

- 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?*

Maintaining and improving academic excellence requires high levels of accountability and appropriate support tailored to each school's unique needs, coupled with strong community connections and partnerships.

As the Region Superintendent of Alternative and High Schools, I had the opportunity to serve approximately 40,000 students while supervising 21 comprehensive high schools, five center schools for Exceptional Student Education, and ten Juvenile Justice and alternative sites. This portfolio of schools consisted of some of the highest-performing magnet schools in the state and nation, high-performing neighborhood schools, and schools struggling to meet the demands of students living in the lowest socioeconomic areas of the city. During my time as Region Superintendent, 95% of the schools I supervised maintained or increased the school grade rating. Additionally, we saw record high graduation and college and career acceleration rates.

Just like a highly effective teacher meets the needs of individual students by meeting them where they are and providing individual support to meet expectations, my approach to school improvement mirrors that philosophy. I developed a systematic approach to ensure all schools were moving in the right direction, which included:

- A deep dive into the current reality to understand school needs.
- A collaborative environment to establish specific and measurable goals with principals.
- A development team consisting of school and district staff to create a comprehensive school improvement plan.
- A tiered structure for progress monitoring and support.
- A cadence of school visits for monitoring and adjusting support plans.

Systematic thinking allows for data-driven decisions leading to improved student success. I utilized available data, such as disaggregated student outcomes on state assessments,

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faculty and staff retention trends, leadership experience and other available data points, to provide support based on school needs. This support included targeted professional learning, instructional coaching cycles for teachers, specific leadership coaching, and

other personalized targeted support. Through this approach, all schools, regardless of achievement data, had the support needed to improve student outcomes.

This experience allowed me to move into an assistant superintendent role and develop districtwide progress monitoring systems and lead graduation rate initiatives. The data and analytics dashboards allow teachers, school leaders, and district staff access to real-time progress monitoring of school improvement plans and support plan development.

Having a system of school improvement is just the foundation to allow all schools to improve. The most challenging school environments require additional resources and support. Strong community partners providing mentorships, internships, scholarships, mental health resources, and other basic needs are critical to the school improvement process. These partnerships make it possible to offer supplemental programs and resources to students needing assistance overcoming barriers created from outside the school environment.

As superintendent, I would take a similar approach by ensuring each school has a school improvement plan based on high, yet attainable expectations, alongside appropriate levels of support informed by relevant data. Each school is unique, but all schools together represent the work of the district, and this work cannot be done without the support of community and business partnerships.

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?*

The most critical factors to ensure successful expansion while maintaining educational excellence are community awareness, recruiting and developing talented educators, and maintaining excellent service and support systems.

Building trust in the school district can only be achieved through significant community awareness during times of change. I have been leading my district through a significant change process that has impacted many school communities, closing schools in parts of the district and opening new schools in areas of growth. Changing attendance boundaries, whether due to growth or decline, is disruptive to any school community. It is critical to keep the community informed and ensure there is a deep understanding of why the change is necessary and how and when the impact will occur. Transparency throughout the process, being receptive to feedback, and explaining decisions each step of the way help alleviate angst caused by change.

Talent development is a critical component of expansion. We know the growth is happening, and cannot hope the educators our students deserve will show up when needed. It is imperative to prepare future educators to meet the expectations of excellence. Every school deserves a highly capable leader, and every classroom must have a highly qualified teacher. I will ensure there is a robust talent pipeline to fill future vacancies. There will be opportunities for paraprofessionals to become teachers, teachers to become teacher leaders or assistant principals, assistant principals to principals, and principals to transition into district leadership positions. This will be done through partnerships with colleges and universities in the region, internal teacher and leader preparation programs, and continual recruitment efforts to meet the staffing demands of a growing district. The development of internal talent alongside recruiting from outside the district is the pathway to meeting the instructional staffing needs in a growing district.

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Instructional staff is not the only challenge for a growing school district. We must also be prepared to provide outstanding service in all aspects of daily operations. A growing district requires forward thinking and must recognize the increased demand for HVAC

technicians, plumbers, electricians, food service employees, bus drivers, and other support positions.

I had the opportunity to develop many Career and Technical Education programs that led to employment within the school district. Information Technology programs lead to internships and employment as techs in schools. Also, HVAC dual enrollment programs, culinary and even landscape operations programs give our graduates opportunities to become members of the team as HVAC techs, food service employees, and landscapers. These types of student pathways create a sustainable talent pipeline to help meet the demands of the service needs of a growing district.

As St. Johns County continues to grow, the next superintendent must establish an efficient system that plans for the future while maintaining the highest levels of student success and service. Having worked in one of the largest school systems in the state I understand the importance of intentional collaboration to ensure the system can adjust to the needs of the community.