schools and community groups. The result was a heightened awareness of services that are available for parents and grandparents. ESE services are many in the district:

Job coaching, community based instruction, P.T./OT, assistive technology services, nonviolent crisis intervention training, parent resource guides, family liaison office, arts speak for autism, and quarterly meetings for any ESE parent that needs help or has questions.

When I took the job as Superintendent, there were five due process hearings in process. During the next five years of my tenure in office, we had no due process hearings that were officially filed. As an educator, I believe that all children of all ability levels should have access to a quality educational experience.

b) LEP

My experience with LEP and ESOL began in the early 90s when the META consent order was signed here in Florida, which said that school districts must provide services to those students that were identified as LEP. The identification methods was very simple in relation to whether or not the student qualified for service. Many of those same frameworks are still in place today. The number of LEP learners in our schools continue to grow, and that growth rate outpaces that of native English-speaking students.

LEP programs are organized based on entrance testing and growth models that allow students to test out of services. One of the major issues we have had to deal with has to do with the migrant movement that occurs yearly. Standardizing as much as we can academically has helped, but it is very hard to get youngsters up to speed with fewer than 180 days of instruction. Some of the programs that we have initiated are Fast Forward, Achieve 300 (Teen Biz), English Language Literacy through Civics ED, SRA and Spalding Phonics and our major approach is SLOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol). All of those programs have helped continue the improvement academically for students and schools. Truly the biggest challenge we face today is to provide programs that serve ALL students in a way that allows them to reach their goals and become productive citizens in the future.

Q17) Discuss the progress the schools in your district have made in the area of student achievement. What role did you play in these accomplishments?

I am very proud of the accomplishments made as they relate to student achievement during my 7 ½ years as Lee County's Superintendent. During this time the District's dropout rate went down to 1.3 percent from 7 percent, and the graduation rate went up to 80.3 percent from 69 percent. Both indicators are the best in the history of the District. While at the same time, our free and reduced lunch programs went from around 50 percent to just over 70 percent.

Academic achievement is the hallmark of District improvement. Providing opportunities for staff to have high quality, professional development is an essential part of improving student achievement. The teachers and principals are the key factors in positive school and District improvement.

It is my strong belief that all children can learn; and it is the responsibility of the Superintendent and District leadership to develop and implement programs and processes to ensure the success of every child.

The following are a few of the accomplishment made during my tenure:

- Obtained District grade of an "A" last two years

- 86 percent of our schools received an “A” or “B” grade
- Of the state's nine largest districts, Lee County was the only one to have no “D” or “F” schools
- Had no Title I schools in lowest 5 percent statewide
- Developed pre/post test in all academic areas

Please see Appendix B & C in my application packet for more detail.

My role in the academic improvement of the District was about proper planning and allowing schools and teachers to do their part after the direction was set by the school board. My major responsibility was to assure that all District employees understood that the focus of the District was improving student achievement. Improved student achievement is never one person; it is about the power of all working together toward a common goal.

Q19) Discuss the experience you have in motivating a diverse staff and student body.

Motivating staff and students is about providing a positive leadership style that encourages District employees to work together for the betterment of students, staff, and community.

As Superintendent, providing those opportunities to be a part of the decision-making process motivates employees and students to engage in positive school and district improvement.

Collaborative bargaining is one of the areas that I believe has motivated staff to be involved during my tenure as Superintendent. Involving students in a district-wide government association was also a very positive way to get students to encourage their peers to be involved in district discussions. I truly believe that involvement is the key to motivating staff to be active in positive district growth.

Q20) How has diversity impacted your leadership in your current workplace? What role have you played in celebrating diversity?

The world that we know today has changed dramatically in the last ten years. As leaders, it is important to be sensitive to the different groups and their individual concerns in the community, while at the same time creating opportunities to recognize

diversity as a natural part of our society. Recruiting diverse population of professionals is a big part of the H.R. Department in districts today. Assuring that children have an array of role models is also very important. Recognizing different holidays and attending community events has been an important part of my involvement as Superintendent.

The planned celebrating and recognition comes from Board resolutions, individual schools, and teachers' activities. My involvement in the development of LEAD (Latino Educators Administration Development) and the District work with HABA (Hispanic American Business Alliance) and the cultural exchange between Lee County and Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic brought positive attention to diversity in our school community.

Q23) What is your position on privatization of County School Board jobs?

While privatization may appear to save money initially, I am typically opposed to any large-scale privatization. Privatization means we give up control of many aspects to include who we hire to work around our children. We also lose control of important and costly resources such as equipment. The private company now in control of these resources can raise prices, and we would be in a difficult position not to comply due to the huge cost of re-acquiring equipment, hiring staff, etc. Limited outsourcing can work to our advantage whereas large scale privatization hurts our relationships with long-term, loyal employees and causes some loss of control over the services provided and who is providing this service while working around our children.

Q25) What sort of relationship do you envision between employer and Union at the School Board?

I would envision a very collaborative relationship between the employer and the Union. In the School District of Lee County we employ the interest-based process for all bargaining and Labor/Management committees. Originating in 2001, I expanded this initiative as Superintendent and developed a self-sustaining model. In this process, we focus on the common interest versus advocating for the solution we think is the right one. As a result of using this process, we forge better agreements with our bargaining units. During my tenure, the relationships with our teacher and support unions were excellent. There was not a single incident requiring us to go to impasse; and all contracts were ratified by huge majorities even when compensation increases were not provided. Research by Cornell University showed that agreements reached by interest-based negotiation were more creative, durable, and ended with better labor

relations than those reached using traditional negotiation strategies. Interest-based agreements were also cost neutral when compared to traditional methods. This has also been our experience in Lee County.

