

Flagler County ESE Questions

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What is your position on ESE inclusion?

My belief is that we must set up systems to provide for ALL students. No matter the category or subgroup we place our students in, our goal is to take them from where they are and provide them with the supports to meet their needs so they grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

Here are some of the ways I have been involved with providing for ALL students:

- Providing a strong, researched-based tier 1 instruction that includes differentiation and a tier 1 support system.
- Cultural proficiency training. One must understand a student's culture and experiences to best engage them in the learning process. This understanding will help to set a positive and engaging learning environment, differentiate instruction, meet emotional & social needs, and provide the correct support structures whether that is remedial or enrichment.
- Providing mental health services for both students and staff. There seem to be more and more mental health issues interfering with both teaching and learning. Providing mental health supports is important in providing the best environment for teaching and learning.
- Professional Learning Communities (PLC) has been a structure that provides teachers with collaboration time to focus on standards, how to assess those standards in formative ways, and to address the needs of each of their students whether it is by remediation or through extension. PLCs as led to a more focused MTSS process with both academic and behavioral areas of support.
- The Teacher Leadership Compensation (TLC) program enacted by the State of Iowa, has allowed for the sharing and coaching of instructional strategies, a format to try new ideas with immediate and useful feedback, and a structure that provides on-time, individualized professional development. The TLC program has decentralized instruction and professional development to provide teachers support at the classroom level.

Specifically looking at our ESE population, we are always striving for providing the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The goal for an LRE is to provide as much inclusion time as possible. It is vital to provide ESE students quality time with peers for social, emotional, and academic growth. I have found that inclusion is most successful when the supports, whether it is a para-educator embedded in the classroom or a co-teaching situation, are highly-trained and working together as a highly functioning team. Inclusion is very successful when everyone is working as a team, setting high expectations for all, executing well-designed plans, maximizing each other's skills, and providing continual communication. In fact, I have observed classrooms under this model that have not only benefited the ESE students in the class but ALL of the

students in that class. An inclusion model implemented provides a collaborative culture for staff and a great learning environment for all students.

If selected for the Superintendent position, what would you do to improve ESE inclusion at Flagler Schools?

As I stated earlier, inclusion is very successful when everyone is working as a team, setting high expectations for all, executing well-designed plans, maximizing each other's skills, and providing continual communication. The key ingredients for making any implementation successful are continuous training, feedback loops, and the on-going process of assuring that what is being done is providing a learning environment that is engaging, rigorous, and meeting the needs of ALL of our students. As the new superintendent, I would lead a team to evaluate current professional development plans & opportunities, communication processes (both internal and external), current inclusion practices, determine skill & training level of staff, schedules (especially as it relates to collaboration opportunities for teachers and support staff), and current/trend student achievement & social emotional data. This evaluation information would provide the needs assessment to be used for planning purposes as we move to a more efficient and highly-performing inclusive model.

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

As assistant superintendent in Washington, Iowa, I was finding very difficult to communicate with our Hispanic community. Though language was a barrier, it was some cultural difference that made it difficult on the relationship between the district and our Hispanic families.

Particularly in the prioritizing of a student's education and the student's ability to work to support their family. To assist in improving communication and better understanding each other's culture, it was important to find ways to engage with each other. We implemented three initiatives to engage families, better understand culture difference, and support our students' educational needs and obligation to support their families financially.

- To help engage families into the school community, we coordinated activities when they were able to participate. Many times it was on weekends, especially Sunday afternoon when many of our Hispanic families were together. Child care was also provided during activities centered-around adult learning, such as our English for Adults class.

- Though we did have many of our written communications in both English and Spanish, we moved to having all written communication in Spanish. We also provided translators or translator devices at many of activities, including Parent-Teacher conferences.
- We developed flexible schedules for some high school students that would allow them to earn their high school diploma while being able to work to support their families. This program eliminated putting the student in the position to have to choose between their education and supporting their family.

