



## **Name**

**Dr. Ben Churchill, Superintendent**

## **Current School District and Location**

**Poway Unified School District  
San Diego, California**

## **Introduction**

Dr. Ben Churchill is Superintendent of the Poway Unified School District, one of California's highest-performing large school districts, serving more than 34,000 students across 40 schools. Known for strong academic outcomes, award-winning programs, and deep community engagement, Poway Unified demonstrates Dr. Churchill's belief that public education must be both excellent and deeply connected to the people it serves.

Now in his tenth year as a PK-12 superintendent and his thirtieth year in education, Dr. Churchill is recognized for building trust, strengthening governance, and creating systems that improve outcomes for students while sustaining long-term organizational health. Before joining Poway Unified in 2024, he served for eight years as Superintendent of Carlsbad Unified School District in Southern California, where students achieved annual gains in academic performance, maintained a 96%+ graduation rate, exceeded 80% in both Advanced Placement (AP) pass rates and A-G completion (eligibility for acceptance to University of California and California State University systems), and significantly expanded dual enrollment and college credit opportunities. Under his leadership, the district also expanded award-winning Career Pathways programs in 21 areas, successfully passed a \$265 million community-supported facilities bond, and earned state and national recognition from the U.S. Department of Education, California Department of Education, College Board, and the California School Boards Association.

Dr. Churchill is widely recognized for balancing instructional leadership, fiscal responsibility, communication, and governance. His leadership philosophy centers on trust, clarity, continuous improvement, and collaboration. He believes communication is not about messaging. It is about trust.

## **Education**

Dr. Churchill earned a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Valparaiso University, a Master of Education in Teaching and Learning from DePaul University, a Master of Arts in School Leadership from Northeastern Illinois University, and a Doctor of Education in Educational Administration from Argosy University.

He began his career teaching English in China for six years at the elementary, secondary, and university levels. That experience shaped his belief that access, belonging, and opportunity must remain at the center of public education.

He remains committed to leadership development and mentoring future school leaders, including serving as an adjunct professor in the University of La Verne's Administrative Credential Program.

## **Experience**

After teaching in China, Dr. Churchill taught high school English in Illinois before moving into school leadership as an assistant principal, principal, and district administrator. He served as principal of an alternative high school in Chicago, focused on dropout retrieval and support for foster youth, pregnant and parenting teens, and adjudicated youth.

He later served as Assistant Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer in Community Unit School District 300, Illinois' sixth-largest district, where he directed teaching and learning for 25,000 students across 26 schools. There, he expanded dual enrollment partnerships, created Career Pathways programs in 11 areas, launched one-to-one technology implementation, expanded early childhood access for Title I students, and strengthened dual-language immersion opportunities.

In 2016, he was appointed Superintendent of Carlsbad Unified School District in California, where he led the district for eight years. In 2024, he became Superintendent of Poway Unified School District in suburban San Diego, where his work is centered around three Board-adopted priorities: Student Success, Community Engagement, and Fiscal Responsibility.

He also serves as Vice President for Legislative Action for Region 18 of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), liaison to ACSA's Legislative Policy Committee, Board member and past chair of the Classroom of the Future Foundation, and remains actively engaged in statewide advocacy, governance, and superintendent mentoring.

## **Outstanding Achievements**

Dr. Churchill's leadership has consistently produced measurable gains in student achievement, college and career readiness, community trust, and long-term fiscal stability.

During his eight years as Superintendent of Carlsbad Unified School District, the district maintained a 96%+ graduation rate, exceeded 80% in both AP pass rates and A-G completion, and significantly increased the number of students earning college credit through articulated and dual enrollment partnerships. Career Pathways programs expanded across 21 areas, creating stronger connections between students and high-demand, high-wage careers in the San Diego region.

Under his leadership, Carlsbad earned recognition as a Best Community for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation, National Blue Ribbon and Green Ribbon School Awards from the U.S. Department of Education, California Distinguished Schools and Green Ribbon recognition from the California Department of Education, Golden Bell recognition from the California School Boards Association, and College Board recognition for expanding female access to computer science.

