



Name: Dr. J. Robin Cochran, EdD

Current School District and Location – Washington County School District - Kentucky

INTRODUCTION

Education & Experience: Dr. Jennifer Robin Filiatreau Cochran, Ed.D. has served as Superintendent of Washington County Schools in Kentucky since 2009 and is a veteran educator of thirty-two years. A graduate of Washington County High School, she embodies community-rooted leadership, bringing lived experience and professional expertise to her role. Dr. Cochran earned her Bachelor of Science and Master of Arts in Education from Eastern Kentucky University, with certifications in Learning and Behavioral Disorders (K–12) and English and Communications (5–8). She completed a Rank One in Instructional Leadership and holds certifications as Principal, Director of Special Education, Supervisor of Instruction, Superintendent of Schools, and Consultant for Exceptional Children. She earned her Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from Northern Kentucky University.

Dr. Cochran's career spans roles as a regular and special education teacher, instructional and behavioral consultant, literacy coordinator, principal, superintendent, and adjunct professor. Her leadership expertise includes districtwide systems design, dropout prevention, family and community engagement, rural education equity, superintendent evaluation, and continuous improvement.

Outstanding Achievement(s): Among her most significant achievements is the creation of Commander Academy, an alternative learning model launched within her first year as superintendent. Since its implementation, Washington County Schools has maintained zero dropouts for students who remained in-state and in-district for seventeen consecutive years. Under her leadership, all schools in the district are Family Friendly certified, family engagement is embedded into administrator evaluation, and chronic absenteeism has declined significantly. Dr. Cochran is widely recognized at the state and national levels for her service, mentorship of new superintendents, and contributions to education policy, leadership development, and rural school improvement.

AN INTERVIEW

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

Today's superintendent must be far more than a manager of systems or a responder to compliance demands. The role requires moral clarity, relational trust, and the courage to redesign systems when they no longer serve students. In an era of rapid turnover and increasing complexity, the superintendent is called to be a stabilizing force as someone who understands that leadership is not about distance or authority, but about belonging and responsibility.

I believe the superintendent must lead as a steward of people and place. This means knowing the community deeply, listening intentionally, and making decisions that reflect shared values rather than short-term popularity. The modern superintendent must be willing to say, *"If the system is not working for students, then the system must change,"* and then follow through with sustained action. At its core, the role is about ensuring that every child matters all the time and building systems that prove it.

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

By the third year, I understood that sustainable change does not come from programs alone but instead it comes from beliefs that are embedded into systems. Early in my superintendency, confronting a dropout rate exceeding ten percent made it clear that technical fixes would not be enough. Framing dropout as a moral failure rather than an operational problem fundamentally changed how we responded. That insight reshaped my leadership.

I also learned that trust is built through consistency and follow-through. Communities watch what leaders do over time, especially when decisions are difficult or unpopular. Staying, listening, correcting course when something is not working, and holding myself accountable alongside others mattered more than any single initiative. Perhaps most importantly, I learned that long-term leadership is not about comfort but instead it is about persistence. The work becomes clearer, but not easier, and that clarity brings responsibility.

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

Lead as if the children and families you serve are your people...simply, because they are. This belief should shape every decision, especially in moments of resistance or crisis. Practically, this

means designing systems around students rather than tradition, refusing to allow young people to disappear from the system, and moving beyond “random acts” of improvement toward institutionalized, accountable practice.

One strategy I strongly recommend is embedding core beliefs such as family engagement, equity, and student completion into evaluation, strategic planning, and daily operations. If something matters, it must be measured, modeled, and sustained. I also encourage new superintendents to adopt what I call the *11th commandment*: **Thou shall not continue to do wrong**. When data or feedback shows that something is not working, improve it. Do not defend or ignore it. It will not go away.

Finally, understand that staying can be a strategic leadership choice. Longevity, when paired with growth and reflection, builds trust and allows systems to mature. Leadership is not about advancement, but it is about stewardship. When you commit fully to a community, outcomes can outlast your tenure and change lives for generations.

Submitted by:



1/8/25

Name/Signature

Date