

**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?**

Providing students with the strongest academic and whole child support is the number one priority of education. St. Johns County Schools is a high performing school district meeting the needs of most students. A deeper dive into the data reveals that some students are not meeting academic success compared to other students. Based on state data and the state identification of Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) schools, two subgroups have been identified as underperforming their peer groups. The two groups are black students and students with disabilities. To be able to address these disparities while maintaining or increasing achievement with other groups, it should start the district strategic plan.

I have a strong background in strategic planning and in school improvement. A district strategic plan is the roadmap that outlines the goals, strategies and actions a district implements in order to increase student achievement and progress monitor the effectiveness of each goal by analyzing data/metrics in order to inform further decisions aligned to goal achievement. The strategic plan allows for focused priorities and ensures accountability as a district. As the superintendent and in collaboration with the board, district and school leaders, starting with a comprehensive needs assessment, looking at many data points. From this deep data dive, the team would identify strengths and areas of need, and perform a root cause analysis. SMART Goals, Strategies, and action steps would be developed. We would look at the current strategic plan and revise as needed based on the current comprehensive needs assessment. This plan would then be communicated to all stakeholders for additional input. Progress on implementation of the plan and data would be collected and shared with all stakeholders during monthly board meetings.

This plan would include strategies and actions for all students to achieve at the highest level including specific strategies and actions aligned to addressing the disparities in academic achievement of black students and students with disabilities. In my work in Atlanta, our ATSI schools were identified for the subgroup of students with disabilities. After our comprehensive needs assessment, it was determined that an audit of the special education program as a whole needed to occur. From this report, we were able to develop strategies and actions that provided support for students, teachers and leaders to be successful.

The plan also included strategies to move our high-performing students further. Districts tend to be happy with these student's data and don't challenge them in order for them to reach their full potential. Many of these students can become disengaged when not provided rigorous instruction. To address this, we made sure all schools were able to provide accelerated/advanced classes to not only gifted students but also high achieving students using data and input from our student advisory and teachers.

Strategic planning is a vital process for all districts and schools that allows for prioritization of district needs through goal setting and holds the district accountable in progress monitoring effectiveness of the plan to increase student achievement for ALL students.

**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?**

Many districts across the nation have seen a decrease in student enrollment since the pandemic which has caused hardships with budgets, buildings and staff. But this isn't the case for every district. Many rural and suburban districts have experienced significant growth. For St. Johns County this is a reality and has been for many years and is expected to continue for many more.

Based on my experience the three most critical factors that I would address to ensure successful expansion while maintaining educational excellence are long term planning, infrastructure investment, and community partnerships.

Long term planning consists of districts analyzing historical enrollment data to predict future growth. It is important to develop a 5-to-10-year plan to address potential impact of population changes on finances, facilities, and staffing. Districts should also be looking at demographic data and geographical information systems to understand and plan for population shifts this includes assessing any potential housing developments that could impact enrollment. In Atlanta, we were able to work with the city to identify areas that housing developments were going to be built. Many areas of Atlanta are very congested and one area of impact that we were able to plan ahead for, was transportation. With the current congestion, we had to add additional routes in order to meet the needs of students to arrive to school on time. Knowing that there would be an additional impact in two years once the subdivision was complete we were able to plan and budget for the increase in transportation needs. The plan needs to be constantly discussed, updated and communicated in order for all stakeholders to be prepared for change.

Looking at infrastructure investments, we need to consider building new schools, expanding existing schools and utilizing existing spaces. St. Johns has a current plan to address this. As the new superintendent, I would meet collaboratively with the board, district and school leadership teams to determine if any adjustments or revisions need to be made. Based on data, redistricting may need to be considered. This is where community involvement will be imperative. Atlanta has been in the process of investigating redistricting options and have been meeting with stakeholder groups for the past eighteen months. These discussions have been useful, and data gathered has help inform decisions. You will not please everyone, but at least all voices have been heard.

Finally, but embedded in the two previous factors is the importance of community partnerships. Working closely with the city planners, developers and community to ensure new developments are designed to support local schools. Public meetings need to be held to inform stakeholders and to listen and address concerns they may have. We have partnered with the Arts in Education group in Atlanta to potentially partner to build an Arts Academy. This partnership would allow for a new school to be built to accommodate high school arts students with less of a financial burden on the district and a great partnership and experience for students.