His work intentionally increased opportunities for historically marginalized students. Carlsbad Unified was recognized by the Learning Policy Institute as a "positive outlier," where students of color consistently achieved at higher than expected levels, and by the California Reading Coalition for improving literacy outcomes for Hispanic third-grade students.

Dr. Churchill successfully led the district's \$265 million community-supported facilities bond campaign, the first successful bond in Carlsbad in twelve years, while also earning Moody's credit rating upgrades and strengthening long-term fiscal sustainability.

In Poway Unified, he has elevated communication and engagement as a strategic driver of student success. Through initiatives such as the Straight from the Supe podcast, the Emmy-nominated Studio 701 student media program, the Made Me Smile video series, the Student Influence Lab, the Community Engagement Series, the quarterly periodical *EmpowerEd*, and weekly Superintendent Updates reaching more than 34,000 families and 4,500 staff, communication has become a tool for trust-building, transparency, and stronger partnership with the community.

Dr. Churchill was recognized with the 2019 Innovative Superintendent of the Year Award from the Classroom of the Future Foundation, the 2021 Superintendent to Watch Award from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), and the 2022 Superintendent of the Year Award from the Association of California School Administrators Region 18.

He believes the superintendent's role is not about personal visibility, but about stewardship, service, and creating the conditions where students and educators can thrive.

## **An Interview**

### ***Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.***

The superintendent today must be both the chief instructional leader and the chief communicator. The work is far more public, immediate, and complex than it was even a decade ago when I started as superintendent. Communities expect transparency, responsiveness, and trust, often in real time.

The role requires balancing student outcomes, financial stewardship, governance, labor relations, facilities, and public confidence all at once. You have to be able to lead systems and relationships simultaneously. Academic excellence matters, and so does helping people feel heard, informed, and connected to the work.

I believe one of the most important responsibilities is building trust before you need it. Communication is not about messaging. It is about trust. If families, staff, and boards trust your intentions, difficult conversations become possible. Without trust, even good decisions can fail.

That is why I place such strong emphasis on visible leadership, proactive communication, and consistent engagement. The superintendent cannot simply manage the system. You have to help people believe in it.

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

One of the biggest lessons I learned was that leadership is less about having the right answers and more about creating the right conditions for good decisions to happen.

Early on, I thought success depended on expertise and speed. Over time, I realized trust, listening, and consistency matter more. People do not follow plans, they follow people they trust.

I also learned that school boards need clarity, not surprises. Strong governance depends on proactive communication and clear expectations. One of the most important things a superintendent can do is ensure board members are informed early, consistently, and honestly. Governance becomes stronger when trust is built through communication, not just during moments of conflict.

Continuous improvement also requires humility. You have to be willing to listen, adapt, and acknowledge when better solutions emerge. Leadership is not about protecting your position. It is about protecting the mission.

**Share an idea to use or something you've learned with your colleagues.**

One of the most valuable strategies I have learned is to create a clear framework for decision-making and return to it consistently.

In our district, we anchor our work around three priorities: Student Success, Community Engagement, and Fiscal Responsibility. That clarity helps guide conversations, budget decisions, board agendas, strategic planning, and communication with staff and families.

For new superintendents, I would say this: do not try to solve everything at once. Build a small number of clear priorities, communicate them relentlessly, and align your systems around them.

Also, never underestimate the importance of communication as leadership. Weekly updates, direct engagement with students and families, advisory councils, podcasts, and visible presence on campuses are not side work, they are core work. Trust is built through consistency.

Leadership is less about doing it all and more about creating focus, clarity, alignment, and trust so people move forward together. Consistency builds confidence, and confidence creates momentum for lasting success.

**Submitted by:**

Dr. Ben Churchill



April 26, 2026

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**Name/Signature**

**Date**