

**Walk us through a time when you had to revise procedures and policies to improve efficiency and transparency. What led to the revisions and what was the outcome?**

In my time as Deputy Superintendent for Orange County Schools, I've been tested by crisis and repeatedly proved my ability to be nimble and make changes when needed to best support students, teachers, and families in this community. My leadership and management experience are informed by thirty-five years of experience in the classroom and as a school leader – over thirty years in Orange County. This experience guided our response to the challenges of the pandemic. I was responsible for leading the planning for re-opening schools in Fall 2020 — and my approach shows I understand the importance of leading a transparent, accountable, and efficient school system that is responsive to community needs and values.

This task required working with the School Board to review and where necessary revise policies and collaborate with all divisions, community partners, and local government. I was driven by an unyielding focus on ensuring no student was left behind. It was important to me that our words and actions communicated to our constituents that we were leading with empathy and compassion and that at the core of our decision-making was safety, transparency, and equity. I recall thinking how overwhelmed my parents would have been if this had occurred when I was in school and how they would have provided for us if schools were not open so they could work.

In March 2020, I led the district-wide shift to distance learning, engaging over 200,000 students through our Instructional Continuity Plan (ICP). The ICP, Face Covering Policy, Safety and Procedures Manual as well as our COVID-19 Dashboard allowed us to safely reopen schools. I facilitated the allocation of CARES dollars to support re-entry, including the purchase of Personal Protective Equipment, extended learning opportunities for fragile students, COVID-19 testing, additional student devices, and professional development for teachers and parents on distance learning. We partnered with principal supervisors and Food and Nutrition Services to distribute over 1M meals during the Spring shutdown and summer months and collaborated with IT to distribute hot spots to families without internet. Our collaborative relationship with DOH and our Medical Advisory Committee allowed us to continue to remain open safely and expand learning opportunities for students. Our successful re-opening helped our most fragile students access instruction. I say successful because we increased students attending school face to face from 30% in the Fall to 60% in January 2021. I also led the work of recovery in the summer of 2021 and this past school year. This included increased focus on interventions, doubling the time students attended summer school from four weeks to eight as well as redefining extended learning opportunities for the 21-22 school year.

From the onset of the pandemic and still today, our Executive Policy Group meets and collaborates on how we are using best practices and lessons learned from these past two years to increase efficiency and transparency as we continue to create safe learning and working environments. Key to our success is our focus on safety, people, and equity.

**Specifically discuss how you have aligned the community to promote, advocate, and advance support for teachers, staff, students, and public education.**

As Deputy Superintendent of Orange County Public Schools, we have defied the odds: Seven out of 10 students are children of color, 69% come from low-income families, and 40% speak a language other than English at home. In the years I have been in this role, OCPS has risen from a “C” to an “A” rating, and we boast a nearly universal graduation rate. This only happens with the support of the community, with us all working together in support of the same goal.

My belief that all children can learn and excel guided my work to lead OCPS 2025, Orange County Public Schools’ strategic plan for high expectations for student learning and social emotional well-being. The Board engaged in extensive work sessions, retreats, and data review, to adopt a new vision and mission statement as well as new values and objectives that were the framework of the new strategic plan. Once the plan was created, we took it to the community to seek input from all our constituents. It was important to be able to adopt a plan, jointly owned by the Board and the community to create stability and direct stakeholders and the work we will do over the next several years. A comprehensive communication plan involving various divisions within OCPS enabled broad stakeholder input for the renovated elements. A new webpage was developed containing a video presentation highlighting proposed changes and a link to a feedback form. I also engaged with board members in 11 community meetings aimed at soliciting feedback on the proposed changes. The feedback received was analyzed and shared with the Board who then made final alterations to the plan.

Once adopted, I worked with Cabinet members to develop goals and measures on the scorecard that would convey our progress towards attaining the objectives agreed upon by the Board. The result is a plan that is guiding the work of OCPS with a focus on equity and access and increasing pathways that lead our students to success. Specifically, our focus is to close achievement gaps, promote early literacy, expand pathways, develop character and social-emotional skills, attract high-quality candidates, promote employees’ physical and emotional well-being, develop and retain effective and diverse personnel, maintain safe, healthy and inclusive learning and working environments, deliver high-quality service by maximizing resources to support identified needs, and provide a community-wide network of support for students and families. Various metrics convey our success towards achieving these goals including a yearly survey to students, staff, and parents. Strategic plan updates are provided monthly during board meetings and our district and school websites, and social media platforms provide additional forums for us to apprise our constituents of the successes and challenges we face and engage them in our efforts to create meaningful opportunities that lead our students to success. These opportunities have helped create an atmosphere of transparency, trust and support for our district and the work we do to ensure students graduate with the essential skills to be life ready.

**Describe how you have balanced stakeholders' needs in the ongoing improvement of school culture and safe working environment?**

Today's schools must foster the development of versatile, highly educated students to prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow. A critical component of successful educational institutions is a healthy and supportive school culture. Positive and healthy school cultures and climate are the foundations of high-quality learning environments and create the conditions for effective teaching and learning to occur.

In my roles as principal, principal supervisor, Chief Academic Officer, and Deputy, I have made it a priority to engage stakeholders in the building of this culture by providing a space for employees to talk about their challenges and difficulties.

Over the last several years we have conducted face to face teacher round tables to gather feedback by asking three questions – What is going well? What keeps you up at night? What do you need to be successful? The feedback received has been helpful, but participation has not been what we would have liked. This year I expanded our reach to all employees across the district and provided options for feedback: face to face meetings, virtual meetings, or completion of a survey. We asked two questions; “What can come off your plate?” and “What cost saving measures could the district implement that could be used for compensation?” The one caveat was that student achievement could not be negatively impacted. Over 10,000 responses were reviewed and analyzed to determine feasibility and categorized as being able to be implemented in the short-term or long term. Ideas were then shared with the Board and stakeholders.

I am leading the telework pilot this summer, an idea that surfaced as a cost savings consideration from our school and district-based staff. The pilot allows up to two days per week of remote work for some 12-month positions, depending on the role. The program, remote work options, expectations and guidelines were developed and shared with employees through the Remote Work Pilot Program document. The underlying commitment to highly responsive service and support to internal partners and students and families are vital to the success of the program. Metrics including attendance, job satisfaction, and service delivery will be analyzed by my team at the end of the pilot. While the pilot is focused on 12-month employees, ideas on how to expand telework to other employees have surfaced and are being studied. Although the idea surfaced as a cost savings measure, there is evidence that flexible schedules are a valuable recruitment and retention benefit. Upon completion of the pilot, we will analyze data collected to determine risks and benefits of expanding the pilot.

Plans to implement ideas shared by staff regarding what can come off their plates and cost savings measures have already begun and will demonstrate to our employees that their involvement and feedback is vital to creating a culture where all stakeholders thrive. Like other school improvement efforts, culture does not have a finish line and needs to be part of the continuous improvement efforts on a regular basis.