Q32) What do you know about this community and school district?

I know that Osceola County has a rich history that dates back to the 1800s. I also know that the school district is proud of its accomplishments. As I review resources available on the Internet and talk to people in the community, I get a sense of pride as it relates to the schools of the district. Most importantly, I get a sense that everyone wants the system to continue to improve academically. I hope to be a part of that improvement.

Q42) How would you organize this district's custodial services?

I would first look at the current structure to see how efficiently it currently operates. There are national standards that give recommendations in regard to organizing the custodial service departments. My experience as the director of maintenance in Lee County will be valuable in studying the issues and options.

I would want to collect information from the end-users of the service and then make a plan based on needs of the schools if necessary. My expectation is that all schools and district buildings are clean and well maintained.

Q43) How would you operate the food service program? Should the food service program operate in the black?

Food service programs should provide healthy choices for all students. More and more of our students come to school hungry. We must do our part to provide the nutrition necessary to guarantee that our students are ready to learn. Because of the state of our economy, we have provided summer feeding programs and weekend backpack food for hundreds of our students; and, at the same time, operated a food service program that is in the black. I believe that, if managed properly, the food service program can and should operate in the black.



Q49) As an example, let's assume that you are not familiar with the "Race to the Top" standards for the state of Florida. How do you get up-to-speed quickly on such unfamiliar policies implemented in other states? Describe the method that you would use.

RTT or any other initiative that you are unfamiliar with would require reading and discussions with those experts already in the district. As Superintendent, you can't know everything; so you must depend on the district staff to help get you up to speed. Today there is so much on the internet, that it is easier to get the information you need. Asking questions is very important as you transition into any position. In Florida researching the DOE website in regard to RTT will provide substantial data. If additional information is needed, contact DOE staff.

Q50) What do you think about the Parent Internet Viewer (PIV) used in the Osceola County School District? What have you used in the past to keep parents informed of their children's grade status? What is the maximum amount of time that should elapse between the determination of an assignment or test grade and when it is posted online for parents to see? Please elaborate.

I believe that as a District, we must have technologies that allow parents opportunities to stay up to date with their children's grades and assignments. I am not familiar with the PIV system, but have used ParentLink as the tool for parents to stay engaged in their children's education. Finding the right fit is critical because it affects not only the parent but teachers and students as well. Many questions must be answered in order to get the right information in the hands of parents and students: Is it WEB-based, does it have a call-home feature, what are the requirements for the teacher to monitor just a few, when are grades and assignments posted, and how quickly should they be available?

Like any good assignment or assessment, the quicker the results are available, the better it is to assure that the student understands how well they have done on the test or assignment. I would think that most assignment and tests would be available with one week after being turned in. Exceptions are always going to come into play, ie. term papers, activities in the school, and illness, etc.

Good instruction and assessment with timely return of materials is a component of positive educational values.

Q51) How would you verify on a day-to-day basis that your policies and procedures are being properly implemented? For example, how do you know

if teachers are handing out the questions and answers to midterm or final exams?

The responsibility to assure that policies and procedures are being implemented in the district is the duty of the building principal and their administrative team. Making sure that the Superintendent clearly communicates expectations is critical to assure that all procedures are being followed. As Superintendent, you put faith in the professionals that manage the 53 schools in the Osceola system. If there are issues, the Superintendent must be willing to take action to assure compliance. Trust but Verify.

Q52) What plans would you implement to eliminate sugary products in school cafeterias and vending machines?

It is all about healthy choices in the cafeterias, and it must be a District focus to assure that our menus provide the healthiest meals possible.

Q53) Given the state school systems are currently face with regarding bullying on campus as well as off campus, briefly mention:

a. What measure(s) have you implemented in dealing with this issue in your current position?

b. What measure(s) you will implement across the school system to ensure the safety of all children?

c. How will you ensure that this method is implemented in all schools?

- a) The Jeffery Johnson Bullying Legislation originated in Lee County. We have programs for students and teachers and support staff to help recognize bullying.
- b) Consistent enforcement of code of conduct. Provide anonymous TIP numbers for students to call. Widely communicate the bullying policy.
- c) Involve the board and work to make it a district priority.

Q54) What method(s) do you have in mind to deal with out-of-zone students?

I will have to study the issue to assure that I clearly understand what needs to occur. I have extensive experience in managing student assignment plans and feel comfortable working through any issue.

Q55) What will you do to recruit minority teachers to Osceola County?

I am certain that we can recruit and retain quality minority teachers to the school district. Designing a plan to attend state, national, and international job fairs will be a positive start. I have had success establishing teams of educators going to the job fairs around the nation. Another consideration would be to put together a task force for the recruitment of minority teachers. In addition, involve the local Hispanic organizations and the NAACP for support in the recruitment of quality applicants. Seek help from the universities to assist in recruitment efforts and most importantly, start a local "grow-your-own program" inside the District.

The area of recruitment is one of the most critical initiatives that any school district will deal with in the coming years. As all of us know, the retirement of the baby boomers will create challenges in the replacement of those teachers.