

EPAC/ ESE Parent Advisory Council - Flagler Response

Yaw Obeng

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1. What is your position on ESE inclusion? If selected for the Superintendent position, what would you do to improve ESE inclusion at Flagler Schools?

I have experience in different jurisdiction with Inclusion Models. Currently Vermont is an Inclusion state. But just by saying you have an inclusion approach does not preclude it is effective. Inclusion can be successfully implemented in a variety of ways but it can also be done very poorly, where it is at the detriment of students and families.

I support the WEAC (Wisconsin Education Association Council) holistic interpretation of inclusion - "... a commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she (they) would otherwise attend". Federal education regulations do not mandate inclusion but I believe it should be our goal in integrating our students while considering their neurotypical peers and the least restrictive environments. These practical components play a factor in the types of inclusion strategies and programs for each child.

The conversations with parents and school teams should determine the appropriate types of inclusionary programming for a student. The goal in the IEP should be to aspire towards the most inclusive experience for a student in the classroom.

The adaptations needed for a student will be determined by the degree of modifications and accommodations required in the general classroom. Also the degree of external support. Let's build capacity within the classroom to the furthest extent possible.

Improve ESE Inclusion in Flagler Schools

In reviewing at how I could support Flagler Schools in improving ESE Inclusion and outcomes, the first step would be to examine the data.

Based on what you have provided that 16% of students receive ESE services this sheds some light on areas that require support. The national average of students receiving Special Education support is 13% (U.S. Department of Education). So clearly we are over the norm. The research data also tells us that when more than 15 - 20% of students require intervention this could indicate that we could have a Tier 1 Direct Instruction challenge. Ideally only 3%-5% of our students should be receiving Tier 3 intensive intervention.

Therefore, my approach would start with our teachers who support our students. The data indicates our instructors would need capacity building through training, coaching, resources and support. We would be eligible to receive Title II Federal disbursement for training and

development for teachers and school leaders. I would engage our teachers and paraprofessional in a SWAT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis process so they can inform us, based on their experience on what will work best in Flagler. A few strategies that I would introduce that have been tested and proven to yield success would be:

Professional Tier I Instruction Capacity Building - High quality instruction for every child, Embedded Instructional Coaching- Adaptations, modification and accommodations

Development of Student Centered Learning Environments- Structural classrooms that support all learners inclusive of their abilities, Personalized Learning Plans

Dual Certified Teachers - Hire and retain teachers with dual certification that includes Exceptional Students certification

Co-Teaching Model - CTM has worked in effectively implementing inclusionary approaches in classrooms. A teacher with an area of expertise (this case ESE) or specialty joins a homeroom to support a specified group of learner(s).

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

I have had the opportunity to work successfully with formal and informal community advocacy groups and individuals that have applied pressure on the District. The groups and topics range from: Faith communities, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ2AA communities, Special Ed Networks, Native Americans, immigrant communities, etc.

A specific example I will use; is the conflict we were experiencing with a coalition of Faith communities contesting teacher delivery of certain sensitive areas of the curriculum. They wanted certain practices exclusively band from the schools.

In order to deescalate and reduce the conflict, I invited the leaders to participate in a meeting to understand their concerns. The meeting was a good step in moving towards finding some common ground to take action. I was able to develop a level of understanding for their concerns which allowed for them to appreciate the districts position and responsibility. This set the stage to allow the group to become part of the solution by having representatives on a Task Force that would work on mutually agreed upon recommendations to be considered. Over several meetings we were able to lay the groundwork that any recommendations must be within the scope of Education Legislative Law, Human Rights, Collective Agreements, Curriculum Guidelines, Board Values and Policies. This was a significant step to get the leaders to step back and consider all the stakeholders who would be impacted. The committee which had representation from community members as well as staff experts decided to develop a guideline document called **'Addressing Controversial and Sensitive Issues'**. The document addressed four major areas:

Controversy in the Curriculum

(It is acknowledged at the onset that controversial and sensitive issues affect teachers, staff and students both emotionally and intellectually)

Controversy and the Development of Values

(Learning environments shall be established in which conflicting sets of values are processed analytically and with respect for the differences in peoples, identities, and world views.)

Addressing Controversial Issues in Teaching

(Controversial issues shall be presented in a manner consistent with the developmental maturity of the particular students being taught)

Presenting Controversial Issues in a Fair and Appropriate Manner

(In the broad perspective of curricular activities, controversial material must be treated in a fair manner that is thorough, balanced, and free of unfair biases.)

It required staff in-servicing and an ad- hoc oversight committee to implement. It was worth the hours. Now we have some guidelines, procedures and structure for students, parents and community members to bring issues forward supported by a process to manage the conflict before any Board involvement. This significantly reduced Board delegations on controversial school issues and gave us the opportunity to create a multi-faith reference group to share potentially sensitive issues,

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

Working collaboratively with the ESE community is an essential partnership in closing the achievement gap in the district. It will require listening and being supported to make identified changes to find increased success for students who receive services. It will also have an impact on the coordination and alignment to general education programming.

To improve communication, I would have to meet with the community and demonstrate that I present to listen and learn from them before taking any action. Offer a commitment to meet regularly in order to develop a shared vision. We would need to start a conversation regarding what the data is telling us. This would allow for some open dialogue without placing blame in order to collect what is called 'street data'. The 'street data' would give us authentic interpretation into what the numbers mean to them and what they believe has been occurring.

An improved communication approach must be aligned with a plan of action to work together on. The implementation of a plan will give the opportunity for frequent communication and feedback. I would engage the ESE community in a Start - Stop - Continue activity. The activity illuminates all the challenges and success but also gives us actions to put into a plan. We can align indicators with actions which will measure our progress and provide for continuous communication loop on what is happening.

