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

The correct implementation process of RTTT lies in an analysis of that application. It is the responsibility of the district to meet the criteria of law. Currently the law provides an opportunity for the school district or site to receive a “grade” for its performance as it is compared to the state/national standards. The grade should be easily understandable for parents. The goal of the RTTT application is high student achievement and teacher/administrator accountability. For the most part, unions across the state (including Osceola) have agreed to the RTTT memorandum of understanding.

I agree with philosophies of accountability that are outlined in RTTT, and I agree with the philosophies of high student performance. Many of these performance standards should be covered in the evaluation process. We should all want to be accountable for our work and do a good job. The better we do our jobs the more our students succeed. This is the reason we became teachers.

Senate Bill 736 may not help the implementation of RTTT. We should be accountable for the test scores of our students, and those scores should be included as a small reflection of our evaluations. However, I do not believe that teaching to a test should be the ultimate goal of teachers, and tying to test scores to salaries can be a complicated process. There is more to the art of teaching than testing. If our students are not successful we should be asking why. If a barrier exists that is prohibiting a child’s ability to learn we must pause and seek ways to remove that barrier. Such barriers may be academic or social. The social baggage some of our children bring to school can become entrenched in the learning process. We have to recognize and embrace these barriers. If we ignore these issues we do our students a dis-service. These philosophies tend to be excluded in RTTT and Senate Bill 736.

Success in Senate Bill 736 implementation is achieved through the process of collaboration. The school district must work with the union to develop salary schedules that are compliant with state law. After reading the most recent audit report, the state indicates there is still work to be regarding salary scale revision and evaluation protocols as it relates to test scores. These are very emotional subjects for teachers. The process of becoming compliant can be overwhelming for staff members and can leave teachers feeling as if they are drowning in red tape. It is the responsibility of the district to proceed forward with caution ensuring each staff member has a clear understanding of the process. Osceola must implement (d according to law) RTTT and Senate Bill 736 according to law. Again, success is achieved through collaboration. Staff members who

are not allowed to have input in the process are less likely to implement any desired action by the district.

The management of RTTT federal funds is also difficult process. The federal funds allocated for the program is substantial. Additional, so are the federal mandates regarding how those dollars are allocated and spent. The goals and objectives of Osceola and the federal government may not be congruent. We must engage in district wide discussions as to the allocation of those resources to best benefit the students of Osceola. The district must also communicate to its staff and patrons the requirements of federal law. This may help ease the confusion regarding federal fund allocation.

*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?*

Absolutely, as the end user of board decisions teachers are one of the most important components of the decision making process. I am a firm believer in the teachings of Weatherly and Lipsky (1977), Street-level Bureaucrats and Institutional Innovation: Implementing Special-Education reform. This land-mark study highlighted the importance of teacher/staff “buy-in” regarding any change or reform movement in a bureaucratic structure. According to the study, without the support of faculty the goals of any desired change will not be implemented appropriately and the status quo will remain. This statement will remain true regardless of administrative efforts. In order to move the Osceola County School District forward teachers must not only be provided an opportunity to have their opinions heard, but must also have faith that someone in power is actually listening. I believe that any school district that does not actively listen to their faculty is destined to fail.

It is important to note that it is the responsibility of the administrator to describe and outline the power of faculty or the committee in any decision making process. The volume of power granted is contingent upon the factors of the perceived problems or tasks the district must implement. If these parameters are established in advance, and if each staff member has a clear understanding of their role before the collaborative process begins then the process of staff involvement and problem solution run smoothly. The Osceola County School District already has a designated labor union to achieve this objective. Additionally the district should establish relevant committees to address the relevant issues of the school district both on district and site levels. Some of these committees may be standing committees and some may be temporary. Ultimately each committee must have a specific focus and task to achieve results for the district.

The easiest methodology to determine the needs/concerns of staff members is to ask them. I simply do not understand why school districts make this process difficult. Administrators will receive accurate responses to questions if they have spent time building relationships with faculty members and growing their level of trust. The staff member must feel comfortable expressing their ideas in a format without fear, and the

administrator must be willing to listen. Forums, not staff meetings should be held with staff members on a regular basis to gain their insight regarding the best methods to achieve district goals.

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

A difficult parent is not an individual who disagrees with the school district. By definition the school district is both a servant and a representation of a very diverse population. Disagreements will occur regarding issues that impact students.

