

## Flagler question 1

What is your position on ESE inclusion?

I am a strong proponent for students with disabilities to have the right to an education in the least restrictive environment. It is actually the law. It is extremely important to allow students' access to the general education curriculum with their neurotypical peers with the necessary supports and services to be successful in the general education classroom. I have been involved in special education for over 20 years and have seen the pendulum shift back and forth. Without really knowing what was implemented, how the transition process took place, what training did occur and how this was embraced with the staff, students and other stakeholders it is difficult to assess what could have been done. Was this a top down mandated institution of the full inclusion structure? What type of differentiated learning platforms are currently being used? I am a proponent of curriculum delivery in the Universal Design Learning format that builds on the strengths of students with disabilities, not their weaknesses. They learn and are assessed through multiple means of representation, actions and expression and engagement within the classroom.

I believe that full inclusion can be extremely successful, but it needs to have the support, resources, a mind shift with general education teachers and a willingness to understand students with disabilities. Teachers need a great deal of support and training not just in co-teaching and inclusion, but in really understanding the challenges a student faces day in and day out with his or her disability. As an adjunct professor in special education for master degree students, I often see many general education teachers have an "aha" moment when they start to understand the different disabilities and how it impacts individual's learning. They respond to wanting to do things differently, I never understood it was so difficult for the student and other comments once they understand the different characteristics of various disabilities and the challenges students can have in learning as well as, social emotional learning.

My biggest concern would be meeting Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. Just being placed in a general education classroom setting doesn't always provide FAPE based on their disabilities and delivery of services. I have experienced and observed very productive co-teaching classrooms and also co-teaching classrooms in which the special education teacher is nothing more than a para-professional. I believe that in an inclusive classroom in which one general education teacher and one ESE teacher are working together, an observer walking into the room would not know which role each teacher held. The classroom would be operating in a way that supports are built in and not really visible or apparent, that all students are getting the supports and interventions they need to be successful. Often in many of my trainings and presentations, I discuss that "fair isn't equal," "one size doesn't fit all" and that it is important to provided students what they need to be successful. Sometimes we have to provide more for some and less for others, because they don't need it. We need to provide all students with the supports they need to be successful in an inclusive environment. We also need to provide teachers, administrators and other stakeholders the tools and resources necessary to be successful in the classroom.

Question 2:

What would you do to improve ESE inclusion at Flagler Schools.

As Superintendent of Flagler Schools I would seek to gain as much information on the implementation process that occurred; the failures, the successes. I would engage multiple stakeholders, parents, EPAC, teachers, students, para-professionals, administrators and identify, what is working, what is not working and what is needed to move this effort positively forward. Also, analyze the data on students success rates, ESE teacher ratios, previous

## Flagler question 1

trainings, school wide understanding of students with disabilities, what types of teaching practices are currently being used in our schools and asses what can align with inclusive practices. Identify training for staff and administration to not only understand the legal implications of providing FAPE for students with disabilities, but also training in the characteristics of students with disabilities. I would seek to understand what is depth of understanding that teachers and staff have of children with disabilities and provide education and training to them. As an ESE teacher, I often had teachers tell me to just take them and fix them and they would no longer have a problem in their classroom. Unfortunately, through my experiences as an administrator and teacher, this too often the perception. At my districts I have provided trainings of what it is like to have a disability, being in the shoes of a person with a disability. I believe there needs to be a strong understanding of what a child experiences having a disability day in and day out, and develop a greater awareness of our diverse needs of our students. It would mean moving teachers and staff out of their comfort zone, providing them with tools and resources in which they can confidently approach an inclusive classroom as a master. It is not easy, it takes a great deal of mind shift, training, understanding and willingness to make changes. This includes buy-in from stakeholders and working with those stakeholders in a collaborative, problem solving effort to improve ESE inclusion at Flagler schools.

In your previous position, how have you worked to improve communications with a community group that has reduced conflict with the district.

In a previous position, our education programming operated, among other areas, in isolation. We conducted our business with little to no collaboration with others within our agency community. Each area competed for time to provide their services and programming. Upon my commencement, I found a lot of disconnect and lack of communication. As I progressed, I requested meetings, sought out key individuals that were decision makers and built relationships with those individuals. I asked specific questions, inquired why or why not, certain things were happening. I developed relationships, which in itself increased communications and collaborated to make positive changes. For a long period of time, education did not collaborate with other areas of the agency community, and many areas operated as silos, conducting business with little regard to what others were doing. Over the past 2 years, we have made significant strides to improve our delivery of overall services to our students within the community. When we sought to restructure our day, to provide more appropriate services to our students, it was apparent that these changes touched every area of the organization. This took a highly collaborative approach to reach our goal. After many meetings, reaching out to specific areas and having numerous conversations with stakeholders, we reached our goal. To improve communication among community stakeholders it starts with building good relationships with those stakeholders. Providing opportunities to collaborate, listen to issues and working together to find solutions. It is the relationships that improve communications, not the mode of communication.

