

Candidate: Scott Schneider
St. Johns County School District Superintendent
Written Responses

St. Johns County School District

- 1. Our district shows impressive math and reading scores overall, with about 3 out of 4 students performing at or above grade level. However, a closer analysis shows that some areas of our district are high-performing while other areas are low-performing schools. What specific approach would you take to address this disparity while maintaining our overall academic excellence?**

As a leader, I am committed to a systematic and consistent information-gathering process to enhance student outcomes. This process is vital for maintaining transparency and fostering trust among all stakeholders. My approach prioritizes listening before acting. It is essential to consider the perspectives of students, educators, parents, community members, and the governance board ensuring all stakeholders have a voice. This collective input, combined with data triangulation, forms the foundation for establishing guiding principles and district priorities. The process is cyclical: we diagnose, prescribe, and monitor results until the desired outcomes are achieved. These district priorities guide decision-making, and as Superintendent, it is imperative to empower our teachers and school-based leadership by providing them with the autonomy necessary to perform their duties effectively. When stakeholders and educators feel trusted and valued, they are more inclined to take ownership of their work, collaborate openly, and implement strategies tailored to the unique needs of their students. This empowerment fosters an environment where continuous improvement becomes an integral part of school culture, leading to sustained academic excellence for every child.

In my current role, we identified significant learning gaps and implemented this process to effectively impact student achievement. We started by first listening to school-based leaders, teachers, and stakeholders via the 5 Essentials survey (University of Chicago) and in-person conversations. Then we analyzed student performance in reading and math and usage data from our online resources. Information gathered and feedback received indicated that our teachers felt undervalued, student performance was not improving, and both teachers and school-leadership lacked the autonomy to incorporate curricular resources. Our internal review and stakeholder input revealed that our previous approach had become ineffective for various reasons. This information gathering process led to the Learning through Earned Autonomy based on Data (LEAD) initiative and corresponding professional development. By prioritizing listening first and acting second, and granting earned autonomy, we adopted a deliberate approach to address the specific needs of all students, communities, and schools. Consequently, our teachers and school leadership felt empowered, took ownership of student learning, and the traditional school graduation rate increased to 95%, with all sub-groups outperforming the state average.

The successes of St. Johns County School District should be recognized and celebrated, even as we acknowledge learning gaps among some children. By prioritizing listening first, acting second, and providing earned autonomy, I am confident this process can be successful as Superintendent of SJCS D. It empowers stakeholders, values teachers, establishes clear and

intentional practices, and delivers results for all children. Through my over 20 years of experience working in and with underperforming schools, external personnel often set a plan of action without involving school leadership and educators. This approach limits teacher ownership and innovation desperately needed. When educators feel trusted and valued, they are more likely to take ownership of their work, collaborate openly, and implement strategies tailored to the unique needs of their students. This empowerment fosters an environment where continuous improvement becomes an integral part of school culture, leading to sustained academic excellence.

2. Our district projects significant growth in the coming years. What do you identify as the three most critical factors a superintendent must address to ensure successful expansion while maintaining educational excellence? How would you develop sustainable systems capable of accommodating continued growth?

To ensure successful expansion while maintaining educational excellence, as superintendent I would address three critical factors. Firstly, it is crucial to ensure that educational programs are continuous across all schools. This includes the alignment of curriculum, teaching methods, and assessments to provide a seamless educational experience for students as they progress through different schools within the system. Secondly, the system should function cohesively as a unified school system rather than operating as a collection of individual schools. This is a crucial difference between a system of schools and a school system. A school system promotes collaboration, resource sharing, and consistency in educational standards, enhancing the overall quality of education across all schools. Thirdly, establishing a solid foundation for quality education at all schools is essential. This involves investing in teacher training, infrastructure, and educational resources to ensure that every school can deliver a high standard of education to its students.

To develop sustainable systems capable of accommodating continued growth, as superintendent, I would implement scalable educational programs. These programs can grow and adapt to increasing student numbers without compromising the quality of education. This can be achieved by ensuring teacher access to universal curriculum with tiered resources for teacher utilization based on varying teacher experience, teacher performance data, student achievement levels, unique student needs in addition to different school settings and sizes. This will require investing in the professional development of teachers to ensure they are equipped with the skillsets needed to adapt to changing communities while maintaining academic excellence.

Furthermore, fostering a collaborative culture among schools encourages them to work together, share resources, and implement best practices. This can be promoted by developing a central repository of educational resources that all schools can access, establishing cohorts of educators across the district to collaborate on tailored student learning plans, student assessment, and innovative teaching strategies. Additionally, this will promote initiatives that encourage cooperation among schools, such as joint extracurricular programs, inter-school competitions, and collaborative projects.

Regular monitoring and evaluation of school performance are vital to maintaining high educational standards and identifying areas for improvement. This can be done by implementing

systems for collecting and analyzing data on student performance, teacher effectiveness, and overall school operations to inform decisions and drive improvements. Essentially, we must trust the process and school-based personnel but verify the implementation is producing the necessary results to maintain academic excellence. Consistent use of progress monitoring assessments, both formal and informal, will help maintain the quality of education and the effectiveness of programs. Establishing channels for receiving feedback from students, parents, and teachers must also be established as it is crucial to verifying student success. Utilizing this feedback to make necessary adjustments and improvements to the educational system is essential.

By implementing these strategies as superintendent, we can develop sustainable systems that not only accommodate growth but also ensure the continuity of programs, a unified school system, and a solid foundation of quality education. This comprehensive approach will support the district in maintaining educational excellence as it expands.