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Candidate for Lake Wales Charter Schools Superintendent of Schools
Written Responses


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

In my three principalships and multiple district leadership roles, I have come to understand that it takes a collective of all stakeholders, each feeling a solid connection to each other, to ultimately work together to achieve the mission of educating all children to achieve their full potential. The successful leader understands that climate and morale, along with clear expectations of our purpose, drive district culture. Here are the strategies and core beliefs that I believe have contributed to being recognized as a leader in my current organization:

- Maintain Clear Expectations – Everyone must know the vision and mission and how they are essential to the organization. The expectations are reinforced continually; they must be the drivers of what we do and why we do it. Systems and processes are built upon these beliefs.
- Authentic Relationships – This has to be a core trait of the servant leader. Stakeholders must feel valued and respected. Every person has a role in success as "It takes a village," and each person has to know that. Leadership realizes that their contributions are vital. As a result, trust is established, and commitment grows.
- Clear and Transparent Communication – A cadence of communication and meetings must be established where stakeholders check-in and feel part of the organization's path. With students in the forefront, representatives from students, families, community members, and staff must be heard, and Trustees must be informed and consulted frequently.
- Celebrate Success – Every positive step must be acknowledged and built upon. Students, staff, and constituents that are valued will build esteem in their abilities and pay it forward.
- Seek and Accept Feedback – Feedback is essential for growth, cannot be ignored, and must be sought out. It is not about ego; it is about students reaching their potential, and feedback is not personal; it is professional. Leaders must empower their stakeholders to converse with others, and this is done through building relationships built on trust.
- Collaborative and Shared Leadership – Mutual empowerment, developing cross-functional teams, and sharing responsibility empower everyone. The group's intelligence ensures that every point of view is valued, everyone sees the other's role, and most importantly, all see their contributions as essential.
- Visibility – The successful leader is seen leading the work, is visible on every level, and is accessible to all stakeholders.
- Commitment to the Whole – A great leader knows that success is about the organization, never about themselves. By never losing sight of this tenet, ego is removed, and a sense of community is established.

With a potential start date of March 2022, the new Superintendent must employ these ideals immediately. To build this culture, a plan of action will be developed to engage all stakeholder groups (students, families, community members, staff, business partners, and Trustees) in building a strategic road map to advance all student outcomes.

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

This answer builds upon the work done in creating culture. Part of that culture is developing the road map or strategic plan. In the road map, we see the system's goals, the strategies to implement, and the checkpoints. Accountability is baked into the strategic plan and ultimately into all interactions to this extent. It certainly helps if the leader is familiar with all system roles, most notably as a teacher, principal, and district leader, to make sure they understand the work at every level.

Most people think that the annual evaluation is the ultimate driver of accountability. Indeed, the evaluation is tied into the organization's strategic goals, is frequently monitored, and can determine employment status going forward. However, I maintain that the most significant factors of student achievement occur daily through interactions built upon a culture of trust and other intangibles that keep us all on track as we help students realize their full potential. Evaluation instruments rarely measure your heart, your ability to work with others, and your willingness to do what it takes to get the work done. The high-functioning system has staff holding themselves accountable.

Advancing a system of trust and accountability comes from transparent leadership and communication. The complexity of the principalship and advancing large district initiatives introduced me to a facilitative leadership style based on project management designed to keep the organization on track and help staff hold themselves accountable (including the Superintendent). Below is how this could look in the Lake Wales Charter School District:

- District Leadership Meetings – Direct Reports meet weekly to discuss the strategic goals, progress, and barriers. Members report specific actions taken toward advancing priorities, related tasks, and timelines. Group feedback is given, support is provided, and capacity is developed as silos and barriers are broken down, and Leadership sees the collective effort.
- Principal Meetings – Principals meet with the Superintendent and Direct Reports bi-monthly to see and analyze the impact of the system on student achievement and well-being.
- 1:1 – Direct Reports and Principals will have bi-monthly check-ins with the Superintendent on the above topics. Led by the Direct Report, this grows leadership and confidence from within.
- 1:1 with Trustees – Trustees, will meet with Superintendent to guide policy, provide feedback, and get system updates. A well-informed Trustee is never caught off guard, can have a meaningful meeting, and can be proactive in knowing about issues in a timely matter.
- Weekly Updates – The Board of Trustees should be informed of issues and successes weekly or as needed through a call-out or email sent to all Trustees. Further, staff and community should have frequent communication regarding the organization and see system successes in real-time.

Daily accountability from the Superintendent and others is done through the facilitative leadership model, highlighted by clear expectations, assigned process owners and tasks, frequent reporting on progress, and memorialized through project management methodology.