If selected for the Superintendent position how would you improve communication with the ESE community.

As a superintendent I would seek to improve communications with the ESE community using multiple means of communication. I believe it is important to provide opportunities for school and community stakeholders to build relationships among each other. School communities are microcosms of the larger community, and it is important to create proactive, positive and meaningful relationships with all stakeholders. It appears that the current superintendent has been building this effort with ESE community. I would be actively engaged with the ESE community, parents and students. They are a vital component and voice for our students with disabilities and I believe it is important to have that advocacy for our students. I believe and would welcome opportunities to engage these stakeholders and would continuously seek opportunities to provide what is best for our students. Having been in special education for over 20 years and a strong advocate for our students with disabilities, I would welcome the many opportunities to collaborate and ensure that we are making student centered decisions, keeping up with regulations and providing an inclusive environment for all to succeed.

### Flagler Question 3

Please explain how you have successfully changed management practices of administrators in your previous positions for the better, including processes used or recommended for administrators accountable.

As a Director working with my team of administrators, I found that many times people are resistant to change and do not like to get out of their comfort zone. This can always be difficult when implementing changes to structures, systems and programming. I have learned that change can have a subtle impact or have a significant impact into areas that may not have been thought about. What I have found to be successful is creating problem solving groups that involve multiple stakeholders. We have used the 7 step approach to identify our problem area(s) and begin to break it down into a problem statement, collect data and identify root cause. We develop goals/metrics and create initiatives to track our implementation and create countermeasures if necessary. This becomes a team approach in which administrators work together or they work with their building teams to address these problems and develop solutions. It is important to have clear and concise expectations in which leaders understand their responsibilities and be held accountable. Accountability can be measured when expectations are clear and there are checks and balances in place to ensure accountability. I believe in systemic approaches to reaching goals and objectives.

If selected for the Superintendent position what would you do to end retaliatory management practices against staff.

I believe the first step I would take is to get an understanding of what is happening within the culture of the buildings, their current challenges and successes. As referenced in your letter there is a hostile environment in which staff are facing retaliation. It appears that leadership may be operating from a position of not just fear, but inadequate support and most likely a lack of knowledge regarding special education law, compliance, adequate ratios and other factors that have become challenges within the building and the district. Most school administrators have little to no experience with special education, so without the proper training, education and support, they are most likely navigating in foreign waters.

After gathering data and working with multiple stakeholders to drill down the challenges, as a high priority I would begin working with those stakeholders through a problem solving step process, create a needs assessment and develop an action plan to begin making changes among those stakeholders. This would include trainings, education of laws under IDEA and Section 504 and the characteristics of students with exceptional needs. We would develop a process of implementation in which issues can be addressed in a positive systemic process to eliminate a culture of retaliation, negative and abusive behaviors. Many people don't leave their positions due to money, they leave because of the culture and climate. Shifting the climate and culture depends heavily on leadership both at district level, building levels as well as, in the classroom. It is important to empower others to make the right decisions and provide them with avenues in which they seek opportunities towards solutions, prioritize student centered decision making that is of value to all of our stakeholders.

I believe that it is important to have procedures in place in which the subjectivity or decisions of prejudice, retaliation can not happen. Retaliatory practices create hostile environments and whether the decision was made in retaliation or was made for the needs of the students or school at the time, there should be a process in place that eliminates that type of behavior. Without knowing the exact details, it sounds like the behavior is prevalent in the district or it may be narrowed down to one or two people. Just as we expect to hold students and staff accountable, the same goes for leadership as well. However, there seems to be a lot of fear, lack of training and lack of understanding regarding the issues of providing FAPE and services for ESE students. It is always challenging to find the best balance, especially if an administrator is operating from a lack of support, resources and knowledge.

### Flagler Question 3

#### Question 4

In your previous positions, what have you done to cultivate the next generation of leaders?

I believe if you hire a leader to do a job, you have to trust them to do that job. So it is important to build a culture of trust and support for developing leaders. That doesn't mean to just cut them loose, it means allowing them to make decisions and not micro manage leaders. It is important for them to learn from their decision making and be reflective in their practice. It is important to ensure there is an understanding of our common vision and allow them to develop and their leadership styles. It is important to let them shine when there are opportunities and provide constructive reflective feedback as well. I believe it is important to develop servant leadership practices, that create a positive culture and climate within the building. Because if you don't have a great climate and culture as a leader, one will struggle with accomplishing the vision and mission of the building and the district. I am also aware that as a superintendent, it is important that your leaders are sending the same message as the district, as it is often channelled through building leadership. I also think it is important to let them know that you trust them with the job they are doing, create healthy relationships and celebrate their successes. I believe it is important to be the role model that you want your leaders to become. I often recognize my leadership team, even if it is a small thank you or good work on a project. It helps them to know that they are on the right path and they are being supported by their leadership. I believe it is also important to provide leadership training, opportunities to network with others and most importantly problem solve with each other to find great solutions, leadership opportunities and help develop each others' leadership growth.