A difficult parent is an individual who is not willing to discuss their concerns in a calm disposition, and who is not willing to go through the process of having their issue resolved.

The concerns of parents must be addressed at the lowest level possible to achieve the greatest results. I talk to parents daily in my current position. The first question I ask the "difficult parent" is "have you talked to your child's teacher or coach". If this has not occurred (quite often it has not), I direct them to schedule a conference time and provide an opportunity for the faculty member and the parent to work out a solution that is beneficial for all parties involved.

I have found that most parents are simply interested in venting their problem and believing that someone in authority has heard their concerns. If the problem cannot be resolved at the lowest level possible then the situation moves up the bureaucratic scale one level and the procedure is repeated. If it is the responsibility of administrators to communicate with faculty, then it must also be the responsibility of teachers and coaches to communicate with parents. I believe the number one factor creating a "difficult parent" is a lack of communication.

School boards have a special place in operation of a school district. An odd number of school board members exist in each school for the purpose of decision making. Even numbers can sometimes equate to a split or stalemate in the decision making process. The process of school management is not difficult providing everyone understands the rules. Rule 1: School board members are elected to represent their segment of the district's population. Rule 2: We are not always going to agree. School board members must be provided an opportunity to express their opinions on various issues that impact the district. These efforts are achieved through The Open Meeting Records Act. The format provides an opportunity for both discussion and conflict resolution. Violations of the act equate to problems. I believe in the process of open communication, and I believe in the philosophy of transparency. School board members must feel comfortable expressing their opinions and ultimately voting their conscience on issues that impact the district.

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

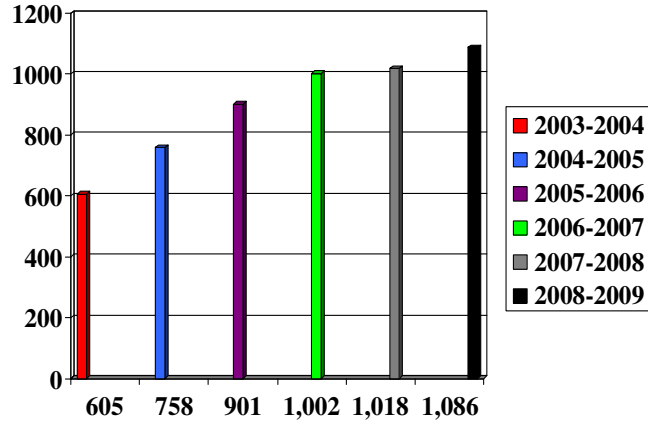
Extra-curricular programs are absolutely critical to the success of any school district. These programs help to set the tone or climate for the site. For many students, participation in their program of choice is their rationale for staying in school. Fine arts are just as important as athletics. Each child is different and possesses varied interest and talents. It is the responsibility of the district to provide students with an opportunity to showcase their talents. To achieve this goal school districts must maintain both facilities and staff to support these programs. The implementation and management of extra-curricular activities is expensive. Yet, the success and growth of students justify the rationale for the expenditure.

*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?*

The primary academic barriers for these students are language, vocabulary, and reading level. As a district we must learn from the teachings of Dr. Robert Marzano. Teachers must utilize high impact teaching strategies that produce quality results. I am a firm believer in Dr. Marzano's emphasis of graphic organizers as a main instructional tool. The benefit of this strategy is evident by encompassing all learning styles. This teaching strategy is critical for these active learners. It is important for teachers to address visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles in each classroom. Teachers must also define, outline, and describe both tier I and tier II words for their individualized class and curriculum. The systemic utilization of these strategies can produce powerful results.

While at Crooked Oak Public Schools, I served in the capacity of not only superintendent, but that of curriculum coordinator. The district, with the help of dedicated staff members and a collaborative partnership with Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratories, adopted graphic organizers as the main teaching strategy district wide. This was done in an effort to remove the school district from the state's school improvement list. This was a goal of the school board upon my hiring. Hours of training, preparation, and quality implementation produced the results outlined below. I am very proud to say the district was removed from the school improvement list and was recognized by the State of Oklahoma as the 2<sup>nd</sup> most Academic Performance Index improved High School for 2008.

