

## More superintendent finalists speak

**Subheadline:** Branham focuses on school safety, communication and mentorship

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## Content

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Lancaster County School District's third superintendent finalist, Preston Heath Branham, spoke to community members Thursday, Sept. 14, in the USCL Arnold Special Events Room. He emphasized the positive things taking place in the district, and applauded current staff for their efforts.

## Background

Branham is principal of Centerville Elementary School in Lexington County.

He previously served as the director of academic operations for Hobsons-Naviance Advantage, executive vice president of academic operations for Wake Forest Advantage, national executive director of school improvement for all EdisonLearning schools and senior vice president in South Carolina for EdisonLearning, according to LCSD public information specialist Michelle Craig.

He was also elementary schools director in Lexington School District 1, instructional evaluation coordinator in Newberry School District and principal of Saxe Gotha, Prosperity-Rikard and Whitmire elementaries. He was assistant principal at Hammond Hill Elementary and taught at Prosperity-Rikard Elementary and Newberry Middle School, according to Craig.

He has a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Newberry College, a master's of education in supervision and administration from Clemson University and an educational specialist degree in school superintendency from Arkansas State University. He is on track to earn a doctorate in educational leadership from Northwest Nazarene University in May 2025.

## Thursday's session

Branham spoke for about 10 minutes and answered questions for about 25 minutes.

“I’ve visited elementary, middle and high schools today, the district office and other facilities, and I can tell you this — you have a lot to be proud of in the school district,” Branham said. “What I saw today was amazing, and don’t let anybody tell you otherwise.”

But Branham said that does not mean there is no room for growth or improvement.

Branham said he wants to “put public education back on the pedestal that it deserves,” and make sure that school faculty and staff see action behind words from district officials.

“The most important thing is that what we do to our facilities have to have safety first, period,” Branham said. “That safety is physical safety, but it’s also how people feel about where they work and where they learn.”

Branham said he had a troubling education path, and was not “born with a silver spoon in his mouth.” He struggled in school and leaned on mentors to help him achieve. Through a dedicated band director, Branham became more involved in extracurricular activities and found his purpose.

“I’ve had to fight for what I’ve achieved, but I didn’t achieve it by myself,” he said. “I achieved it because teachers and adults in church and others poured into me and gave me the ability to see what I couldn’t see myself.”

Branham said he believes in childhood early education programs, because investing in children early is key to ensuring success. He also said communication at every level is important, because staff, teachers, students and parents need to be informed and equipped with information so student success can be prioritized.

## **Q&A session**

Branham answered five questions, regarding his leadership style and mentorship, communication, school safety and mitigating gang involvement, reducing dropout rates and supporting IEP students and new or struggling staff.

Branham said his leadership style requires him to be active in the communities he serves.

He also said it’s important for people in positions of power to really listen, not listen to respond. He said that every time a parent comments on a school Facebook or Instagram page, he will pick up the phone and have a conversation, in hopes of eliminating or solving the issue.

“There has to be common decency and rapport and respect,” he said. “For whatever reasons, some people have no interest in the schools, some people don’t trust, some people have a reason not to trust. We’ve got to restore that.”

Branham said to ensure school safety and reduce crime-related involvement, systems and processes have to be in place and practiced so they become muscle memory.

“In event of a tragedy or a potential threat...we have to make certain that our people have been trained well, and that we reduce or mitigate any adversity,” he said, adding that it’s important for students, staff and administration to know how to help, as well as feel safe to report and trust something will be done.

Branham said the right resources have to be in place for IEP students, so they can graduate. He said he was an IEP student in math, so he can understand what those students need.

He suggested using advisory councils for idea sharing and community development, so that administration, teachers and staff feel supported and can collaborate to foster achievement.

## **Child images**

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### **LANNWS-09-20-23 SUPERINTENDENT SESSION BRANHAM**





## **Related content**

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### **Bio Box: Final session Sept. 20**

The last community session is with superintendent finalist Matthew Hayes at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 20, at the USCL Arnold Special Events Room, 476 Hubbard Drive, Lancaster. Look for that story in the weekend paper.