

Terry Connor
Sarasota County Schools
Sarasota, Florida

INTRODUCTION

Terry Connor leads Sarasota County Schools with a focus on clarity, accountability, and consistent execution. He has established a reputation as a results-driven superintendent who brings order to complexity while maintaining an unwavering focus on students and staff. His leadership style blends a clear vision with operational discipline, building trust through transparency and fostering a culture where feedback is valued, and performance follows.

Under his leadership, the district has refined its strategic direction, expanded access to rigorous academics, enhanced internal communication systems, and prioritized professional development.

Sarasota County Schools serves over 45,000 students across 54 schools and consistently ranks among Florida's highest-performing districts.

Mr. Connor has served as Superintendent since 2023.

EDUCATION

Terry Connor began his education career in the classroom before advancing into leadership roles within some of Florida's most complex school systems. He holds degrees in education and educational leadership and has dedicated the past two decades to studying effective practices in schools, using that knowledge and experience to drive system improvements.

He is a graduate of the National Institute of School Leadership's (NISL) Executive Development Program and the Forum for Educational Leadership. Additionally, he is a member of Chiefs for Change and holds an Instructional Coaching Certification from the University of Florida's Lastinger Center for Learning.

Connor was drawn to the mission of building better schools early in his career, starting as a middle school science teacher and quickly moving into leadership roles. He has consistently focused on expanding opportunities, improving student outcomes, and strengthening instructional practices at all levels.

EXPERIENCE

Before joining Sarasota County, Connor served as Chief Academic Officer and Deputy Superintendent in Duval County, where he helped redesign secondary instruction, expand choice options, and align academic supports with student needs. He has also worked as a high school principal, leading significant gains in student achievement and staff performance.

Across all roles, his approach has remained consistent:

- Set clear expectations
- Build the right systems
- Communicate with precision
- Maintain a focus on the classroom

In Sarasota, Connor introduced a streamlined organizational structure, launched inclusive feedback mechanisms, and invested in professional development. He has also emphasized safety, transparency, and efficiency in all operational decisions.

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS

In his first full year as Superintendent of Sarasota County Schools, Terry Connor delivered a results-oriented approach focused on restoring academic clarity, stabilizing district operations, and positioning the organization for long-term improvement. He completed a comprehensive 100-day transition plan that identified key organizational gaps and stakeholder priorities and took immediate action to restructure the district's executive leadership team to enhance accountability and support for schools. Under his leadership, the district adopted a strategic plan grounded in measurable goals, instructional coherence, and a renewed commitment to academic achievement.

Mr. Connor reestablished the district's focus on foundational instruction, particularly in reading proficiency, exceptional student education, and academic acceleration. He implemented a monitoring system for instructional performance, supporting schools through targeted feedback and data utilization. The initiatives launched under his direction emphasized early literacy, English Language Learner support, and evidence-based interventions to address achievement gaps. His operational decisions consistently aligned with classroom needs, including a complete review and revision of board policies to improve alignment with state laws and board priorities.

He demonstrated strong fiscal leadership by responsibly managing the end of ESSER funding while maintaining a fund balance above 7.5%, redirecting resources to areas of greatest instructional need, and laying the groundwork for long-term sustainability. He also revised the teacher and administrator evaluation system, expanded differentiated professional development opportunities, and prioritized human capital by focusing on recruitment and retention strategies to address staffing gaps in high-need areas.

Connor prioritized community and staff engagement by launching consistent communication systems, restoring trust with parents and employees, and creating structures for meaningful input, such as the Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Council. His efforts strengthened stakeholder relationships and rebuilt confidence in the district's direction and leadership.

His leadership has received national recognition; he was named a 2025 NSPRA Superintendent to Watch, reflecting his commitment to communication, leadership transparency, and innovation in public education.

Connor's inaugural year as Superintendent was marked by structure, execution, and a clear message: the work must always return to the student.

FEATURED MEDIA

- [The Impact of Social Media in Schools, SRQ Daily](#)
- [Education bills will benefit Sarasota County's school district, Herald Tribune](#)
- [A Commitment to Educational Excellence, SRQ Magazine](#)
- [The Economic Engine Powering Sarasota to Prosperity, SRQ Magazine](#)
- [Establishing a Strong Foundation for Academic Success: The Critical Role of Prekindergarten](#)
- [Trading Spaces with Terry Connor | School Nurse](#)
- [Trading Spaces with Terry Connor | School Custodians](#)
- [Trading Spaces with Terry Connor | Food & Nutrition Services](#)
- [Trading Spaces with Terry Connor | School Registrars](#)
- [Trading Spaces with Terry Connor | School Resource Officer](#)
- [SCS In Tune - Ep 4 Summer Feeding Program](#)
- [SCS In Tune - Ep 3 Registration in Focus](#)
- [SCS In Tune - Ep 2 Mental Health Options](#)
- [SCS In Tune - Ep 1 School Choice](#)

HOW DO YOU SEE TODAY'S SUPERINTENDENT?

Today's superintendent is a strategist, a systems thinker, and a communicator—not just a figurehead or a cheerleader. The role demands clarity, decisiveness, and the ability to work across various domains: instruction, operations, finance, HR, policy, and politics. You cannot specialize; you are expected to lead effectively in all areas.

To succeed, you must:

- Build a team that can execute effectively.
- Maintain public trust through honest and timely communication.
- Make decisions with long-term sustainability in mind.
- Balance urgency with patience—not everything needs to move quickly.
- Know when to immerse yourself in details and when to step back.

Most importantly, you need to protect the instructional core. Every system you influence—be it transportation, technology, facilities, policy—should support student learning and teacher effectiveness. If it doesn't, you need to either fix it or eliminate it.

Though the role continues to evolve, the goal remains the same: to make the system work for students and those who serve them.

WHAT NEW UNDERSTANDING DID YOU ACQUIRE AFTER TWO OR THREE YEARS IN THE JOB?

After being in the role for a while, one thing becomes clear: clarity does not happen on its own; it must be built.

People don't need more initiatives or longer emails; they require fewer priorities, sharper focus, and straightforward answers. If the message is unclear, the work won't stick. If the system lacks follow-through, even the best ideas will fail.

Here's what I've learned:

- You must over-communicate the “why” and simplify the “how” relentlessly.
- Most operational issues are, in fact, communication failures in disguise.
- Transparency is not just a talking point; it's a discipline that must be practiced, even when uncomfortable.
- Listening doesn't mean agreeing. However, durable change won't happen if people don't feel heard.
- Clear metrics and real-time feedback loops are essential, along with the willingness to pivot when necessary.
- You can't just manage the district; you must design a system that operates clearly, consistently, and without fear.

SHARE AN IDEA TO USE OR SOMETHING YOU'VE LEARNED WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES.

One effective strategy we implemented is creating structured spaces for genuine feedback—and actually acting on it.

We launched the Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Council (STAC) as a direct communication channel between myself and frontline staff. This is not a symbolic gesture; it's a working group with real influence. We address challenging topics—such as school culture, discipline, workload, and student behavior—and use that feedback to shape district policy, priorities, and communications.

Key takeaways include:

- More surveys aren't necessary; you need to listen better to those who are already speaking.
- Representation is important, but so is continuity. We rotate members but retain some each year to build institutional knowledge.
- The group's influence increases when staff see their ideas reflected in real decisions. Therefore, it's vital to close the loop and demonstrate your work.

This structure has been replicated across other roles, including parent councils, student panels, and operations task forces.