



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

Name

Matthew L. Dillon, Ph.D., Superintendent

Current School District and Location

Petal School District | Petal, MS

INTRODUCTION

Matthew L. Dillon, Ph.D., a native of Columbia, Mississippi, and a product of the public school system, was appointed superintendent of the Petal School District in 2014. Under Dr. Dillon's leadership, Petal School District has been named the number one school district in the state on multiple occasions, has claimed several state and national awards in arts and athletics, and is recognized annually as an "A Rated" school district by the Mississippi Department of Education. Graduation rates are at an all-time high, and the district is consistently competitive on a national level with the NWEA testing assessment that measures growth and proficiency.

Education

Dr. Dillon earned an associate of arts degree from Jones County Junior College, a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education with a minor in Biology from The University of Southern Mississippi, as well as a master's degree and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, both from The University of Mississippi.

Experience

Before he was appointed superintendent of Petal Schools, he served as assistant superintendent for the Tupelo Public School District, and as head high school principal in the Pearl Public School District. He began his educational career as a teacher, coach and assistant principal at the elementary, junior high and high school levels.

Dillon currently serves on the State Superintendent Advisory Council for the Mississippi Department of Education and as chair of the Eastern States Consortium. He is a member of the University of Southern Mississippi School of Education Advisory Committee and has served as an adjunct professor in Educational Leadership since 2021. He also serves on the William Carey University School of Education Advisory Committee, where he was an adjunct from 2016-18. Dillon is past president of the Mississippi Association of School Administrators and past chair of the Gulf Coast Education Initiative Consortium.

Outstanding Achievement(s)

Dr. Dillon's outstanding achievements include the passing of a bond referendum last May with an approval rating of over 80%. He received the Bobby Runnels Leadership Award for outstanding service to the Petal Community in 2024. In 2021, Dillon was named Mississippi Superintendent of the Year by the Mississippi Association of School Administrators. He was also recognized in 2019 as the Mississippi Haggard Hall of Fame Dad of the Year, appearing on the Steve Harvey Show in Los Angeles. In 2018, the Mississippi Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

presented him with the Outstanding Administrator award and in 2017, he was named Petal Person of the Year by the Petal News.

Other highlights during his tenure include the establishment of “Petal U” a collaborative program with the University of Southern Mississippi to grow the administrative pool of applicants for future leadership positions within the Petal School District. Also, in partnership with USM, he established a teacher residency program where student teachers spend one full year in the district gaining front line experience while establishing a rapport within the district as part of Petal’s recruitment and retention efforts.

Dr. Dillon also established a “one-to-one” initiative to provide Chromebooks for every student, increased Career and Technical Education opportunities including the Utility Lineman program with Chain Electric, implemented Project SEARCH – a program focused on providing education and training to those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and increased participation in arts and athletics.

AN INTERVIEW

Tell us about how you see today’s superintendent.

Today’s superintendent must be a catalyst for success in all facets of the educational experience in our ever-changing global society. A “catalyst,” while it inspires, serves, motivates, mentors, guides and influences productive and positive changes, it doesn’t act alone. The current, consistently evolving culture of the public school system requires constant evaluation of practices and a limitless capacity for solutions. A single individual can only produce so many ideas, actions and perspectives. A superintendent must be assertive and firm in his or her convictions, but not necessarily make decisions in isolation. As a modern superintendent, I strive to surround myself with knowledgeable, creative and steadfast professionals to ensure that decisions are made with an exceptional quality of thought and consideration.

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

I absolutely acquired the importance of forward thinking -- to the extent of years beyond even your own tenure. It’s not enough to think through today, next year, or even a five-year plan. I learned quickly the importance of studying trends, assessing needs and creating a machine that can adapt and push forward through both the best and worst of circumstances. Critical to the success of this machine are the processes under which it’s run. Whether it’s leadership changes or policy changes, the processes under which those elements are cultivated and executed create the environment for sustained success. Leadership must be forward thinking enough to establish processes for a multitude of scenarios, so that in the face of crisis, catastrophe, or angry parent, all parties have a plan to proceed successfully.

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

It has always intrigued me to consider organizations and/or people that were “one hit wonders” in their field versus those that sustain success over a prolonged period of time. Some of the best examples of both perspectives can be found in the sports and the entertainment world. I

bet we can all name a musical artist or athletic team that experienced one time success and never returned to the pinnacle. On the flip side, there are many examples of teams or artists that constantly stay at the top. Sustained success is a concept that drives me every day at my school district and in life...the ability to get a little bit better than the day, week, month and school year before. Ultimately, we are competing with ourselves.

From this mindset, I developed the 5 Ps for sustained success that can be applied to any organization: People, Purpose, Processes, Performance and Praise. If you take your hand and look at each digit, they are all different. The thumb represents People as it is the most unique digit on your hand. The people we encounter each day are all different, from background, to appearance, to age and experiences, and the list goes on. It is important to note that we have all been made different and should embrace the uniqueness of all that cross our path. The index finger represents Purpose. Your index finger is often the digit many use to provide directions or point instructions. As we navigate work and life, we need to understand our purpose or our north star. Having direction in our life guides our work. The middle finger represents Processes. It is the longest digit on our hand and most often, processes are long. I would argue processes can be boring and monotonous, but so necessary. As people come and go in positions, processes allow for consistency and accountability. The ring finger represents Performance. Typically, we wear our wedding band, class ring or championship ring on our ring finger. Performance is what many of us like to do. It's the ability to showcase our knowledge and talents. If we get the People, Purpose and Processes right, more often than not, the Performance takes care of itself. The pinky finger represents Praise. As you know, that is the smallest digit on our hand. I have learned in organizations that we naturally praise big wins, but sometimes fail to praise the smaller growth moments that lead to the big wins. It is a reminder to slow down and praise the little things that happen daily and weekly with intentionality.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt L. Lill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

6-28-24

Name/Signature

Date