# District API



Recently in my current school district, Tahlequah Public Schools invited AdvancedED to audit the district. Upon their conclusion of a comprehensive audit of curriculum and instruction the district was awarded both certification and accommodations for instructional practices and management of the overall well being of students. We are very proud of our elementary reading programs and the academic accomplishments of students, and we will take every opportunity to brag on our staff.

*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?*

It is the responsibility of the superintendent to ensure quality instructional leaders are managing school sites. To ensure quality staff development for site administration, we began a series of book studies. We would like to believe that these collaborative studies were masters level discussions, aimed at using real district examples and applying those example to theoretical perspectives outlined in the books. The books studied were the following:

- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Marzano, R. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- McEwan, E. (2003). *Seven steps to effective instructional leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Wellman, B. (2004). *Data-driven dialogue: A facilitator's guide to collaborative inquiry*. Sherman, CT: Mira Via, LLC.

These books serve as the back bone of district operations and are constantly utilized as a reference guide.

Additionally, through a partnership with the Charles A. Dana Center the district has engaged in the practice of “Classroom Walkthroughs”. It is though these practices administrators are able to briefly enter classrooms to document written three minute snapshots of both teaching and learning. The data gathered is based upon the highly effective teaching strategies of Dr. Robert Marzano. Principals are trained to look for and highlight these strategies. The results of the data are then shared with staff members.

This process is *not* apart of evaluation procedures. The goal of the program is to provide relevant data regarding teaching and learning for the purpose of non-threatening collaborative discussions regarding students and their learning process. The program has been highly effective. I believe instruction has improved since implementation.

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

Assuming all teachers have the same purpose, staff members should be motivated by the success of the students. I believe that is the goal of the Osceola County School District. With that being said, it is the responsibility of the school district to provide an opportunity for both faculty and students to express themselves and explore their own interests and culture in the curriculum.

We are by definition a public school district. Being a representation of the public we bring our own unique sets of values, norms, and priorities to school with us each day. Again, school should provide an opportunity for expression not repression. Special days or events should be allowed to occur at the various school sites. These events should highlight our differences. We have scheduled many events in every school district that I have been employed to help celebrate and honor the unique culture of all students represented. Student body participation in these events helps us to gain a better understand of each other and brings harmony to the district. These events should of course have prior approval though administration to ensure they meet the parameters of both policy and public safety.

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

In order for diversity to occur individuals must recognize that it exists. Conformity is only easy for the majority. Recognition of diversity must start with the superintendent. It is my responsibility to set the example and establish the norm that celebrating diversity is important.

Failure to recognize and celebrate diversity leads to bullying and poor behavior. Administration must recognize diversity early and establish the parameters of acceptance and tolerance.

As a leader who is trying to promote diversity we must actively seek out those who are not like us. Engaging in diversity must not only be spoken, it must be actively engaged and recognized by others as important. Diversity is reinforced through by TIME. Attendance at events celebrating diversity is critical. The physical presence of the administrator at selected cultural events will always speak louder in volume than shallow words.

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

If at all possible, I believe jobs which support the function of students should be brought under the jurisdiction of the school district; not the contracted vendor. It is the school district who is responsible for the safety and security of its students. By having the worker employed through the district better control and accountability of the individual's work product can be achieved.

It is understood that sometimes outside vendors can perform a school district service at a cheaper rate, and I do understand the rising cost of workman's compensation insurance. I also understand that in times of financial crisis budgetary decision must be made in the best interest of the school district to save classroom resources. However, when ever possible I believe employees who work for the district, have a higher level loyalty to the district and take pride in their work, because they are apart of the organization and contribute their fair share to the common good of students.

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

Partnership, Partnership, Partnership. Adversarial relationships between the School Board and the Union are not productive, and will never achieve the desired result for either entity. Regardless of the discussion we must all put aside our differences and remember that we must work together for the betterment of students. We serve them. Keeping students as the focus will equate to better solutions for difficult problems.

Additionally, when ever possible the district must work hard to provide much needed resources, materials, and supplies for staff members. Appropriate pay increases are also much appreciated for those who directly impact students. I am very proud of the relationship that has been built between my current school district and union leadership. We work well together to achieve the best results for all. Mr. Stan King, Tahlequah Public School's Union President is listed as a reference on my current resume.

