

Laura Lietaert- Semi Finalist Written Responses



Florida School Boards Association SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH



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?

I would ensure that we remain in close communication with state and local legislators to stay informed on any changes in federal policy and how they may impact funding, compliance requirements, and educational standards. The National Conference of State Legislatures published, *FAQ: The Education Department and the Federal Role of Education*, on March 21, 2025. In the article, the NCSL staff stated, "The order, Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities, directs the secretary of education to take steps to close the department to the extent permitted by law and "return authority over education to the States and local communities while ensuring the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely." The order also directs the secretary to ensure "the allocation of any Federal Department of Education funds" complies with federal law and administration policy."

While there is the potential for change to the structure of the department based on the current order, it calls for uninterrupted services and programs for those compliant with federal law. Making major changes to federal education programs and funding amounts requires an act of Congress. By collaborating with the Florida Department of Education, we can ensure that we continue to receive the necessary support and guidance during a time of potential transition.

I would also focus on protecting and maintaining the essential programs that serve our most vulnerable students. The two single largest block grant programs given to states from the U.S. Department of Education are Title I and IDEA. Title I provides supplemental services for low income K-12 students. We currently have five Title I schools. IDEA provides funds to support students ages three to twenty-one, who have disabilities, with a free appropriate public education (FAPE). MCSD provides Exceptional Student Education services in each school. There are other federal programs that impact our schools. Most recently, our EL population had a significant increase. Title III provides supplemental services for English Learners and recently arrived immigrant students. It focuses on language acquisition and achievement. All of our schools have ELs, but the main concentration remains in Key West. Some of the

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other areas receiving federal funds are teacher professional development, after school programs, career, technical, and adult education. If these programs face cuts or restructuring, I would explore ways to allocate district funds strategically to continue offering these services. This will require working closely with staff to ensure that our programs are flexible enough to adapt to potential changes in policy and still meet federal requirements. Local partnerships and fundraising efforts may also become essential in supplementing any shortfalls in federal funding.

Lastly, I would advocate for the autonomy of local districts in decision-making. The possible decentralization of education governance presents a unique opportunity to tailor programs to the specific needs of our community. As Superintendent, I would take a proactive stance in ensuring that Monroe County Public Schools not only survives but thrives through this uncertain period by emphasizing innovation, collaboration, and resourcefulness.

[National Conference of State Legislatures](#)

[Funding for Florida School Districts](#)

[MCSD 24-25 Budget](#)

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?

Receiving a \$15 million windfall provides a unique opportunity to make a lasting and meaningful impact on Monroe County Public Schools. I would recommend a multi-phased, strategic plan to use these funds to address both immediate needs and long-term goals, ensuring that the investment benefits students, staff, and the community as a whole.

I would allocate a portion of the funds to address urgent infrastructure and capital needs, especially in the wake of any disruptions caused by unforeseen events such as the anticipated change in the U.S. Department of Education or natural disasters, such as hurricanes, which are always a possibility. Updating and maintaining school facilities, upgrading classroom technology, and improving safety measures would ensure that our schools remain safe, modern, and conducive to effective learning and educating the whole child.

A second priority would be to invest in professional development programs for our educators, ensuring that they have the skills and resources necessary to adapt to changing educational landscapes. This could include training in personalized learning,

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which our teachers repeatedly state is important to them. Supporting our teachers in learning that is meaningful to them is essential for ensuring that every student receives the best possible education.

A portion of the funds would be allocated to expand enrichment programs that help students develop critical thinking, creativity, and leadership skills. This could include STEM initiatives, arts programs, extracurricular activities, and athletics that provide students with diverse opportunities for growth beyond the classroom. These go hand in hand in educating the whole child and could help support where the state cut funding for arts and other potential areas such as AP and CTE courses.

Finally, I would recommend setting aside a portion of the funds for a long-term investment in education. This could include creating a dedicated fund for scholarships, student support services, or even establishing an endowment that will provide ongoing funding for future educational initiatives. Our current fund balance exceeds the state requirement, but could also be enriched with this gift. These funds would help ensure that the district continues to thrive well beyond the current generation of students.

By using the \$15 million in a balanced, thoughtful manner, we can create a lasting legacy that supports both immediate and future needs, making a significant impact on the educational experiences of our students for years to come.

[Chapter 8 School Internal Funds](#)

[Duties and Powers of the School Board](#)

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