



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

Timothy Purnell, Ed.D.
Superintendent
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Meet Timothy Purnell and Read His Interview

Dr. Timothy Purnell was appointed Chief Education Officer of the Somerville Public Schools in Somerville, New Jersey, on Feb. 1, 2011. Prior to his post in Somerville, Dr. Purnell served as the superintendent in Harding at the age of 32 for three years. He also served as a principal, vice principal and science teacher.

In 2015 Tim Purnell was recognized as the 2015 New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA) Central Regional Superintendent of the Year. His district was nationally recognized as a District of Distinction and in the same year. NJASA Executive Director Richard G. Bozza described Purnell as “an excellent role model for all aspiring chief education officers to emulate. He is a results-oriented professional who continually strives to improve the quality of education for all students through his knowledge, experience and enthusiasm.”

Speaking from the vantage point of ten plus years as a school administrator, Purnell says, “As chief education officer of the Somerville Public Schools, I have conveyed a positive message for the recent changes in the teacher and principal evaluation systems.”

He adds, “I felt a positive message was essential to diminish any notion of viral negativity within the organization. From my perspective, it was an opportunity for the district to recalibrate how we assess teachers and principals.”

21st Century Leadership has always been a part of the fabric of his being. He submitted his first community blog entry in October of 2008 and his first tweet in October of 2009. His blog was given the 2010 Top School District Blog Award. As a middle school science educator in Montclair in 2001, Purnell applied for a grant entitled Internet Accountability where parents could log into class and absent students could attend through a webcam and instant messenger. He was featured on the #HouseofEdTech as a VIP in 2014, and he was also a participant in a ConnectEd #FutureReady Superintendents Summit at the White House with President Obama, Secretary Duncan, and 100 other superintendents from across the US.

Dr. Purnell’s research, entitled *No Transient Child Left Behind*, studied the link between student transience and standardized test scores on a global and local level. He was featured on the NY Times Room for Debate (2015). He has presented for the NJEA (2002), Techspo (2011), NJSBA (2012 and 2016), NJASA (2014), NJASA (2015), ISTE (2015), and served as a keynote speaker for Vollers Excavating & Construction (2013), the NJ Development Council Leadership Conference (2009), the Monmouth University Student Employment Awards (2008), NJASA (2015), and the Wall Township Public School’s Administrative Retreat (2015). His backpack research, in cooperation with Montclair State, was featured in the NY Times and Star Ledger. He was nominated to the Seton Hall Community Advisory Board, Advisory Council for the NJDOE Office of Governance & Leadership Development, and the State Program Approval Council.

Timothy Purnell has been selected for the You Make a Difference Award, a Phoenix Award, a Governor’s Teaching Recognition Award and a Weston Teaching in Excellence Award as well as a Geraldine Dodge Fellowship School Leadership Award to study the Italian educational system.

Purnell received his Bachelors in Arts in 1997 from the University of Delaware with a concentration in Biology and a minor in Genetics. He received his Masters in Administration and Supervision in 2002 from Montclair State University and his Doctorate from Seton Hall University in 2008.

He serves on the NJ State Board of Examiners and has worked as an adjunct prof at Montclair State since 2002. Currently, he is serving in his second year as the President of the Somerset County Association of School Administrators.

INTERVIEW WITH TIMOTHY PURNELL

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

Joseph Scherer, executive director of the superintendents' national dialogue, says that the greatest deficit in education is not finances, but rather leadership. Everywhere we go, people seem to know more about education than us, the educators. It's gotten to the point, Scherer says, that the "public doesn't miss educators from the discussions about education."

In my opinion, we need superintendents to become stronger advocates for the best interests of children. There are so many talented leaders and my hope is that the people will recognize the benefits of courageous decisions that outweigh the special interest outcries. We need to amplify our voices. I would love to see more superintendents running for public offices and becoming active with legislators. I have read some incredible ideas, thoughts, and opinions on Twitter. We need to unite these voices and build a strong refrain. We need more conversations and I'm hopeful that NASS can accomplish just that!

What new understandings did you acquire after two or three years on the job?

When I first became superintendent at the age of 32, I was surrounded by AWESOMENESS. I became wired to hide my insecurities. I believed that I shouldn't allow others to see my weaknesses. That thinking could not be less constructive. I became active in my local association and eventually president. I learned to "open up" to my colleagues and realized that people aren't drawn to AWESOMENESS. They are interested in genuine conversations. They are engaged by people who show vulnerability and that's what makes my county such a close group of superintendents.

David Brooks, NY Times, speaks of the difference between resume and eulogy virtues. He says that "no person can achieve self-mastery on his or her own. Individual will, reason, and compassion are not strong enough to consistently defeat selfishness, pride, and self-deception. We all need redemptive assistance from outside." We NEED each other! Cal Ripken advises us "to expose your weaknesses and ask questions." For me, it has paid dividends. Being a superintendent doesn't have to be "working on an island" or in isolation. It may be lonely in my office, but a colleague is a phone call away.

Please share an idea to use or something you've learned with your colleagues.

Last year, the district launched 3DPD (Three Dimensional Professional Development) which allows educators to differentiate their own professional development through an online "best practice" repository. Teachers record instructional segments or full lessons using a Swivl camera in their classroom. These recorded clips are uploaded into a private YouTube channel where colleagues can access the content 24/7 and collaborate about the viewed practices. Although teachers have the latitude to observe colleagues in action, the online repository reduces the need for teachers to have substitutes cover classes for peer observations and enables them to spend more time in the classroom with their students.

Under the direction of the Director of 21st Century Education, the channel allows teachers to tag lessons by pedagogical topics. This enables the viewer to search the database for interested areas in a relatively quick manner. The Director approves, manages the channel, and ensures that footage is tagged and uploaded properly.

This is one way that we celebrate and highlight excellent classroom pedagogy in the Ville! 3DPD is a piece of evidence that our educators are #allin4theVille and dedicated to perfecting their craft.

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