

Christina Ann McPherson

2011 Roosevelt Drive, Key West, FL | (305) 304-7974 | Christina.McPherson@keysschools.com

Question 1

Monroe County School District receives approximately \$14 million dollars from federal programs and grants. With the potential impact of the restructuring and possible elimination of the USDOE, there would be significant challenges and changes needed to address the potential shortfall.

While the impact of these cuts may affect many departments such as Food Service, ESE, Head Start, the Title funding, ESSR grants and school based mental health services, the magnitude with the potential funding streams affected would directly impact schools. Gerald Adams Elementary School, Horace O'Bryant School, Key Largo School, Poinciana Elementary School, and Stanley Switlik Elementary School receive Title I funds which provides allocations for teachers and support staff including after school tutoring and enrichment. In addition, Head Start (180 students) which provides early childhood education including health, nutrition, and parent involvement to low income children and families could be potentially compressed.

Such drastic cuts have not happened since 2011 when the Monroe County School District had a financial challenge and had to make cuts in order to support the fund balance. During that time as a member of the Executive Leadership Team and the Director of Assessment and Accountability, we were tasked with reducing the budget and looking for proactive ways to preserve the most essential programs. It would be crucial to prioritize which programs are nonnegotiable and seek to find additional funding sources. One of the first ways is to maximize class size in schools and look at the lapse salary savings district wide. As Superintendent, if these federal funds were gradually phased out, all schools, departments and stakeholders would be tasked to reduce the operating budget by five percent.

Currently, the district has 17 social workers that service approximately 2,200 students throughout the year by providing mental health services and social emotional supports. The essential needs of students must be sustained which includes preserving mental health services and support since the aftermath of COVID. District wide the number of students receiving support from schools and agencies such as GCC has increased annually including Mobile Response Team visits and student Baker Acts. In order to preserve these essential mental health programs, we would request support from local non-profit organizations, private grants, and promote charitable events.

Departments such as Adult Education, Vocational Education, EL Support, 21st Century programs and Teacher Professional Learning could be impacted. While ESSR funds have decreased there are school nurse technicians, guidance assistants, and support positions that are included in this funding stream. These departments will be responsible for acquiring outside grants to alleviate the deficit.

From 2011 to 2014, and from 2021 to the present, I have participated in all facets of departmental and school budgets and understand the overall district budget processes. There are many creative and innovative ideas that can help sustain current programs. The most important focus, however, is working together to mitigate the impact on students and staff. As Superintendent, I would work strategically to support schools and personnel and ensure student success.

Christina Ann McPherson

2011 Roosevelt Drive, Key West, FL | (305) 304-7974 | Christina.McPherson@keysschools.com

Question 2

The Monroe County School District which spans 126 miles has vastly different communities with diverse immediate needs and priorities. As Superintendent, with a beneficiary of \$15 million dollars, I would reinstate the District Advisory Council formerly known as the (DAC) and allow for key stakeholder input and feedback to be heard by region. A representative from each school, school board member, the Superintendent, and two community members would meet monthly.

Throughout an entire year, during the DAC meetings, there would be time for a breakout session by region to collectively brainstorm the list of significant projects and rank them in order of essential and necessary priorities specifically to support students. The purpose or use for the funding must serve first and foremost the needs of our students. In addition, the proposals would be ranked by monetary costs as well. As fiduciary stewards of the \$15 million dollars, the board would consider proposals submitted to the Superintendent as vetted and approved through the DAC Committee.

The DAC can utilize the feedback from the recent community forums and focus groups as well as the Strategic Plan to guide the choices and decision making of the committee. Aside from recruitment, retention, and affordable housing which were discussed at each forum, there were distinct regional themes. For example, in the Upper Keys, there was concern with the equity regarding athletic fields, school facilities, access to transportation and vans. There was also a recommendation for academic supports specifically for mathematics. Finally, there was a request for support and increased funding of fine/performing arts and sports programs specific to middle schools.

In the Middle Keys community forums, the critical needs were increasing CTE programs and apprenticeship opportunities. One vital part was the focus on student mental health and resources for preventative supports for families and students.

The Lower Keys feedback centered on student activities and athletics including high transportation costs for travel. Constituents also recognized the need for increasing the CTE opportunities and more EL supports and resources.

Most significantly, the student voice asked for increased student engagement in classrooms. Not only was this observed in the community student forum and focus groups but also a monthly topic at the Monroe Association of Governing Students (MAGS) meetings. Student feedback asks for active student engagement to include robust teaching to promote learning with dynamic student interaction. The student leaders also recognized the need for professional learning and increased student engagement as well as for mental/social emotional needs. Students additionally asked for more Positive Behavior/Intervention Support (PBIS) activities throughout the Keys.

As Superintendent, I would utilize the DAC to provide specific feedback from the community to present to the School Board. I would ensure that it reflects and preserves the distinct and diverse needs in each region of the Keys creating and encouraging student centered decision making. I would recommend the board divide the amount equitably to allow each region to share and address the specific areas of focus and needs for their unique community.

Christina Ann McPherson

2011 Roosevelt Drive, Key West, FL | (305) 304-7974 | Christina.McPherson@keysschools.com