

December 9, 2021

Re: Lake Wales Charter School Superintendent Written Questions

Dear Search Committee:

I have provided my responses to the two written questions below.

1. How do you address issues of school or district culture?

Peter Drucker is correct when he stated, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Once I notice a shift in the culture, I take a systematic approach while utilizing a shared leadership model to address these types of issues. All educational leaders need to understand that a positive culture translates into a positive learning environment for students. I understand that addressing issues related to culture is a process, not an event; therefore, addressing culture-related issues is not easy. When I address these types of issues, I ensure that I have a thorough comprehension of all of the facts. This starts with understanding that I, as the leader, am ultimately responsible for the culture of our organization. I begin by looking in the mirror. What can I do (or have I done) to influence the existing culture. Furthermore, I lead by example by holding myself to the same expectations that I expect of our staff and students. The most important element of addressing culture is collaboration. It is vital for staff members’ voices and opinions to be actively listened to and genuinely valued. I do not address culture-related issues in isolation. Rather, climate and culture are routinely discussed during our District Leadership Team meetings. During these meetings, one item that I provide consists of supports for our teachers in planning relevant professional development that they feel is instructionally beneficial. In addition, I celebrate teachers for their accomplishments, both professionally and personally.

One specific example occurred when I began my tenure as superintendent. Our district lost one-quarter of its operating budget due to the closures of our two coal power plants. Morale in our district instantly sank to the lowest levels in 13 years. I was challenged with developing a plan in order to maintain the positive culture our district had exemplified for over a decade, while increasing our students’ academic achievement. I began meeting with both union representatives and administration to prepare a plan and to establish norms. We began employing the right candidates, increased parent engagement, and held true to our vision that our

district had established at our inception. I am proud to say that our financial situation is the best it has been in five years. Further, both of our buildings (elementary and junior high/high school) are identified as **Independent** based on the Ohio Department of Education's accountability system. These accomplishments would not have been possible without administration and staff collaborating to align our goals with respect to restoring the Greyhound culture.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate that educational leaders have a lasting effect on the culture of an organization. I challenge myself to ensure that I provide supports for a positive culture that will benefit not only the educational experience of our students, but also the teachers and staff delivering the instruction and services. In closing, my shared leadership approach provides all stakeholders the opportunity to voice their thoughts in efforts to implement genuine collaboration in efforts to sustain a positive organizational culture.

2. How do you hold yourself and others in the district accountable?

There is no one who holds me more accountable than I hold myself. I have always been my worst critic, regardless of what I do. I make a conscientious effort to continually lead with integrity and honesty, never compromising my morals or values. I self-reflect regularly to ensure that all decisions are informed, accurate accounts of all facts. In addition, I take responsibility for my actions and statements. I do not hide behind excuses. I take the blame for all negative occurrences and defer the credit to colleagues. The key factor in holding myself accountable consists of maintaining a high level of self-efficacy in all facets of my life, including professionally, personally, mentally, and spiritually. Additionally, I possess the capability to adjust my mindset with a given situation to focus on the positives of what I can do as opposed to what I cannot. The importance of accountability lies within the short- and long-term goals that I create for myself, as well as tracking progress of these goals. This was evident while I conducted my dissertation research. Furthermore, upon departing for work each morning, I prepare myself for a great day by not only reviewing my “to-do-list,” but also anticipating challenges that may arise throughout my day. Finally, and the most difficult strategy for holding myself accountable is to seek feedback from colleagues or my wife. These individuals keep me grounded on a daily basis.

In addition to holding myself accountable, I have the responsibility as CEO to hold all staff accountable. I utilize various strategies in our district for holding staff professionally and instructionally accountable. For example, our new staff attends required training that I develop, plan, and implement prior to the first full-staff in-service day. I introduce district expectations, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and explain consequences of not abiding by the policies and procedures. Additionally, I meet with building principals to discuss my expectations, which I insist they follow. There is a level of trust that I have placed on our administrators to hold their respective staff accountable. I do not believe in micromanaging. The building principals implement with fidelity the Ohio Teachers’ Evaluation System, which is the official teachers’ evaluation tool in Ohio. Also, I implement Ohio Principals’ Evaluation System, which consists of a professional growth plan for accountability. Furthermore, during my tenure of CEO, we have established a district accountability system developed by teachers of our District Leadership Team (DLT). Teachers hold their colleagues instructionally accountable through the Ohio

Improvement Process, which includes holding all members of Building Leadership Teams (BLT) and Teacher-Based Teams accountable for reviewing formative assessment data. Subsequently, all teachers are expected to utilize evidence- and research-based instructional strategies in their respective classroom. The BLT members review these data, as well as the DLT for accountability purposes. This is essence of the *shared leadership* model. Lastly, and unfortunately, I have followed the process to non-renew or terminate staff members who did not meet my expectations.