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 holding administrators accountable?

I have been most successful when collaborating with staff to implement change through a strategic approach. We used a change management model to develop district alignment with district principals in targeting climate goals. I followed a RDIE (Review Develop Implement Evaluate) change process in order to have everyone focus on the primary goals. Through surveys and focused conversations with subordinate staff, I was able to identify specific areas for improvement. We shared the plan for improvement not only with staff in the school but with PTO and community members. We need everyone to be aware of our efforts and contribute towards progress.

The data that was shared made our actions more objective and measurable. Continuous communication and updates were necessary to ensure there was a level of accountability to our committed actions. It was essential to reinforce by acknowledging small successes through prizes and recognition. Taking time out to celebrate progress helped build community and noticeable change in culture.

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

Organizational retaliatory behavior (ORB) is actually a true concept. It is considered workplace deviance in Human Resource theory. If we are experiencing this kind of climate, then that indicates there have been a series of actions that have perpetuated this reality. It could now be present both ways. This is not healthy which prevents us from focusing on a student's first agenda.

No process is a guarantee of a risk proof outcome, however, building a culture of best practices for preventing workplace retaliation raises the likelihood of success. A well-defined process that limits ambiguity, aligns school values, and communicates a basic framework for fairness certainly will increase the overall climate

A few steps I would take to eliminate retaliatory manage practice:

SURVEY STAFF - Collect information from staff that is confidential and some parts anonymous to identify the real issues

IDENTIFY AND NAME CRITICAL ISSUES - After using a third party to consult with staff then select top issues to focus actions on. A third party will assist in having staff feel safe in disclosing

IMPLEMENT RESTORATIVE PROCESS - I have had success using Restorative Practices in my current District to resolve conflicts and level the playing field to move forward

DEVELOP RETALIATION POLICY- Establish a policy against retaliation. Even before an employee complains, we need to have a clear policy against retaliation. The policy should spell out exactly what retaliation is, and it should make perfectly clear that we will not tolerate retaliation from any of our managers or other employees. It should also tell employees what steps to take if they feel they are being retaliated against.

EVALUATION PROCESS FOR MANAGERS - Create evaluation process that includes a '360 EQ Analysis' from subordinate staff

MENTOR MANAGERS

PROVIDE HUMAN RESOURCES TRAINING

COMMUNICATE- Communicate the initiative and policy widely

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

In all my previous leadership roles as a Curriculum Coach, Assistant Principal, Principal, District Director and Superintendent, the practice of succession planning or developing future leaders was not lost as an important part of my role. As Superintendent, I have been able to mentor and develop programs for future principals and superintendents. As a team we developed a program called 'Me a leader' which became a three-month professional series for teachers and non-supervisory employees to engage in sessions that develop them for leadership roles. The participants had the opportunity to hear leadership stories from identified school community leaders and myself; participate in workshops; mentor groupings; examine current literature; fill out a 360 EQ profile for analysis, develop a leadership plan and a culminating leadership retreat activity.

I have had the privilege of being the Coordinating Instructor for the Superintendent Certification Program. I say privilege because I learned a significant amount about mentoring future leaders of districts through our course work together. I have organized leadership groups to attract Black, Latino and under-represented groups to pursue school leadership. In my districts we have always established some form of mentoring program that allows individuals to explore their leadership potential. I myself experienced a mentoring leadership program as a teacher, so understand the

value and appreciate the investment put in by leaders. Finally, I had the honor of being invited by AASA, The School Superintendent Association to publish an article on Succession Planning. The article illustrated how to build leadership capacity in your organization.

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

There are formal and informal ways to develop successional leadership. The first is to lead in a manner in which individuals would want to aspire to your role. In Flagler, I would canvas and make it known we are looking for aspiring leaders to support and build capacity in our system. Leadership development is open to all staff at all levels.

It needs to be clear when we are talking about development of leadership skills that leadership development is not mistaken for management training.

To improve the leadership skills, we need to engage the staff, provide support by using high quality mentors, and rotate them through meaningful roles to expand their knowledge. Once an area in leadership is found that both sparks and holds their interest move them to deeper assignments with greater accountability.

Formally programs can be established where structures are in place to assist staff in their journey. We can develop leadership programs that are non-threatening or ultra-competitive. These should be established in partnership with unions and other units as they would be vested in their membership

5. In your previous positions, what experience do you have working with the ESE community? What positive results were you able to accomplish as a result of that relationship?

Previously, as a District Administrator of a large district of 258,000 students in Toronto. I was given the opportunity to work with the Special Education Advisory Committee to develop our Special Education Plan. This was a great experience in getting to know and understand the issues of: Special Education students and parents; exemplary program models; teacher and paraprofessional needs; and funding strategies. The challenge of developing strategies with our community partners to implement and then scale to support 450 schools was rewarding. Seeing the alignment grow across the district resulted in student success and parent satisfaction.

On a local level I have worked with ESE Community Advisories as a principal and established Advisories as a Superintendent. I have found that ESE parents are interested in participating but are very busy managing family life. Therefore, the time you are exposed to them must be productive and encouraging. The other challenge has always been getting diverse representation on the advisories. I collaborated with a couple of members to develop an outreach strategy to

increase representation. A significant action was going into the community and speaking with parents in the settings where ethno-cultural communities gathered.

Our district had programmatic and growth challenges. We were in the process of redesigning a new high school considering 21st century spaces and strategies, technology, accessibility and inclusive instructional centers. The ESE Advisory had always advocated for changes in program and facilities. This led to an excellent opportunity for this committee to play a meaningful and helpful role. I invited this advisory council to play a role in the consultations, program design, and development of 'maker spaces' that could be used for inclusionary learning. They rose to the occasion by adding expert value in the development of plans that were designed for the next generation of learners.