If selected for the Superintendent position, what would you do to improve the leadership skills of this new generation of leaders?

As I discussed in the previous question, the beginning of developing and improving leadership skills starts with shift in the culture and climate within the buildings and district. Again, I would start with understanding what is happening and causing the leaders to react negatively towards staff and other stakeholders. I believe it starts with rebuilding trust and transparency within the buildings and among leadership teams. The generation of new leaders need to have good role models in which they can learn to become servants to their stakeholders. They need to have the right tools, compassion and caring for others and have to be able to be problem solvers. I firmly believe that leaders will make or break the climate and culture, and that is an important philosophy that they first of all need to understand and believe in. There is a great trainer, Jack Daley, that really talks about what it takes to change climate and culture. As he would say, if you don't have that, then anything else you try to do will be ineffective. This starts from the top down and would be a high priority for me to push forward. Leadership is not about the leader being successful, it is about allowing for opportunities for others to shine and recognizing their contributions. Leaders celebrate their student and staff's successes. They need to be caring and compassionate towards people and role model that behavior. I often say, leaders need to leave their egos at the front door. I have been fortunate enough to have great mentors and role models throughout my career and the characteristics for their success was being kind, fair and consistent. We can have tough conversations, but we need to be respectful and find ways to fair resolutions. I have also encountered hostile leadership and have found that they tend to work from the basis of fear, being overwhelmed and often lack the expertise and skill sets needed to handle difficult situations. The days of the hammer and nail are and should be long gone. In developing successful young leaders, they need to embrace diversity and tolerance, servant leadership and all stakeholders with dignity. Not only would I provide the necessary training to develop the management aspects of leadership, but I would seek to develop them into authentic leaders that care about their staff and all stakeholders. This would not only create exceptional leadership, but it would also result in a shift towards a positive climate and school culture.

In your previous positions, what experience do you have working with the ESE community?

In my previous positions and current position, I work with numerous stakeholders within the ESE community. I spent over 10 years working in the area of discipline with my caseload, primarily special needs students. Over the course of time and as the Director of Deans, I significantly reduced the amount of ESE students being suspended and removed from schools. We created a school within the school that provided wrap around services for our students within the building, working on both academic and socio-emotional learning. The purpose was to support our high needs, behaviorally challenged students in a program that would help them transition back into general education population. During this time we created a workshop for parents to provide them with skills to manage their children's behaviors. I have often found that some parents feel hopeless and don't have the skills or supports to manage their child's disability. We sought to help them learn these techniques and strategies to positively engage with their child, providing consistency between home and school. It helped communicate the same messages and behavioral interventions for the child and provided a more consistency and structure for the student. The parents were very engaged in the workshop; it opened up communication between the school and parents. These workshops provided a venue in which parents could interact and support each other.

Additional experiences with ESE includes ESE case manager and service provider, working within all grade levels of education. Provided trainings on teaching and building relationships with at-risk students, working with socially-emotionally challenged students and characteristics of students with disabilities. I have worked as a special education director, LEA and have conducted all types of meetings such as, IEP/METs, behavior intervention plans, manifest determinations and most all of the other facets of special education. I am currently an online adjunct professor at a university that teaches master degree and special education director candidates in the areas of special education law, characteristics of students with disabilities, methods of teaching students with disabilities and methods of research. I was named the expert consultant from Office for Civil Rights when hired on as the superintendent as my district was going through a remediation and resolution agreement with them. I was responsible for creating and executing a needs assessment and action plan based on their findings. This was a two year process in which policies and procedures were reviewed, tracking systems implemented, file reviews for all students and child find process/file reviews for all students enrolled, a determination if any students were in need of compensatory services that may have been denied FAPE plus many other areas of improvements. This was a huge undertaking, but moved our Exceptional Student Services into compliance and in October 2019 closed the resolution agreement.

What positive results were you able to accomplish as a result of that relationship?

This response will address the workshop that we created for parents at our high school. The positive results from this relationship was opening the door to communication between the parents and the school community. It provided a consistent message that the student would hear both at school and at home. Parents and other family members learned strategies in which they could respond in a way that would not reinforce behaviors or escalate conflicts between the child and family member. These workshops consisted of 10 sessions in which parents and family members came to the school and worked with our student support services team and learned not only about emotional disabilities, but the behaviors and interventions that could be used to help improve behaviors. The students were not at these sessions and it allowed for parents to network and engage in conversations on their feelings of hopelessness, strategies they implemented that may have failed or were successful. It provided a community which parents could build relationships with our staff and other parents facing the same types

ESE Question 5

experience

of issues. It was a successful workshop that had positive impact on many of our students and their families.