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

It is through being an astute listener, reflector and questioner that I am able to fully understand what the message is. I have learned through life experience and courses like Cognitive Coaching to be a great listener. Along with listening, my written and oral communication is important. I have found that creating and implementing a detailed communication plan for the district has been vital to a successful district. As an administrator, it is important to consider change (first or second order) as an important factor. As an excellent communicator, I need to know my audience and provide a variety of ways for communication including oral, written, and technological.

It doesn't matter which one of my many experiences I reflect on, there are a number of commonalities with them all:

- As I mentioned earlier, no matter the category or subgroup we place our students in, our goal is to take them from where they are and provide them with the supports to meet their needs so they grow academically, socially, and emotionally.
- Communication is the key to student, staff, parent, and community engagement. Continually looking for ways to communicate to inform, gather input, promote, and involve your stakeholders is vital to the continuous improvement of a school community.
- Communities inherently want to have successful schools. What success looks like might be different depending on who you talk to (academics, athletics, fine arts, post-secondary success...). The key is to engage the community at those points of interest to be able to identify strengths and growth areas then in-turn those engaged will support and promote the growth and success of the district.
- Many times people just want to be heard. The school community wants opportunities to express their thoughts, participate in solution-focused activities, ask questions, and just be better informed. Stakeholders who are better informed will be better equipped to promote and assist the district.

My beliefs and actions are very much aligned with valuing ALL, ensuring learning opportunities in all situations (positive or negative), and including the whole community in educating our students. During my years in education, I have demonstrated the drive, the communication skills, team-building abilities, the organizational skills, an understanding of diverse populations, the willingness to provide support for all students, and an understanding of the structure and workings of a district to be a successful superintendent for the Flagler County School District and close collaborator with EPAC.

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?

A good practice no matter if it is with students in the classroom or an administrative team, is to clearly communicate expectations and processes. Most importantly, when expectations are met or processes aren't followed, that these things are addressed. I believe in the coach up/coach out model. The foundational piece of this model is that I am working with the administrator on improvement and growth through coaching but knowing that being coached out is a possibility if expectations are not ultimately met.

Accountability is important and I have my administrators do a number of things along with the activities that I am involved with that promotes accountability within a growth mindset. I have listed a number of those activities:

- Building goals and action plans. The plans would include academic as well as cultural goals.
- The use of Vision Cards. This is what we use to report out the measurement of the goals. The Vision Cards are updated as data comes in, which makes it an active report.
- I formally evaluate all 17 of my administrators each year. I meet with each formally three times a year. Along with their building goals they each have an individual professional plan. This plan is a tool we use to stretch our administrators or address concerns.
- I do informal building walk-throughs along with having informal conversations throughout the year.
- We have an administration meeting monthly to plan as a district and address issues.

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

I make it a priority to participate in and provide opportunities for staff that will promote a positive culture within the district. Many of the opportunities give staff a way to communicate with as well as provide me with a feet-on-the-ground perspective of what is going on in the district. I have listed some of those activities here:

- Visiting buildings and classrooms as often as possible throughout the year.
- I randomly selected staff members who then are provided a day off of their choice sometime during the school year. During that day off I will be their substitute and do their job for that day. I call it Super Sub which is short for Superintendent Substitute. The Communication Director and I produce and place on the District's website pre and post videos of interviews with the staff member as well as a reflection of my day subbing.
- I conduct Superintendent's Cabinet Tours twice a year at each building in the district. My cabinet members and I visit the schools to gather input and provide information on topics and activities of importance to staff.

This modeling has also spurred similar activities at the building level with many of our administrators. These types of activities along with the action plans that come from the input that we gather, build a culture of open-communication and the trust that not only can someone express their concerns but also knowing that it will be addressed and retaliation will not be an issue. If for some reason, someone is retaliated against, it will be addressed.

