

Leadership in Troup County Schools is not about establishing power, but community and trust

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Gallup's meta-analytics report has found there are a number of qualities that people look for in strong leaders. Among them: commitment and compassion, clear communication, vision and purpose, transparency, decision-making capabilities and inspiring others.

Now just 15 months into his role as Superintendent of Troup County School System, Dr. Brian Shumate has demonstrated all of these qualities and more.

There was a lot of good within the school system to build upon, but a lot that still needed to be revamped. So Dr. Shumate and his team hit the ground running, addressing deficits in the curriculum, creating a student code of conduct, establishing consistent practices within the district and more.

"When I say consistency, I don't mean maintain the status quo. It's about creating new, consistent applications," he said. "It means consistent implementation of a system across the district. When you have systemic coherence, I don't care if it's attendance or curriculum or discipline, you're going to get better, and it's going to create trust within the community and from our teachers."

Dr. Shumate said, "Our district has become stronger and I think people have more faith in us because we have a plan, we execute the plan and we modify the plan as we go, and we're transparent about what happens or doesn't happen. There's no air of secrecy."

His primary motivation in decision-making is to serve the best interests of the child. "Time on task equals student achievement, and attendance is what holds everything together—it's fundamental—and we need to pay attention because we can't teach them if they're not there, and when they're in school, we have the ability to serve them better."



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Dr. Brian Shumate, Superintendent

Dr. Shumate knows though that without the support of the community, the district would not be able to support students the way that it does. "The biggest surprise to me when I got here was how many people care about this school district—how many people are engaged. I appreciate the people who have a vested interest in the success of this district and its students," he said. "I see us as a unifying force in the county, and it's going to take the ongoing support of our community as we continue to improve."

With over 30 years of experience under his belt, Dr. Shumate knows that earning trust starts with leadership and choices. He is frank, positive, upfront and approachable. He doesn't want a hierarchy, he wants a direct line of communication—to be hands-on and to communicate openly and honestly with administrators, families and students.

He has become accustomed to putting in the hard work that it takes to ensure those around him feel comfortable and confident to reciprocate that honesty. Dr. Shumate has had dinner in students' families' homes; every principal in the district has his personal cell phone number.

As a result, his confidence in embracing change to reach high expectations and standards has rubbed off on those around him.

And it appears that positive change is coming.

"Our district is the centerpiece of this community," Dr. Shumate said. "We touch more facets of Troup County than any other organization, from pre-K to graduation to college community partnerships, faith-based organizations, and three different city governments—every nook and cranny of the county somehow has an affiliation with the school district. And if we're doing well, everyone is cooking."