



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

### **Name**

Dr. Carol D. Birks, Superintendent and Chief Executive Officer

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

Allentown School District  
Allentown, Pennsylvania

### **INTRODUCTION**

Meet Dr. Carol D. Birks, Superintendent and Chief Executive Officer of the Allentown School District in Pennsylvania. With more than three decades in public education, she is known for leading school systems through complex challenges while staying focused on what matters most: expanding opportunities for students.

In Allentown, Dr. Birks is guiding a district of more than 16,000 students through a period of meaningful transformation. Her work is centered on strengthening instruction, creating clearer pathways to college and careers, and building systems that are designed to last. Just as important, she has made community voice a consistent part of the district's direction, creating space for students, families, staff, and community partners to help shape the work.

Colleagues often describe her leadership as steady and focused, with a clear sense of direction and follow-through. Her approach reflects a belief that real change happens when vision is matched with consistency, strong relationships, and a deep understanding of the communities schools serve.

### **Education**

Dr. Birks holds a Doctorate and Master's degree in Educational Leadership from Teachers College, Columbia University. She also earned degrees from Hampton University and the University of Bridgeport.

She completed her Superintendent Certification through the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education, further preparing her for the demands of leading large and complex school systems.

### **Experience**

Dr. Birks began her career in the classroom, an experience that continues to shape her leadership today. She went on to serve in a range of roles, including principal, assistant superintendent, and chief of staff, before becoming superintendent in multiple districts.

Her leadership journey includes time in New Haven Public Schools and the Chester Upland School District, where she led efforts to strengthen instruction, stabilize systems, and improve outcomes for students.

Across each role, she has built a reputation for navigating change with clarity and purpose. Whether working with educators, families, or community partners, she is known for bringing people together around a shared vision and doing the work required to move that vision forward.

### **Outstanding Achievement(s)**

Dr. Birks' leadership in the Allentown School District is defined by a clear focus on aligning vision with measurable results. She led the development of *Lighting the Way: A Blueprint for Innovation and Excellence 2030*, bringing structure and accountability to a system serving more than 16,000 students.

Through the Allentown Youth Internship Corps, more than 550 students have participated in paid, career-connected experiences. Early college participation has also expanded, with cohort graduation size increasing by 57%. She has advanced innovation while keeping equity at the center, including expanding two-to-one device access and integrating emerging tools, such as artificial intelligence, to support teaching and learning.

These efforts are producing measurable results. The district has achieved a 64.4% increase in English Language Learner growth, nearly double the state average, along with a 4.1% increase in graduation rates and a 42% reduction in in-school suspensions. At Bridgeview Academy of Health, Science, Innovation, and Technology, the graduation rate has reached 92%.

Her leadership has earned national recognition, including being named one of the Top 25 Superintendents to Watch by the National School Public Relations Association, with district communications also recognized by the National School Public Relations Association and the Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association. She also serves as a blogger for the American Association of School Administrators and is a co-author for *STEM CENTURY: It Takes a Village to Raise a 21st Century Graduate, AASA Edition*.

### **AN INTERVIEW**

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

Today's superintendent has to lead with both clarity and connection. I have come to see the role as much more than managing a school system. It is about navigating constant complexity across academics, operations, and community expectations, often all at the same time.

For me, it always comes back to trust. You have to engage students, families, staff, and community partners in real ways, not just inform them, but bring them into the work so they understand the "why" behind decisions and feel a sense of ownership.

I also believe today's leaders have a responsibility to look ahead. We have to prepare students for a rapidly changing world while staying grounded in strong instruction and equitable access.

That includes being open to innovation, like artificial intelligence, but using it thoughtfully and responsibly.

At the end of it all, my role is to create the conditions where people can do their best work, so every student has a real path to opportunity.

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

One of the biggest lessons I learned in those early years is that you do not lead a system by having all the answers. You lead by listening, building trust, and helping people see themselves in the work. I also had to learn to be patient with the pace of change. When you care deeply about students, you want to move quickly. But real, lasting progress takes consistency, clear priorities, and a willingness to stay the course, even when it is difficult.

I came to understand how much relationships matter. The connections with the board, staff, families, and community are not separate from the work; they are the work. When those relationships are strong, everything else moves more effectively. Those early years shaped how I lead today, with a focus on clarity, consistency, and making sure people feel heard and valued.

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

Leadership at this level is about far more than managing a district; it is about being an architect of hope and progress. My journey from the halls of Teachers College Columbia University to the heart of our classrooms has taught me that we must marry deep systemic thinking with a soul-centered approach. My advice to fellow leaders is to embrace a catalytic identity that uses data to tear down the barriers holding our children back while simultaneously strengthening the village that sustains them. We must have the intellectual courage to re-examine the health of our organizations and remain visible enough to hear the quietest voices in our hallways. Our strategic plans cannot be mere documents on a shelf but must exist as a living promise to light the way so that every single child can manifest their highest potential.

**Submitted by:**

  
**Name/Signature**

4/29/2026  
**Date**