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

**School District:**

Osceola County Public Schools has a very diverse student population. According to the district's website and superintendent position opening flyer almost half of the student population is Hispanic and approximately 30% of the population is White. It is because of this diversity teachers must work hard to include all students in their selected teaching strategies. The district operates on a \$375.5 million dollar budget and a \$176.9 million dollar capital budget. The district employs more than 6,000 people. Test score data provided by the Florida State Department of Education indicate a varying range of scores between sites. It is important to note a general trend towards improvement and increased academic student achievement. These trends can only be produced by a dedicated staff. The district should invest time in revisiting site school improvement plans looking for indicators or evidence of program implementation and its significance. This can only assist those sites that have not made adequate yearly progress. According to improvement plans the district has chosen to utilize the services of Learning-Focused to assist in the areas of curriculum and instruction and staff development.

Both the school district and the community seem to be sharply divided between upper and lower classes. The district and the community does not seem to have a middle socio-economic status. This being said one "cookie cutter" approach or strategy for the entire district may not be effective. The district must evaluate its data in accordance with RTTT, and develop programs appropriate for each individualized school site.

As indicated by the superintendent search questions, the district/site school improvement plans, and Florida's Race to the Top application the district still has work to do in order to be compliant with Federal Law. Senate bill 736 is a driving force in Florida's Education Reform Movement. Issues regarding salary schedules and teacher evaluations based upon test score data still need to be finalized. This can only be achieved through a collaborative process.

The board of education plays a vital role in the school district. Upon viewing several school board meetings via the district's web site, I can see they are dedicated to the cause of making Osceola an outstanding school district and providing opportunities for all students. They have a great concern for both students and faculty, and run a well organized meeting.

**Community:**

Upon viewing information provided by the Osceola Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Department one can indicate that the community is moving in the right direction. The community does have both the advantages and disadvantages of a service industry. The largest employer in the county is the school district.

To address the needs of economic development The Chamber of Commerce has divided itself into councils. Large corporations such as Lowe's and economic opportunities through tourism provide stability to the region, and the community is reaching out to



form partnerships with both outside and inside entities to spur small business economic growth. The partnership with UCF Small Business Development Center is an indication the community is attempting to grow. It is also nice to see civic groups are a driving force in the community. Osceola County has a citizenry dedicated to service.

In conducting additional research it appears that the housing market has taken a downward turn as a result of the economy. The market seems to be flooded with more housing than is needed, which according to the laws of supply and demand drives the value of property down. Many patrons may be financially upside down in mortgage payments. This may be a problem in future bonding capacity for the school district. However, it does appear as if construction projects in the district are progressing.

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

Conversations regarding custodial services are typically centered on whether or not those services are to be under the umbrella of the school district or contracted through a vendor. I have contracted and non-contracted custodians in my present school district. The high school is serviced by an outside vendor and the remainder of the school sites utilizes district personnel. I have had successes and failures using both methods.

It is difficult to find and employ long-term quality custodians that will thoroughly clean buildings. Complicating this fact is the rising cost of workman's compensation premiums. Additionally, it is difficult to control and manage individuals who work for an outside vendor. In essence the contracted laborer is not your employee.

School districts are very fluid operations. Vendor contracts often get in the way of site emergency needs. Spur of the moment task or request can be outside the boundaries of the contract and cost the district additional dollars. Custodial services are definitely a topic of discussion. I believe any decision regarding custodial services must be done in a collaborative fashion with the superintendent of schools, school board, site principals, facilities manager, financial director, and the local union president/bargaining unit. If possible, I would always lean towards custodial staff being employed by the school district and not contracted out through vendors.

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

Yes, the food service program should operate in the black. This was the original intent of the program. The reality is the program is always under funded to meet the federal guidelines for appropriate portion size, food quality, and diversity in menu options. The district's food service program manager must work closely with the superintendent and financial director to ensure monthly bills are paid. The superintendent must establish a budget with a margin of error to manage possible monthly overages in food expenses,

payroll, and equipment repair or replacement. The food service program should be governed by the food service program manager and the wellness program committee. It should be the goal of the committee to gather input regarding the likes and dislikes of cafeteria patrons (students/community), and establish an appropriate menu that meets federal guidelines and meets or exceeds the expectations of students.

