



**National Association of
School Superintendents**
United in Common Purpose: Each Other's Success

Name: Dr. PJ Caposey

Current School District and Location: Oregon CUSD 220, Oregon, IL 61061

INTRODUCTION

PJ Caposey serves as Superintendent of Oregon Community Unit School District 220 in northwest Illinois. He is a former Illinois Superintendent of the Year and a national finalist for AASA's National Superintendent of the Year, recognized for leading sustained academic improvement, financial stability, and governance excellence in high-poverty, politically complex districts.

Over the course of his career, PJ has led multiple district turnarounds, including a period serving simultaneously as superintendent of two school districts. His leadership is defined by disciplined execution, clarity of expectations, and a strong commitment to developing people—not just systems. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential practitioner-thought leaders currently serving in the superintendency.

Education:

Doctorate and Education Specialist degrees in Educational Leadership, Western Illinois University
Master's Degree in Educational Leadership, National Louis University
Bachelor's Degree in Social Science with teacher certification, Eastern Illinois University

Experience

PJ began his career as a high school teacher in Chicago Public Schools and progressed through administrative roles in both urban and rural systems. He served as Assistant Principal at Auburn High School in Rockford, Illinois, and later as Principal of Oregon High School, where the school earned national recognition from *U.S. News & World Report* and *Newsweek*.

He served more than a decade as Superintendent of Meridian CUSD 223, leading comprehensive academic, operational, and cultural transformation. During this time, he also served concurrently as superintendent of a second district—an experience that sharpened his systems leadership and prioritization skills. Under his leadership, Meridian earned repeated *U.S. News & World Report* recognition, Illinois Performance Excellence awards, and the 2024 Partners for Excellence (Baldrige) Gold Distinction—the first district in more than 20 years to receive the honor.

In 2024, PJ returned to Oregon CUSD 220 as Superintendent, where his work has focused on instructional coherence, operational clarity, and long-term sustainability, including deficit reduction, implementation of the Science of Reading, and systemwide standardization.

Outstanding Achievement(s)

Dr. Caposey has led districts to sustained academic growth while strengthening financial health, governance practices, and organizational coherence. His leadership is grounded in a deep commitment to continuous improvement as a disciplined way of operating—using data, reflection, and feedback loops to drive better decisions over time.

That commitment is reflected in his district's adoption of the Baldrige Performance Excellence framework, which centers on continuous improvement through systems thinking, alignment, and evidence-based decision-making. In 2024, his district earned the Partners for Excellence (Baldrige) Gold Distinction, the highest level of recognition in the framework and the first awarded to any school district in the Midwest in more than 20 years—signaling that continuous improvement was not episodic, but embedded in leadership practice, culture, and results.

Beyond district leadership, PJ is arguably the most published sitting superintendent in the country, with ten nationally published books and commentary appearing in *The Washington Post*, *EdWeek*, *Edutopia*, *ASCD*, *CBS This Morning*, *NPR*, and *The Hill*, among others. He has delivered more than 200 keynote presentations nationwide.

He actively teaches or contributes to leadership preparation programs at four universities, including work with an Ivy League institution. His continued commitment to teaching at the college level reflects a deliberate investment in lifting others—developing future leaders and strengthening the profession beyond the boundaries of any single district. He has also coached or mentored approximately 100 school leaders, reinforcing a belief that public education improves fastest when leaders support and grow one another.

AN INTERVIEW

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

I still believe the superintendency is the best job in education—period. There is no other role that offers the same opportunity to change lives and life trajectories every single day. As a superintendent, I get to do that at scale, for both adults and students.

That said, the job has never been harder. The political landscape is more volatile, the scrutiny is constant, and the margin for error is razor thin. But those challenges do not diminish the role—they clarify it.

What makes the superintendency extraordinary is the ripple effect. When we do this work well, we don't just impact classrooms or schools. We strengthen entire communities. Success in schools changes expectations, restores trust, and alters trajectories far beyond the walls of our buildings. That reality makes the role both an incredible opportunity and a profound responsibility.

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

In the first year, much of the work is about change. In struggling districts, that often means decisive action. In higher-performing districts, it means establishing clarity and aligning the organization around shared expectations. Either way, there is an initial surge of visible movement.

By years two and three, that surge fades—and the real work becomes clear. The superintendency is about stewardship and legacy. It is about leaving the organization stronger than you found it and positioned for continuous improvement beyond any one leader.

I came to see the role as a relay race. My responsibility is to run my leg well and hand the baton off in better condition than I received it. That shift moves the focus from leading change to developing people—intentionally building leadership capacity within the organization and contributing to the strength of the profession as a whole.

When that happens, the impact extends beyond a single district. Investing in people creates a ripple effect across public education, strengthening systems through collaboration, mentorship, and shared responsibility.

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

Know who you are and lead from that place. Without a clear understanding of your personal vision and values, the magnitude of the role will overwhelm you. Superintendents must be clear about what they stand for and what they are willing to take a risk for, because difficult decisions are unavoidable.

Leadership in this role also requires comfort with discomfort. Meaningful change rarely comes with unanimous support, and anything that has 100 percent buy-in is usually not worth doing. People will talk, criticize, and question motives. You can choose to play defense, or you can stay on offense—anchored in purpose and focused on outcomes that matter.

Authenticity matters. This job is unsustainable if you cannot be yourself. Superintendents who thrive are reflective, humble, and willing to learn—even from critique that initially feels unfair. There is almost always a nugget of truth worth examining.

Finally, remember that leadership is a people business. Every conversation moves someone—either closer to growth or deeper into stagnation. One of our primary responsibilities is to grow leaders, not create followers. When we invest in others, commit to our own learning, and lead with clarity and humility, we strengthen not just our districts, but the profession itself—and that responsibility should anchor every superintendent.

Submitted by:

Dr. PJ Caposey

Name/Signature

February 4, 2026

Date