

1. With the restructuring and possible elimination of the US Department of Education, what would be your plan to address the changes to federal education programs?

While it's too early to know the full scope of how federal education restructuring will unfold, my approach would be grounded in clarity, calm, and collaboration. The reality is that most federal education dollars already flow through the state, and in Monroe County, federal programs currently account for an estimated 9%, or approximately \$14.5 million, of total funding. The percentage may be small, but the impact is not.

These funds are not peripheral, they are essential to our schools and communities. Under no circumstances should we accept a break in services. These programs support some of our highest-need populations through Title I (\$1.8M), Title III, IDEA for exceptional student education (\$2.9M), school safety initiatives (\$1M), school meals (\$3.9M), and early childhood programs (\$1.8M). Any disruption would directly affect our ability to provide equitable opportunities and vital services.

My first priority would be ensuring Monroe County remains informed and connected. That includes engagement with the Florida Association of District School Superintendents and relationship-building within state-level superintendent networks, not only to stay ahead of legislative developments, but to ensure we're leveraging every relationship and resource in Monroe County. These connections allow us to anticipate change, influence decisions, and respond with purpose.

Second, I would ensure Monroe County has systems in place to pivot quickly. There should be no surprises. Every federal program, from Title I to Title II professional development, has both state-level liaisons and district experts. As superintendent, I would establish a Federal Transition Task Force, made up of cross-functional leaders, to monitor developments, prepare guidance, and ensure continuity of services. This team would stay plugged into state meetings, track proposed shifts, and help align district practices with evolving legislation.

Because the final structure is still unknown, we must be ready for a range of possibilities, including scenarios where funding becomes more flexible and less categorical. While flexibility can create opportunity, we must ensure communities historically supported by federal programs do not experience a loss of access or support. That includes students in the bottom quartile, English Language Learners, and others who rely on these resources to thrive.

In alignment with strategies outlined in all four Strategic Goals, we must ensure we are maximizing remaining federal funding streams, especially for Title programs, special

education, and school nutrition, which directly serve our most vulnerable students. I would work with the board and cabinet to examine funding formulas and use federal dollars strategically to free up local funds for long-term priorities.

Having led large-scale budgets and partnerships, including securing funded nursing instructors through a partnership with Mayo Clinic, I understand how to build sustainable alliances that protect students in times of uncertainty. Strengthening partnerships isn't just about resources, it's about building resilience.

As Florida's Principal of the Year, I've participated in superintendent-level conversations and seen the power of staying connected to both policymakers and those most impacted by change.

This isn't just about funding, it's about trust. We'll lead with clarity, communicate transparently, and always center our mission to serve every child.

2. The district is left \$15 million dollars, as a beneficiary to a will. The money is to be used "as the district deems necessary". As Superintendent, how would you recommend the board use the money?

A \$15 million gift is a powerful opportunity, but one that must be handled with humility, strategy, and community voice. As superintendent, my recommendation would be grounded in Monroe County's strategic vision and informed by our collective values. Rather than proposing a set spending plan, I would guide the board and community through a three-part framework that helps us evaluate options together: immediate impact, long-term investment, and sustainability.

First, we could explore options that make an immediate impact, addressing high-priority needs that directly affect students' daily experiences. Possibilities might include expanding access to mental health services, improving school safety infrastructure, or offering housing incentives for educators. These types of short-term, high-visibility investments could serve as immediate signals of responsiveness and support.

Second, we could consider long-term investments with lasting return. That might include expanding early childhood education, building new CTE pathways aligned to local industry needs, or creating programs to "grow our own" future educators. These initiatives align with Strategic Goals 1, 2, and 3, and could be transformative for student futures and Monroe's long-term workforce development.

Third, we might decide to preserve some of this one-time gift for future flexibility. Setting aside funds for a rainy-day reserve, endowment, or innovation fund would allow the district to pilot bold new ideas or respond to emerging needs without relying solely on annual

budgeting. This approach ensures the gift has enduring value beyond a single spending cycle.

In all cases, these would be options to explore and present to the public, not pre-set plans. My role would be to help the board facilitate an inclusive and transparent decision-making process, centered on working groups in each district composed of educators, parents, students, and community leaders. These groups would not just brainstorm, they would be given a real understanding of district operations, funding limitations, and the possibilities that exist. When communities are invited to both learn and lead, outcomes are stronger. I've used a similar approach before—while serving on a 10-member school board in New Orleans, I helped lead a community-driven budgeting process that resulted in long-term investments our families still benefit from today.

I would also ensure the benefactor is honored with intention, whether through a named innovation initiative, a scholarship, or a public recognition that ties their legacy to our shared values.

Though I am not originally from Monroe County, my leadership, whether in Africa, in New Orleans, Philadelphia, or here in Florida, has always centered on listening first, honoring local knowledge, and building up the people already rooted in place. This approach builds unity, trust, and momentum.

Ultimately, this is more than a financial decision, it's an opportunity to bring people together. With clarity, shared leadership, and alignment to our values, we can turn this one-time gift into something that reflects the hearts and needs of Monroe County.