



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

Name

Jonathan Hinke
Executive Director, Strategic Initiatives

Current School District and Location

Putnam County School District
Palatka, Florida

INTRODUCTION

Meet Jonathan Hinke, an Executive Director for the Putnam County School District in Palatka, Florida. Putnam County is a geographically large, mostly rural county in Northeastern Florida, divided by the beautiful St. Johns River. The school district welcomes almost 10,000 students into its traditional, charter, and virtual schools each day.

Although he was born and raised in Wisconsin, Jonathan has spent the majority of his education career working in Florida. For the past decade, he has dedicated his time to improving the Putnam County School District with a focus on increasing expectations and creating systemwide changes. With a continuous improvement mindset, he isn't afraid to challenge the status quo in an effort to improve outcomes for all students.

Education

Jonathan has a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from the University of North Florida and a Bachelor of Music in General Music Education from Lawrence University.

Experience

Jonathan began his teaching career in Stoughton, Wisconsin in 2004. After a move to Florida in 2007, he spent seven years working for Duval County Public Schools as a teacher and academic coach. His experience working in turnaround schools led to him accepting a job working for the Bureau of School Improvement with the Florida Department of Education. In 2015, he was recruited to join the Putnam County School District as a school improvement specialist. While in Putnam County, he worked his way into a director role and eventually earned his executive director title in 2021.

As the Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives, he oversees district and school improvement efforts, strategic planning, school improvement grants, acceleration pathways, and school choice programs.

Outstanding Achievement(s)

From his days of being a District Teacher of the Year Semi-Finalist for Duval County Public Schools to his current role as an executive director, Jonathan remains an advocate for public education. His ability to see potential in others and his unrelenting commitment to improving student outcomes led him to join the Putnam County School District in 2015. His involvement in various district initiatives, has put the school district on an upwards trajectory and path of continuous improvement.

One of his first accomplishments was developing and facilitating the implementation of the district's five-year graduation initiative. In 2015, the district's graduation rate of 54.9% was not only unacceptable, it was the second lowest in Florida and full of disparities in student subgroup outcomes. A decade later, the district's 2025 graduation rate of 96.6% was the highest in the district's history and ranked them 5th of 67 districts across the state. Every single student subgroup outperformed the state average in 2025 and both the Free/Reduced Lunch and English Language Learner cohorts ranked 1st in Florida for their on-time graduation rates.

Along with his work to improve graduation rates, Jonathan also led the district's school turnaround efforts. In 2017, 9 of 17 traditional public schools in the district were graded a D or F by the State of Florida with six of the schools having a state required turnaround plan. With a strong focus on improving core instruction, leadership and instructional practices, and the use of data, the district has been improving school grades. The district has not had a state required turnaround plan since 2019 and has not had a school with a grade below a C since 2023.

As part of strategic planning, the Putnam County School District has been working as a team to improve the twelve components of the district grade. In his role, Jonathan collaborates with department directors and supports school administrators to ensure improvement efforts are aligned with the district's vision and mission. In 2025, the district had the highest ELA achievement since 2011 and the highest math achievement since 2014. The district increased in 10 of 12 components and earned the most points for their district grade since the modern calculation in Florida began in 2015.

With school grades and student achievement improving, Jonathan has recently assumed leadership over the district's acceleration programs. He now oversees all of the college credit earning high school programs including Advanced Placement, Cambridge AICE, and Dual Enrollment. The district offers a Cambridge AICE Diploma pathway and an Early College Program for students who are college bound. His goal in the first year has been to increase both student access to accelerated coursework and performance. The results already show that students want more rigorous and varied courses and they are taking advantage of these courses and programs in record numbers. Through collaboration with school leaders, he implemented Cambridge Primary Global Perspectives as a pilot at four elementary schools and will be expanding this program to more students next year. Jonathan frames this work as helping students and families find their pathways to success.

Every achievement Jonathan has had with the Putnam County School District has been the result of bringing leaders and staff together to build a systemwide approach to improvement. He believes transformation occurs because of collaboration and an unwavering commitment to challenging the status quo by increasing expectations.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN HINKE

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

I see today's superintendent as needing to lead during a period of a lot of noise. It's easy during a time of quickly advancing technology, social media controversies, and political pressures to get distracted. Superintendents today must be adept at not letting distractions interfere with vision and outcomes for students. The ability to filter out the things that get in the way of students and staff being successful is important. If we lose sight of the main goal of public education, then we've lost the purpose that is foundational to our existence as a public institution.

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

My experience with the Putnam County School District has provided me the opportunity to gain five insights into school and district transformation.

- Sustained Vision: True transformation requires long-term investment and commitment, not quick fixes or short-term thinking. If you don't have a defined vision, your efforts will stray from the goal.
- Expectation + Support Formula: High expectations without adequate supports fail, and supports without high expectations plateau. The formula for success requires increasing the level of both.
- Systematic Implementation: Districtwide change requires a collaborative approach across all schools and programs. Coordinated efforts will lead to sustainable results.
- Student Agency: When students see genuine opportunities, they will rise to meet increased expectations. Our beliefs about their potential transfer to increased expectations.
- Leadership Courage: Challenging mediocrity means being willing to disrupt comfortable patterns and push for excellence. Don't let naysayers have the last word. Prove them wrong.

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

As a district leader, I've learned the value of giving and receiving feedback from colleagues. It's a skill that comes somewhat naturally for me, and I realize that not everyone is comfortable with feedback. However, I have found that giving specific, constructive, and actionable feedback is one of the most effective ways of improving work skills and how we communicate. Feedback is also critical for increasing expectations.

I try to approach every day as an opportunity for improvement. Seeking and receiving feedback allows me to grow as an educator and leader. Giving feedback provides opportunities for my colleagues to grow.

Submitted by:

Jonathan Hinke



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Name/Signature

Date