



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

### **Name**

Dr. Jeff Horton

### **Current School District and Location**

GFW Public Schools  
Gibbon, Minnesota

### **INTRODUCTION**

Meet Dr. Jeff Horton, Superintendent of GFW Public Schools in Gibbon, Minnesota. The district stands out as a leader in student-focused education, providing unmatched programming and support for students. Nestled in the communities of Gibbon, Fairfax, and Winthrop, the staff and community are proud to be able to help students grow into future world class leaders, nurses, entrepreneurs, farmers, police officers, mechanics, or whatever else they would like to become. Dr. Horton's experience in the classroom, the field, administrative offices, and the board room have uniquely prepared him to transform this district into a unique and powerful education destination.

### **Education**

Dr. Horton has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Secondary Education and a Masters Degree in Secondary Education: English and Social Studies from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. He also earned a Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership from Bethel University.

### **Experience**

With more than 20 years of experience in Education, Jeff has experienced almost every aspect of the world of public education. Starting as a teacher of English, Social Studies Special Education and coach followed by serving as Assistant Executive Director/Director of Special Services, and later as a principal and Director of Student Services as he worked toward his goal of becoming a superintendent.

After two years as Assistant Superintendent of Duluth Public Schools in Minnesota, he became Superintendent of GFW Public Schools in 2020, at a critical time for the district as it faced extreme budget challenges, a status of Statutory Operating Debt, and a divided community. Through focused community engagement, fiscal responsibility, and future-focused leadership, the district is now in a strong position financially, has launched new programs and supports for students, and is in the process of designing a new school facility after voters approved a building bond referendum in 2023.

### **Outstanding Achievement**

Dr. Horton has a number of achievements to be proud of over his career, but his time at GFW Public Schools is marked with exciting highlights and accomplishments. Just 41 days after beginning as superintendent, voters approved an operating levy referendum that foundationally

changed the district's situation with 63% of voters supporting the proposal, just a few years after 81% of voters rejected a bond referendum proposal. Voters again voiced their support for the direction of the district in 2023 when they approved a building bond referendum to construct a new PreK-12 facility with 67% of voters approving the proposal. An additional revoke and replace operating levy question went to voters in order to pass the savings of a single site onto the community during the November 2023 election. The plan was approved with 78% of voters voting yes.

Dr. Horton has also worked toward further his own experience and education, serving as an AASA National Superintendent Certification Program Trainer, completing a policy fellowship program, and being recognized by a variety of organizations including District Administration (Nation's Most Innovative Superintendents 2022), National School Public Relations Association (Superintendent to Watch 2021), No Kid Hungry (Spotlight on Equity 2021), and more.

He has also overseen many amazing improvements in his time at GFW Public Schools. He helped to implement career and technical education academies in AEM (Agriculture, Engineering, Manufacturing), BACE (Business, Arts, Communication, Entrepreneurship) and HSHS (Health Services and Human Services). He is a champion of fiscal responsibility, joining the district as it was projecting a -12% fund balance and in Statutory Operating Debt (SOD) and through establishing a stable and sustainable budget, the district successfully exited SOD without the use of an operating levy and preserved ESSER funds while creating a projected +12% fund balance and adding over 100 new student courses and programs.

## **AN INTERVIEW**

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

I am confident that the people who make the biggest difference in student achievement and educational outcomes for our students are classroom teachers. It is the job of the principal to be a strong instructional leader in order to be a multiplier for the success of teachers. The primary purpose of district leadership is to be a multiplier for the principals and help them to be their very best so they can help teachers be their very best resulting in amazing opportunities for students.

I see the job of the superintendent as being a multiplier for district level officials and building leaders to be their absolute best so they can in turn serve others, who will, again, serve others, who will support students. Ultimately, everything we do is in support of having students be their very best in a safe and encouraging environment. As a superintendent, you are also afforded the opportunity to build partnerships with the community, state, and federal groups and it is our charge to work with individuals both inside and outside our organization so that they can be their best selves in creating the policies and systems that will support the whole child for all of the students we serve.

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

I am lucky to have started with a strong foundation from my previous experience and being trained well by great school leaders. Reflecting back on the first three years of my superintendency at GFW Public Schools, my core belief that all students and all people want to

do well and be successful has been continuously reinforced. At GFW, we were looking at some very difficult times when I started and by building partnerships within and outside the school and by removing barriers to help people be their best selves, our community has transformed and has become a model in many ways for other districts around the state.

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

I feel that in order to be a transformational superintendent, you must have the courage and fortitude to address the systemic challenges of an organization while investing strongly in communication and connecting with stakeholders to share the vision and story of your district. You must also trust in the goodness of people that when they are given the ability to connect, learn, and grow, they will do the right thing. I feel that this role is one that if you are doing the job just to keep your job, you are not dividing the students or community by your vest; but if you are doing your job to do what's best for students, you will serve as your best self.

**Submitted by:**

Dr. Jeff Horton



1/3/24

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**Name/Signature**

**Date**