

**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?**

I believe that the process you use to solve any significant problem, such as the one posed, can be as critical as the decision ultimately made. Therefore, I wish to begin by sharing how I go about making challenging decisions. In today's world of ever changing news, complex issues and politics, I feel it is critical to research and discern the facts of any change in guidance, laws, policies, or regulations that will impact the school district—particularly the staff and students. While doing this, you must be aware of gossip and “noise” that may be circulating and be able to sort through all the information, misinformation and disinformation that occurs in various news outlets and social media as there can be a lot of sensationalism attached. This is critical because in a school district it is essential to not make any knee-jerk reactions which may cause a panic or an unnecessary, negative ripple effect across the school community. I believe in using well informed, rational decision-making processes which consist of 1) defining the actual problem and identifying all available options, 2) methodically weighing possible outcomes (positive and negative), and then, 3) through a collaborative, transparent process (involving the school board members, leadership team, and key stakeholders) move forward with a collective, transparent decision that works best for the situation at hand. As information can change quickly, it is paramount that flexibility and common sense be used to adapt accordingly. I have always been a leader with a keen sense of timing for necessary actions.

In this case, we must begin with analyzing the current executive order “...to the extent appropriate and permitted by law...facilitate closure of the DOE and return authority over education to the States and local communities while ensuring the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits...”. This does not yet mention any current loss of funds at present time—mainly structural changes. Additionally, there are numerous laws in place such as ESEA and IDEA that have not changed and currently protect disadvantaged students and those with disabilities. States and local school boards would still be required to comply regardless of any federal DOE reorganization. Our knowledge of these laws over the years would not change. It would require local and state elected officials, along with all other stakeholder groups, to work together more than ever to maintain compliance and reach goals. In essence, although Monroe County is composed of many islands, we would never be alone as there are 67 Florida counties in the same boat, as well as all 50 states, that would be solving the same issues—each looking at the unique variances of their community, private sector funding opportunities, possible taxation funding options, and other creative solutions. I would work closely with my staff and the school board and be utilizing my 30 years of education experience, background in both regular and special education, and incorporating 17 years of wisdom as a proven, accomplished, high-achieving school superintendent experience more than ever.

**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?**

First, I would share that any gift, large or small, deserves an appropriate thank you, so I would make sure that occurred. As this is a one time gift, with the conditional word “necessary”, I think a great deal of prudence would have to be used and I would enlist the help of expert financial advisors to come up with several options/solutions to present and recommend to the Board for their feedback and consideration. We would have to be mindful that we are aware of investment policies that are in place by the local school board and that we are in compliance with state laws as they pertain to such funds. Additionally, we would consider whether the district is best served by these funds being used to set up a long term education foundation or special account with the interest used as stipulated. My work over the last 2 years in the nonprofit world exposed me to many such foundations, gifts, and capital campaigns that were set up to provide revenue streams for future years through carefully crafted investment strategies and withdrawal policies that allowed yearly use of the interest proceeds under predetermined qualifications.

School finance and strategic planning has been a strength of mine throughout my career. I have even taught school finance and strategic planning for several years on the graduate level for school leaders and aspiring or sitting superintendents. I share this because a major concept (piece of advice) that I always tried to instill in the leaders was making sound financial investments/decisions for the school district. I gave the scenario of the golden goose versus the golden egg strategy. At times you may receive a large sum of undesignated funds and there are choices to make. For example, do you recommend a singular/multiple capital purchase or construction project to spend the funds at once (golden egg) or do you choose to treat the large sum of money as the “golden goose”, which keeps laying smaller golden eggs in the future. While it is tempting to use the funds for several needed items at once, I would recommend a long-term approach for the perpetual maximization of this rare gift. Unequivocally, in this particular case I would take the golden goose approach. While I am sure the school district has a myriad of wish lists and wants from the school staff and community, the key word in the gift was “necessary”. As a district, we would have to be mindful that we are always able to tell the story of this money (gift) and the conditions of usage, because in hard times some may say, “you have 15 million just sitting there, use that”. We would have to be transparent in how those funds are used and their intended purpose.