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

I believe in the grow-your-own model. I feel it is a benefit to have leaders who know the district and have an investment in the work we have done. In my current district, we have a number of associate principal and dean positions in our secondary buildings. As these positions open up, we first look at our internal staff for these positions. The duties of these positions have been set up to provide a plethora of opportunities along with the normal duties for that position. For example, a traditional dean position would not evaluate staff, in our district they are assigned a few staff members to evaluate. Our goal is to provide an opportunity that will give multiple experiences and in turn benefit that person in future endeavors, whether that is in our district or elsewhere.

We also provide teachers with administrative aspirations, opportunities throughout the district. Opportunities such as game manager for a sporting event, shadowing an administrator, week internships, subbing for an administrator when they are out of the building for a day or two, and just this year we had a couple of interim administrators due to a resignation prior to the start of the school.

I understand that I'm not bigger than the organization. I am not afraid to seek input or threatened by other's talents. I believe in teamwork and recognizing every employee, student, and community member as an essential piece of the puzzle. To mitigate the stress of change, I encourage all employees to express their ideas, share their skills and strengths and take an active part in making their jobs stronger, more productive, and relevant. The most successful way to move an organization from good to great is to cultivate and build off the strengths of the people in that organization. As an educational leader it is my responsibility to provide a supportive culture that is safe to exchange and debate ideas as we continue to raise the bar. I understand how every person's role makes a direct impact on the overall success of a school district.

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

I truly believe that improving and learning as a leader is similar to what we expect to see happening in our classrooms. Clearly communicating expectations, modeling expectations & behaviors, providing opportunities to practice & perform, and provide support and constructive reflection during both successes & failures. Through the learning process it is important to ground your work in the characteristics of an excellent administrator. Although there are many characteristics of an excellent administrator, I believe there are four that are foundational.

- A person of integrity
- Excellent communicator
- Passion for others to succeed
- Has a growth mindset

The first characteristic is at all times being a person of integrity. I strive to live a life that is a model for others. My goal is to be an inspiration to others through the way I present myself, act, and speak. I aspire to be a noble person who supports a culture of positivity, respect, and common goals & expectations.

Secondly is to be an excellent communicator. It is through being an astute listener, reflector and questioner that I am able to fully understand what the message is. I have learned through life experience and courses like Cognitive Coaching to be a great listener. Along with listening my written and oral communication is important. As an administrator, it is important to consider change (first or second order) as an important factor. As an excellent communicator, I need to know my audience and provide a variety of ways for communication including oral, written and technological.

Third is a passion for others to succeed. It is my role as an administrator to help the students, staff, and families succeed. I strive to understand stakeholders' priorities and be supportive of their role and contributions. I believe anyone who knows me, understands that I am driven to support students and staff to be successful through a passion for learning and allowing them to contribute in their areas of strength. I am most productive when I am able to collaborate with others, I am positive in my daily interactions, and I have the skills to continually build the capacity of others to serve ALL students.

Finally, to have a growth mindset as a leader is to believe. To believe in growth, embracing challenges, having grit, seek out other ways to accomplish tasks and not let failure derail your passion and beliefs. It is only through struggles or even failures that I become better and gain knowledge & confidence.

As I move forward to become an exemplary administrator and person, these are the top four characteristic I strive for professionally and personally. These are the characteristics I try to model for others so they can be successful in whatever leadership opportunities unfold for them, no matter their position in the organization.

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

Along with the many IEP meetings I have been involved with over the years, I have involved representatives from the ESE community in many committees and planning activities.

- Curriculum adoption committees
- School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC)
- Facilities Committee
- Part of the committee that wrote our district delivery plan for special education
- Development of a para-education allocation plan that was used to meet the needs of our students in a financially efficient way

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

The most important accomplishment as we do the work in each of the committees is that we have ALL students as our focus. Our ESE representatives have not only come to the table with needs of ESE students but come from the view of an inclusive model for ALL students. Our ESE community representatives have provide many great ideas that others don't see. Many of these

ideas not only meet our students' needs but they do so within the financial restraints we occasionally find ourselves. Our ESE community representatives have also been very helpful in identify possible law or code violations during a process rather than later during implementation where it can become a bigger issue.