

Questions and Responses

- 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 lower-performing schools. What specific approach would you take to address this disparity while maintaining our overall academic excellence?***

A challenge for every school, regardless of state grade, is how to serve low-performing students most effectively. Students with disabilities, underrepresented groups, and low socio-economic demographic group data exposes a disparity and achievement gap. Through data analysis, these students must be correctly identified and an in-depth examination into the specific needs must be addressed.

To this end, the district must deeply commit to the academic success of all SJCS students, with a growth mindset that embraces 'one size does not fit all.' This attitude does exist in our school district, and it is one of the core beliefs that has contributed to our past accomplishments. However, we must not settle. Our school-based and district staffs must continue to collaborate when deciding what specific resources are needed for individual schools and individual students. It is crucial that the right people are in the correct positions to support students' individual needs. Through shared problem solving, with school leaders and teachers, district level teams must explore the forefront of professional learning, aligned with the relevant resources, for our educators. It is vital that we adamantly adhere to a continuous improvement model. We must listen to ground zero, classrooms, to share what is working and what is not, along with what is actually needed and how the district may support. Follow-up and critical feedback in Professional Learning Communities, along with bolstering a sense of student ownership in learning, is essential in refining student success. Focus on formative assessment data and proactive response is critical.

To close the achievement gap, we must begin to identify academic needs as early as possible. Pre-k and kindergarten students should be targeted to address phonics, phonemic awareness and vocabulary deficiencies. Equipping families with strategies to consistently extend classroom instruction to the home is key. Additionally, we must not forget our responsibility to move even our most successful students forward in their academic journey with acceleration opportunities and we should ensure that every senior creates a written plan outlining their next steps after they leave St Johns County Schools.

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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?

As St Johns County School District continues to grow at a rapid pace, we are faced with considerable challenges. At the forefront is funding. We must seek innovative ways for the revenue for SJCS D to meet the velocity of our growth, ensuring that we are not compromising the quality of education we provide. It is not just growth that is impacting our funding. The state required local effort (RLE) rate has decreased once again, only a slight increase in per student allocation has been slotted and the Family Empowerment Scholarships (FES) have all reduced our budget considerably. In response, we must equip our legislative delegation with data so that they can intelligently advocate for our district.

Business partners, foundations, and community groups have faithfully supported our school district. It is imperative that we continue those excellent relationships while establishing new ones. We welcome the environment of competition and school choice because we will always meet the challenge. However, we must purposefully market our district to inform families and the community of the importance of public education and the reason SJCS D tops the state with high caliber instruction, support programs and advantageous resources.

We deeply appreciate our supportive local community who voted to pass the 1 Mil referendum. This funding will provide substantial supplemental salary increases, enabling the school district to recruit and retain stellar employees. Additionally, the referendum will contribute to safety, student welfare, and preservation of necessary programs. Over the next four years, St Johns County School District has been entrusted with the appropriate disbursement of the referendum funds, calculating the return on investment, and sharing this information frequently and transparently with our community.

Every day, technology expands, and schools must keep pace. Artificial Intelligence is currently our latest challenge. As educators, we must first be lifelong learners; therefore, researching and providing ongoing professional learning to harness this emerging tool can only benefit our students. It is critical that we prepare them for a world we have not yet envisioned. However, our school district must thoughtfully create protocols as we navigate educating students how to think critically, problem solve and collaborate effectively to be prepared to enter a world of everchanging technology.

Communication from the school district that is open, timely and factual is non-negotiable. As our school district grows, we must explore the myriad of platforms such as social media, news media, podcasts, and messaging at the next level to effectively keep all stakeholders connected and invested. What we put out from the district should always be polished and professional. We need to expand with new ways to place the spotlight on the incredible work being done at our schools and by our people and the successes of our students. SJCS D should be 'in the news' regularly -highlighting "the great" and sharing where we are with programs, construction,

policies, and updates. People moving to St Johns or those seeking employment should be able to gather information and get a sense of who we are by tapping into our hub of communication. Our community should be able to understand our mission and vision clearly and it is our job to deliver that in the most attainable ways. Of course, communication is reciprocal, and the district and schools must actively seek feedback and be reachable for conversations. As I mentioned in my video, I think Town Hall style forums should not only happen when we have to discuss challenges like zoning or budgets, they should become part of our fiber to connect with our families and community.