

**Question 4: How do you navigate budgetary constraints while advocating for fair salaries, and what strategies do you have for ensuring teachers feel valued and supported in their roles?**

First and foremost, listening to the staff is essential. Understanding their concerns regarding compensation, workload, professional learning and working conditions are some examples and provide valuable insight into where resources should be allocated. By actively soliciting feedback and engaging in open dialogue, I can gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges our teachers face and work collaboratively as much as possible to address them.

When assessing budgetary constraints, it's important to examine all funding streams to paint an accurate picture of financial stability. This includes federal programs like ESSER, which may provide temporary relief but require careful planning for sustainability once the funding ends. These funds expire on September 30, 2024. In addition, there are several sub-grants from FLDOE that are directly tied to ESSER funding (i.e., School Improvement Grant). Over the last two years, I have worked continuously reviewing data and collaborating with our leadership team to maximize the funds usage and impact for staffing and student achievement. Evaluating items that could be shifted from the general fund to bolster reserves helped build financial resiliency within our district.

Likewise, Title I (Additional funding for educational assistance), Title III (English Language Acquisition Instruction), and Title IV (Student Support and Academic Enrichment) funding can be strategically utilized to support staffing allocations, resources, and instructional materials to support schools with higher concentrations of economically disadvantaged students. Similarly, positions designated through grant funding, such as Title II, can be aligned with the overall academic plan to provide targeted support that enhances student learning outcomes while also recognizing the value of educators' roles.

In terms of professional learning, evaluation of opportunities to increase employee development is essential. By investing in high-quality training and workshops that address teachers' specific needs and interests, my goal would be to demonstrate a commitment to their ongoing growth and success. Whenever possible, I would utilize the talent form within our district to empower teacher experts to present professional learning to their peers to accentuate learning with continuous feedback. Strengthening connections with organizations like the Heartland Educational Consortium can provide access to valuable resources and expertise that further support professional learning and district initiatives. Another opportunity is to partner with community stakeholders who could fund teacher grants to help meet identified targeted needs.

A holistic approach to budgetary management involves transparency, integrity, and accountability. I believe, as superintendent, it is my responsibility to uphold these principles, ensuring that budgetary decisions are aligned with the board's stated priorities and commitments

while moving our organization forward operationally to bolster our impact on student achievement.

Ultimately, I believe in the power of collaborative problem-solving. By creating opportunities for teachers to come together and brainstorm solutions to budgetary challenges, I would be able to harness the collective expertise and creativity of the school community. By prioritizing fair compensation, supportive work environments, and ongoing professional learning, as superintendent, I will demonstrate my commitment to valuing and supporting teachers in their essential roles.

**Question 5: “Can you describe specific actions you’ve taken in the past to foster a positive culture that boosts student and staff morale and considering the unique context of Okeechobee County Schools, what strategies would you prioritize in your first 6 to 12 months to promote a positive environment for success.”**

Fostering a positive culture within a school and the district is essential for enhancing student and staff morale, ultimately contributing to academic success. Drawing from my experience as a principal of Matanzas and considering the unique context of Okeechobee County schools, I would implement specific strategies and identify priorities for the first 6 to 12 months to promote a positive environment for success.

At Matanzas, one of the key initiatives I introduced was establishing a care network encompassing teachers, students, clerical staff, custodial team, dining hall staff, and grounds crew. This network was highly visible. My philosophy was “every room, every week.” By being visible, approachable, and actively involved in various aspects of school life, I demonstrated my commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.

Taking a hands-on approach was another effective strategy. I made it a point to lend a hand wherever needed, whether it was sweeping floors, pulling weeds, or moving furniture. This not only helped in building camaraderie among staff but also conveyed the message that no task was beneath anyone and that we were all part of the same team working towards a common goal.

Embracing a "get-to-yes" attitude was crucial in supporting innovative ideas from both students and staff. By encouraging creativity and open-mindedness, I created a culture where individuals felt empowered to share their ideas and give input. It empowered all to have a sense of ownership.

Transitioning these strategies to Okeechobee County schools, I recognize the importance of acknowledging and preserving the wonderful culture and traditions unique to the community. Despite its uniqueness, I believe the overarching goal remains the same: to ensure a bright future for all students.

In the first 6 to 12 months, I would prioritize conducting "Take 20 Listening Sessions," where anyone, be it students, staff, or community members, can voice their concerns, ideas, and suggestions. Gathering input from all stakeholders is essential to understanding their needs and aspirations, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and ownership within the school community.

Furthermore, I would work towards developing a customer service focus for all stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of treating each other with respect, empathy, and professionalism. This would be reflected in our interactions with students, staff, parents, and the wider community. This would tie into the board’s strategic plan goal 3: Positive Culture.

To establish a clear framework for our endeavors, I would outline expectations and collaborate to develop guiding principles that define how we conduct our business as a school community. This would serve as a roadmap guiding our actions and decisions towards achieving our mission of ensuring that "...every student can achieve tomorrow's possibilities."

Finally, I would emphasize the phrase "Okeechobee - Together, we're better," highlighting the collective effort required to foster a positive and nurturing environment where every individual feels valued and supported on their journey towards success. By prioritizing these strategies, I am confident that we can create a culture of excellence and inclusivity conducive to academic achievement and personal growth.