



Tiffany S. Brunson, Ph.D.

Elementary School District 159
Matteson, Illinois

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Tiffany S. Brunson is a visionary superintendent, equity champion, and transformational leader serving Elementary School District 159 in Matteson, Illinois. A proud Chicago native and United States Army veteran, Dr. Brunson brings more than three decades of educational experience to her work. She leads with courage, clarity, and an unwavering commitment to making the invisible visible and the impossible possible.

Since becoming Superintendent in 2022, Dr. Brunson has guided District 159 through bold strategic transformation grounded in belonging, achievement, wellness, and culturally responsive teaching and learning. Her leadership centers human connection, systemic coherence, and measurable impact for every learner.

Education

- Bachelor of Arts in Special Education – University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
- Master of Science in Educational Administration – Roosevelt University Chicago
- Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration – Loyola University Chicago

Experience

Dr. Brunson's career spans roles as a special education teacher, assistant principal, principal, and Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer. She has launched new schools, designed inclusive systems, built departments from the ground up, and influenced state-level policy.

She currently serves as Superintendent of Elementary School District 159 and is a founding board member of the Illinois Alliance of Black School Educators (ILABSE). She also serves as President-Elect of the Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics and Diversity (SSCSD).

Outstanding Achievements

- 2026 Award of Excellence – Illinois State Board of Education
- 2025 Illinois Transformative Superintendent Award (7 Mindsets)
- 2025 Most Distinguished Women in Illinois
- 2024 Amazing Women of Rich Township
- 2024 Contributing author to *Centering Our Voices: The Anthology*- an award-winning collection amplifying the stories, challenges, and triumphs of Black women in education.

Dr. Brunson's leadership is consistently described as visionary, bold, and deeply human. She is known for building trust across communities, cultivating leadership in others, and aligning purpose with measurable outcomes.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN QUINLON

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

I believe today's superintendent must be both a disciplined strategist and a liberatory leader. The complexity of this role requires precision, courage, and deep humanity. My time in the United States Army taught me that leadership demands clarity of mission, steady execution, and accountability. Education requires that same discipline, but it also demands heart.

Today's superintendent must hold two truths at once: urgency and patience. We must move systems forward while honoring the people within them. We are chief communicators, instructional leaders, culture builders, and crisis navigators. But more than that, we are stewards of possibility.

For me, leadership begins with what I call the *Liberation Pause*; a deliberate moment to reflect before reacting, to listen before deciding, and to ask: *Who is being centered in this decision? Who will be impacted by this decision? Who might be invisible here?* That pause grounds my leadership. It ensures that our work is not simply efficient, but equitable. Not just strategic, but human.

At its best, the superintendency is about creating conditions where every child feels seen, every educator feels valued, and every family feels connected to the promise of a high quality education.

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

In my first few years as superintendent, I came to understand that transformation is relational before it is structural. The Army taught me that systems require order and alignment. Education taught me that systems only thrive when trust is present.

I learned that listening is not passive, in fact it is a leadership act. When I engage in what I call a Liberation Pause, I am choosing reflection over reaction. That discipline has reshaped how I approach challenges. Instead of asking, "How do we fix this quickly?" I now ask, "What is this moment teaching us?" It guides all my decision making.

I've also learned that clarity is kindness. Clear expectations, aligned priorities, and coherent systems reduce anxiety and increase performance. Discipline in communication builds psychological safety. People can rise to expectations when they understand them.

Finally, I have come to value pacing. In the Army, we trained relentlessly, not for speed alone, but for preparedness. Similarly, district transformation is not about rapid shifts; it is about sustainable progress. It requires building capacity at every level so that the work outlasts any one leader.

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

One lesson I consistently share is this: *The answers are already in the room, but only if we create space to hear them.*

As leaders, we often feel pressure to provide immediate solutions. But the Liberation Pause reminds me that wisdom emerges in dialogue. When we intentionally slow down to listen to students, teachers, families, community members. Only then we surface insights that no single leader could generate alone.

I also encourage my colleagues to lead with disciplined alignment. In education, clarity of purpose is not optional, it is foundational. When our mission is unmistakable and our work is strategically coherent, we eliminate fragmentation and build momentum. Every initiative should be tethered to a shared vision. When alignment is strong, confusion fades, focus sharpens, and our collective impact deepens

And perhaps most importantly, I remind fellow leaders that courage and compassion are not opposites. They are partners. Discipline without empathy becomes rigidity. Empathy without discipline becomes . Strong leadership requires both.

At the end of the day, my mission remains clear: to build systems that honor humanity, cultivate excellence, and expand opportunity ensuring that every learner walks into a future where the impossible truly becomes possible.