

## Dr. Michael J. Barnes - Mayfield City Schools, OH



### Professional Summary

Dr. Michael J. Barnes is the Superintendent of Mayfield City Schools in Ohio, where he leads a district of approximately 4,000 students with a focus on student-centered learning, early literacy, and system-wide continuous improvement. With more than three decades in public education, Dr. Barnes has served as a custodian, paraprofessional, teacher, coach, athletic director, principal, central office administrator, and superintendent.

Prior to returning to Mayfield, he served as Superintendent of Lakewood City Schools, where he led the development of a shared community vision for graduates, aligning the district around the skills and competencies students need to thrive in a complex and ever-changing world.

Dr. Barnes is the Immediate Past- President of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators and is a member of the Executive Committee for the American Association of School Administrators. He is a nationally recognized speaker, author, and thought leader in instructional leadership, personalized learning, and organizational clarity.

He is the author of *The Modern Superintendent: A Guide to Instructional Leadership* and *WINNING: Lessons on Life, Learning and Leadership*, and *Building Literacy Together: How Families, Schools, and Communities Can Raise Children Who Think*. His work centers on helping leaders build systems that ensure success for every student, every day.

## **Selected Areas of Expertise**

Dr. Barnes' areas of expertise include instructional leadership, systems design, portrait of a graduate implementation, early literacy development, and organizational clarity. He is particularly known for his work in operationalizing student-centered learning and designing structures that move schools from vision to daily practice.

## **Outstanding Achievements**

Under Dr. Barnes' leadership, Mayfield City Schools has become nationally recognized as a leader in innovation. Under his leadership his district has earned a 5-star rating on the Ohio State Report Card for three consecutive years. The district has also seen measurable gains in student achievement, particularly in reading and mathematics, driven by a clear focus on foundational skills and instructional coherence.

He has led the implementation of innovative learning models, including personalized pathways at the high school level and a district-wide elementary teaming model that strengthens collaboration and improves student outcomes.

## **Interview Questions**

*How do you see today's superintendent?*

Today's superintendent is no longer simply a manager of systems; they are a leader of learning, culture, and complexity. The role has evolved significantly, requiring a balance of instructional expertise, strategic thinking, and the ability to lead in what many describe as a VUCA environment—one that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

Superintendents today must be able to clearly articulate a vision, align systems to that vision, and build trust across diverse stakeholder groups. They are expected to lead with both head and heart—grounded in data, but deeply connected to people.

At its best, the superintendency is about creating clarity in the midst of complexity and ensuring that every decision ultimately serves students.

*What new understandings or insights have you acquired after three years on the job?*

One of the most important insights I've gained is the power of clarity and focus. It is easy for school systems to become overwhelmed by competing priorities. Over time, I have come to understand that progress is accelerated when organizations identify what matters most and align their efforts accordingly.

I have also developed a deeper appreciation for the importance of systems. Good intentions are not enough. If we want consistent results, we must design systems that support the work. This includes how we structure time, how we use data, and how we support collaboration among educators.

Finally, I have learned that leadership is as much about listening as it is about leading. The most effective decisions are informed by the voices and experiences of those closest to the work.

*Share an idea or strategy that would be important and useful for a new superintendent.*

One strategy I would offer to a new superintendent is to begin by establishing a small number of clear priorities—what I often refer to as “the big rocks.” These priorities should be directly connected to student outcomes and should guide decision-making across the organization.

Once those priorities are established, the next step is alignment. Every initiative, every allocation of resources, and every expectation should connect back to those priorities. Without alignment, even the best ideas can become diluted.

Equally important is the creation of structures that support collaboration. No superintendent can do this work alone, and no teacher should have to either. When systems are designed to support teamwork and shared responsibility, the capacity of the organization increases significantly.

Above all, stay grounded in your purpose. The work is challenging, but it is also incredibly meaningful. When we remain focused on serving students and supporting educators, we position ourselves to make a lasting impact.