

Dr. Steven Cook
Responses from Bend-La Pine Schools Application Packet

1. Please share why you are interested in this position and your unique qualifications for it.

I am a highly qualified and experienced leader that is driven to make a difference in the lives of students. I am compelled to give them every opportunity and advantage to succeed in the world that awaits them. I know how to build relationships with teachers, community members, parents, and leaders to maximize a system approach to achieving these goals for kids on a large scale. I understand the importance of career and college readiness and the value of multiple pathways that afford students the opportunity to find that which best fits them, whether that path leads directly to a university, the military, a community college, or directly into the working world with industry certification. I passionately believe it is critical to provide students options that allow them to create their personalized pathway to the career/college of their choice and then surround them with guidance and wrap-around support to succeed in the fulfillment of that journey.

When I read the desired characteristics of the superintendent for Bend-La Pine, I knew immediately that I had to pursue it. I was amazed to see that my personal beliefs regarding visionary leadership, instructional leadership and organizational excellence, collaboration and team building, and continuous improvement and systems thinking with a commitment to equity is perfectly aligned with the desired characteristics for the position as stated by the school and community. I would be delighted for the chance to work in such an environment and help build opportunities for every kid! I am excited to get to work with the district personnel, school leaders and teachers and community members to deliver upon those goals for the students and families in the district! I am a driver for positive change, for moving barriers out of all kids path, and for developing opportunities for students to access the future of their hopes.

2. Please list the five accomplishments in your professional career of which you take the greatest satisfaction and why you do so.

Depth of teaching experience (Empathy)

I spent 13 years in the classroom teaching middle school and high school students. During these 13 years, I have been blessed with the opportunity to teach kids with vastly different backgrounds, circumstances and abilities. This has given me a pool of experience with a depth and breadth to pull from when discussing assessment and instruction with teachers and leaders. In addition to those 13 years teaching students, I have also spent an additional 19 years developing a vision and communication strategy for influencing planning and instruction in the classroom as an administrator. These experiences have coalesced to foster an understanding of the demands of classroom teachers and incredible empathy which permeates how I navigate professional conversations with teachers and leaders regarding instructional strategy in a manner that is non-obtrusive, supportive, and focused on a growth mindset.

I have taught doctoral classes to school and district leaders. This experience has provided a strong theoretic background from which I continuously draw to connect problems of practice to the research base. Additionally, I have also made a commitment for the past 5 years to sub in classrooms and throughout our district. Through these experiences, I have managed to stay connected to the day to day functionality in schools and all grade levels while still continuing my own growth and development. I have a strong sense of purpose for helping district leaders, building leaders, and teachers create the deepest and richest learning environments in schools for kids. I understand quality instruction and how to help others understand it.

Ability to build relationships and consensus with diverse groups of individuals with divergent views (cultures, experiences, background, nationalities)

Schools are such unique places. They are filled with lots of adults with differing ideas on the best ways to teach and inspire diverse groups of students with vast differences in abilities, backgrounds, and experiences. This tapestry of personalities creates the foundation of which the school/district culture finds its roots. I have been fortunate to become an integral influencer of the culture of schools and districts as they grappled with a multitude of ideas on how to build personalized approaches to learning. I found that having a supportive relationship with the adults in this endeavor was paramount. The melting pot of divergent views is vital. Helping them to find common purpose and to value that none of us are as smart as all of us is essential. Divergent viewpoints can initially be divisive and emotional, but when acknowledged, explored, and understood can be transformative and become one of a school's/community's greatest strengths. I am compelled to create a collaborative environment that honors every individual and capitalizes on the strengths of our collective culture to build an inclusive and nurturing environment for every student.

Creating a professional development system that engages adult learners and impacts student learning (Instructional coaching)

Teachers and school leaders are the nexus to the success experienced by students. To ensure that kids have the best shot, teachers and leaders must clearly understand expectations. They must also have opportunities to develop their skills in environments where they can receive quality feedback, and direction for impacting student learning. I have had the opportunity to experience all qualities of professional development. Quality PD that is purposeful, tied to the district vision for success, and responsive to teacher needs has the most direct influence on impacting student learning in a positive manner. Fortunately, in my career, I was provided opportunities to take risks, fail forward and learn through experiences with regard to quality instruction. The crucial piece of that success was the function of the coaches along the way that created the opportunities for that growth in me as a teacher/leader. The highest quality PD, that rewards risk-taking in the classroom, will always be at the forefront of any quality strategic plan for effective implementation. I excel at providing teachers and leaders with excellent professional development, including training them on how to provide exceptional professional development for others.

Building a strong Instructional vision and purpose

I have been fortunate to work with and for leaders who could build a common vision with others through effective communication strategies and a well-defined, crystal-clear purpose. I have learned so much from them on how to keep the vision of the school/district at the center of the decision-making matrix. The vision then becomes the lighthouse for the work I have been a part of. I know how to collaboratively create an instructional mission and vision and then build and implement a comprehensive strategic plan to drive the work and connects the red thread of the vision through all of the layers of our systems directly to the student we are trying to reach.

Tenacious focus on culture and community

By far, the accomplishment I am most proud of is my ability to create a culture of quality that fosters and nurtures a sense of community focused on a common understanding of trust and empathy. School districts are dynamic, busy, places full of kids and adults finding their way in their respective roles, essentially trying to do their best. We must tenaciously honor and value their efforts, their leadership, their successes, and their want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. I have accomplished this with genuine and clear communication that is heart-felt and built around positive presupposition. It is this foundation of a transformational environment that creates trust, rallies people together, and inspires them to commit to one another for the larger purpose of the organization and the community. When cared for, nurtured and honored, it becomes the traditions and the expectations for all. This has been a passion during my career as a leader and is the single biggest rock of the foundation of my leadership vision. I take great pride in my ability to build institutional trust and credibility.