

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 for Sarasota County Schools for the last three years.

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

As Superintendent of Sarasota County Schools, Terry Connor delivered a focused, execution-driven approach that strengthened academics, stabilized operations, and positioned the district for long-term success. Through the Future-Focused Strategic Initiative, he led with agility and precision, aligning resources, programs, and facilities to respond to rapid changes in enrollment, school choice, and funding. He restructured the executive leadership team to increase accountability and improve direct support to schools, while implementing a strategic plan grounded in clear metrics and measurable outcomes.

Connor reestablished a strong academic foundation across the district. He prioritized early literacy, exceptional student education, and targeted interventions tied directly to student data. He introduced consistent instructional monitoring systems and built school-level capacity through focused feedback and support. These efforts led to measurable gains, including Sarasota County Schools ranking 2nd in Florida in 3rd grade literacy at 71 percent and 95 percent of district-managed schools earning an “A” or “B.” His leadership reflects both discipline and agility, adjusting quickly while maintaining a clear academic focus.

Through power leadership, Connor made decisive organizational and financial moves to protect the district’s stability. He successfully managed the expiration of ESSER funds while maintaining a fund balance above 7.5 percent. He redirected resources to classrooms, aligned staffing to enrollment, and implemented long-term cost controls tied to healthcare and operational spending. His work established a sustainable financial model while preserving investments in instruction and employee support.

Connor advanced innovation and the use of AI to improve both instruction and district operations. He expanded access to high-quality instructional tools, supported professional development tied to modern learning strategies, and introduced systems that use data and emerging technologies to drive decision-making. His approach focuses on practical application, improving efficiency while strengthening student outcomes.

He also placed a strong emphasis on safety and security. Under his leadership, the district strengthened campus safety protocols, increased monitoring and compliance measures, and reinforced expectations for secure learning environments across all schools. His approach balanced prevention, accountability, and consistent oversight to protect students and staff.

Connor strengthened trust and communication across the community. He launched consistent engagement structures, including the Superintendent’s Teacher Advisory Council, staff listening sessions, and community forums. These systems created direct feedback loops and improved transparency, helping rebuild confidence in the district’s direction.

His leadership has earned national recognition, including being named a 2025 NSPRA Superintendent to Watch and a 2025 NASS Instruction Award recipient. His tenure reflects disciplined execution,

responsiveness to change, and a clear focus on results. The work remains centered on one priority: every student, every day.

Connor's tenure as Superintendent has been 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, or policy. It 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 acting on it.

We launched the Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Council (STAC) as a direct communication channel between me 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.