*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.*

Current staff members can be the most valuable resource in managing and understanding the requirement of RTTT. They have a clear understanding of how far the school district has progressed in its attempts to become compliant, and the tasks that still need to be accomplished. Both the Florida State Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education should be utilized as a resource tool. National, regional, and state education service centers may also provide a wealth of information regarding RTTT. Lastly, the Florida Education Association may also provide the district much needed resources in policy implementation.

*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.*

Tahlequah Public Schools utilizes an advanced system called INOW. This system provides parents with the opportunity to view their child's grades, home work assignments, test score data, and attendance records. The district's website also provides parents the ability to communicate with their child's teacher via email. The system has been very successful. As an end user or parent in the district, I like being able to look up Skylar and Dylan's grades. The system provides me with the opportunity to keep up with missing assignments resulting from illness or field trips. I also use the site to check on the results of weekly exams. The Goodsell family has regular conversations regarding the importance of classroom performance at home.

According to policy it is the goal of the teacher to post grades ASAP. The district has not had any problems with teachers making late reports or failure to post grades into the INOW system. Recently, the district has branched out into blogging. Teachers are able to post homework assignments in their blogs and announce scheduled exams or state testing dates. The program is in its beginning stages but is already receiving rave reviews from parents.

*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?*

TIME. In order to ensure a policy or procedure has been implemented the superintendent must invest time in the school sites. Successful monitoring cannot be achieved behind a desk. The standard answer to this question involves weekly staff meetings and annual reports. Each of the methods is important and effective, but none is as effective as the hands-on viewing of policy implement. Currently, I manage my time to be: 50% office, 25% school sites, 25% community events or functions.

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

In Oklahoma the answer to this question is simple. It is illegal to sell sugary products such as pop and candy inside any school district during the school day. The state's Wellness Policy prohibits this activity except for special occasions such as holidays or birthdays. It is legal to sell such items at after school hours or during extra-curricular activities. The alternative to sugary sweets, according to state law, is healthy snacks. Soda pop has been replaced with juice or power aid and candy bars have been replaced with health snacks such as granola bars.

*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?*

Just like any school district, Tahlequah Public Schools has a bullying problem. Through student referrals and a study of discipline data we have targeted the middle school as the most prevalent area for bullying. To be proactive, We hired a bully prevention specialist.

Mr. Fred Poteete is an expert in preventing bullying. We are very blessed to have his services in our district. He is a long time employee of Tahlequah Public Schools, and consequently knows the students and their families. Mr. Poteete not only works for the district but contacts himself out for the purposes of staff development in other school districts. Currently, he is serving on a national committee to help prevent bullying in schools. We are able to fund Mr. Poteete's position through a federal grant. Since assuming his new role the level of bullying in the middle school has greatly decreased, and our student surveys tell us that children are felling safer at school.

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

I am a firm believer in the School Resource Officer Program. The SRO program provides an additional layer of protection for all students. Local police officers are able to build relationships with students to help prevent crime from occurring on campus. The SRO's work closely with school administrators to defuse immediate problems and help to divert potential danger away from the school sites. Parents are very appreciative of seeing the officers on campus. The officers provide them with a sense of safety and security.

Student surveys are also a great source of information. They can pinpoint the areas and times during the day in which bullying is occurring. These anonymous surveys are vital in bullying prevention.

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

The utilization of SRO's in a school district is a budgetary issue. The district must secure the dollars necessary for the continued employment of these trained officers. Additionally, polices should be passes for the administration of surveys.

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

Transfers inside district boundaries should be allowed under the following criteria:

1. Adequate space is available for the transfer student.
2. The transfer does not cause a space deficit at the sending site.
3. The student is not a grade, discipline, or attendance problem.
4. Parents must sign an MOU describing their responsibility for the transportation.
5. Parents must sign an additional MOU that describes the attendance policies of the district and the boundaries of student failure resulting from absences.
6. All necessary programs for the academic and physical needs of the student are available at the receiving site.

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

In order to secure and recruit minority teachers the district must actively seek out these individuals. This is achieved through building relationships with both civic organizations and universities. Minority civic groups can provide a wealth of knowledge regarding individuals who are certified in various subjects. Also, attendance at job fairs and establishing relationships with College of Education Deans can also be beneficial in finding these teachers. Recruiting minority teachers is important for Osceola County Public Schools. Students appreciate and respond appropriately to a reflection of themselves in front of the classroom.