

Ed Tierney Semi-Finalist Questions

Written Responses

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?

In light of potential restructuring or elimination of the U.S. Department of Education, my approach as Superintendent would be proactive and focused on protecting Monroe County School District's core priorities. Programs such as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title I impact the most vulnerable students, and while they are expected to continue in some form, changes in oversight or allocation require close attention. I would remain in close contact with the school board, as a unified governance team is critical as we navigate this challenging situation.

Should programs like Title II (professional development) or Title III (English Language Acquisition) be reduced or eliminated, we must be prepared to realign resources. With roughly one-third of Monroe County students identified as English Language Learners, continued investment in language acquisition and academic support services is necessary. As a former principal of a large high school with a significant ELL population (over 60%) I've seen firsthand how targeted supports can accelerate student growth and engagement. It's also important to maintain strong professional development programs to support teacher effectiveness. The number one factor in student success remains the quality of instruction in the classroom.

Today's funding environment presents unique challenges. Declining birth rates, the high cost of living in the Keys, and the expansion of Florida's Family Empowerment Scholarship program present unprecedented challenges. More families are exploring private, charter, and home-based learning. Public schools must now demonstrate their value more clearly than ever before.

If federal funds decrease, I will work closely with the budget and leadership teams to identify gaps early, evaluate the full budget, and propose a realignment plan to the School Board that supports instructional quality and student services. My leadership style emphasizes transparency, collaboration, and data-informed decisions. The budget should reflect the mission and adapt to changing conditions without sacrificing core commitments.

Monroe County has a strong record of earning community support through local referendums. Continued trust depends on the School District's ability to demonstrate impact. That means highlighting student success, fiscal responsibility, and the unique programs that set Monroe apart like Career Academies and the MOVE initiative.

Regardless of how federal policy changes unfold, the mission remains the same: to inspire and bring excellence to every student, every day. Through steady, calm leadership and open communication with staff, families, and the broader community, I am confident we can navigate whatever changes are ahead.

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?

This is an incredibly generous gift that should be treated in a manner that honors the memory of the donor and makes a lasting, strategic impact on the Monroe County School District. Given the district's well-known challenges in recruiting and retaining staff due to the high cost of living, I would recommend allocating a significant portion of the funds to expand the district's affordable housing initiative. Although Monroe offers Florida's highest starting teacher salary, the cost of housing remains a major barrier. Investing in long-term housing solutions, such as expanding existing developments or initiating new projects, would directly support recruitment and reduce turnover.

At the same time, Monroe County School District is projecting an almost \$3 million reduction in funding for the upcoming year. Rising costs for utilities, instructional materials, and health insurance add further pressure to the operating budget. Using a limited portion of the gift to close this short-term gap could help prevent disruption to classrooms and essential services, while allowing time to implement longer-term financial strategies.

To appropriately honor the donor, the School Board may consider a meaningful and lasting form of recognition like the naming of a facility in honor of the donor. A public acknowledgment of this scale would highlight the impact of their contribution and may also encourage additional philanthropic support for the district in the future.

In summary, I would recommend using the \$15 million to both stabilize short-term financial pressures and invest in sustainable solutions like workforce housing. This approach helps address urgent needs while also creating long-term benefits that support the district's mission.

Video Responses

1. Our district's Strategic Plan emphasizes both Promoting Academic Success and Developing the Whole Child. In Florida's test-based accountability system, these two priorities can sometimes feel at odds. How would you approach balancing the state's testing requirements with our community's desire for a more holistic education that nurtures students' social, emotional, and physical well-being?
2. Our district serves students with diverse educational backgrounds and needs. As superintendent, how would you develop and implement strategies to support academic growth for all students, particularly focusing on those who may be performing in the lower quartile? Specifically, how would you balance providing targeted interventions for students facing unique challenges, such as newcomers with limited prior educational documentation or emerging language skills, while simultaneously maintaining academic momentum for students across all proficiency levels?
3. What specific methods and criteria would you use to objectively assess the strengths and weaknesses of the existing leadership team? What input would you seek, what weight would you give to various inputs, and how would you use this data to inform thoughtful decisions about leadership, retention, development, or replacement?

Additional Documentation

1. [Headshot](#)
2. [Official transcripts](#)
3. [Most recent formal evaluation](#)