



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

Name

Jonathan Cooper, EdD., Superintendent | CEO

Current School District and Location

Mason City Schools

Mason, Ohio

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Jonathan Cooper serves as the Superintendent and CEO of Mason City Schools, a nationally recognized district distinguished by its academic excellence and cultural diversity. Under his leadership, Mason City Schools has earned accolades such as the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence and an A+ rating from Niche, affirming its status as one of the top school districts in the nation.

Dr. Cooper's commitment to inclusive excellence is reflected in a district where students hail from over 100 countries and speak more than 100 languages, creating a vibrant and globally connected learning community.

Embracing a community-sourced leadership approach, Dr. Cooper prioritizes listening, collaboration, and alignment with the values of students, staff, and families. His leadership is grounded in a deep belief in growing people and building systems that empower others to lead. This approach fosters a culture of empathy, transparency, and trust, ensuring that every student is supported in discovering their purpose and potential.

Central to Mason City Schools' success are three strategic priorities known as the **Three Big Rocks**:

1. **Culture** – Cultivating an environment where the community lives and learns together with intention.
2. **Inclusive Excellence** – Celebrating diversity and advancing equity for all learners.
3. **Personalized Learning** – Empowering students through learner-centered experiences tailored to their interests and strengths.

Dr. Cooper is honored to lead a district that not only achieves academic excellence, but also lives out a bold vision where ***each and every Comet discovers purpose and potential.***

Education

Jonathan holds a Bachelor of Education with a concentration in Science from Ball State University, a Master of Science in Educational Leadership from the University of Dayton, and earned both his Principal and Superintendent Licenses from the University of Dayton. He completed his Doctorate in Educational Leadership (Ed.D.) from Miami University in 2022.

Experience

Dr. Jonathan Cooper's career in education spans over two decades and includes a range of impactful leadership experiences. He began his career as an elementary school teacher in Centerville City Schools, a high-performing district in Ohio, where he led innovative classroom initiatives and coached fellow educators on differentiated instruction and project-based learning.

He then moved into school administration with Kettering City Schools, where he served as Head Principal of Moraine Meadows Elementary and later led Southdale Elementary, successfully merging two distinct school communities into a unified, high-performing learning environment.

In 2014, he joined Mason City Schools as the district's first Chief Innovation Officer and later served as Deputy Superintendent. In these roles, he led groundbreaking work in personalized learning, STEAM education, and instructional transformation, designing systems and programs that continue to influence regional and national education practices.

In 2018, Dr. Cooper was named Superintendent and CEO of Mason City Schools, one of Ohio's largest and most accomplished school districts. Now in his eighth year as superintendent, Mason has been consistently ranked among the top school districts in the state and nation. Under his leadership, the district has implemented a Team of Teams organizational approach, launched the Mason Futures initiative, and led the community through major efforts in inclusive excellence, mental wellness, and pandemic recovery.

Dr. Cooper is deeply connected to the community he serves, actively contributing to local and regional organizations including the Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, Women Walking West, and other community-based initiatives. His leadership is marked by a community-sourced approach, innovative vision, and an unwavering commitment to growing learners, leaders, and citizens through meaningful, purpose-driven education.

Outstanding Achievement(s)

Dr. Jonathan Cooper has led a range of impactful achievements centered on student success, organizational excellence, and community trust. Among these is the successful passage of a major operating levy, the first in 15 years, with record community support during the uncertainty of a global pandemic. His leadership during that time ensured financial stability while positioning the district to emerge stronger, more connected, and more future-focused.

He has led the development of a comprehensive district-wide mental wellness strategy that has become a model across the state and nation. In 2026, Mason City Schools was selected as a national site visit through AASA, highlighting the district's leadership and impact in advancing mental health supports in K-12 education.

Dr. Cooper has also implemented a district-wide personalized learning model, established inclusive excellence as a core strategic priority, and launched the Mason Futures initiative to help reimagine education for 2030 and beyond. Building on this work, he has led the development of the district's Momentum strategy, including the Fusion and Futures teams. This innovative structure creates a system for research and development, empowers leaders at all levels, and fosters a culture of continuous innovation across the organization.

In addition, he has guided district-wide upskilling efforts in emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, creating a human-centered framework that builds capacity across students, staff, and leadership teams. Through this work, student voice plays a critical role in shaping future-ready learning experiences and informing system-wide design.

At the heart of Dr. Cooper's leadership is a deeper accomplishment. He has intentionally built a system that grows leadership through a culture of learning, curiosity, and innovation. By recruiting and developing exceptional leaders, he has created an environment where individuals are empowered to lead, take risks, and become the best version of themselves in service to students. This leadership model has multiplied impact across the district, ensuring that the work extends far beyond any one individual and remains focused on helping each and every student discover purpose and potential.

Dr. Cooper has restructured district leadership through a Team of Teams approach, developed strong business and community partnerships, led robust professional learning systems, and implemented comprehensive OKR frameworks to align priorities and drive accountability.

While these accomplishments are significant, Dr. Cooper considers his most outstanding achievement to be creating space for others to lead, grow, and thrive in service to each and every student. He reflects, "I don't measure success by awards or headlines. I measure it by whether our students feel seen, valued, and inspired to discover their purpose. That's the real work."

His leadership has been recognized through numerous honors, including the Cincinnati Deserving Leader Award, the Community Impact Award, the Community Luminary Award, and multiple listings among Cincinnati's Most Powerful Business Leaders. He was also named a MSSA Educational Leadership Honoree and a Martha Holden Jennings Scholar, and continues to be sought out for national speaking engagements on innovation, inclusion, and student-centered leadership.

AN INTERVIEW

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

I see the role of the superintendent as one of the most important leadership positions in the world. As superintendents, we are entrusted with the incredible privilege of shaping the future by creating the conditions in which every student can thrive. We have the responsibility and the honor to set a vision that is both bold and inclusive, and to align resources in ways that reflect our unwavering commitment to serving each and every student.

Today's superintendent must operate as both a visionary leader and a chief executive officer. This role requires systems thinking at the highest level, with a deep understanding of operations, finance, and organizational design. At the same time, superintendents must be strong instructional leaders who remain grounded in teaching and learning, ensuring that every decision ultimately supports student growth and success.

In today's world, where communities are often tested by uncertainty and division, the superintendent must be a steady and trusted presence. We are called to bring calm to the storms, model level-headed leadership, and communicate with clarity and purpose. We must be courageous enough to champion innovation and advocate for our students at the local, state, and national levels, while remaining humble servants who listen deeply, build trust, and lead with empathy.

A modern superintendent is not just an administrator. We are leaders of leaders, architects of culture, and stewards of possibility. We are responsible for building teams, empowering others to lead, and creating systems where innovation can thrive. It is not enough to gain buy-in to a vision. Our work is to help people see themselves in the vision, believe in it, and understand the impact they have in bringing it to life.

We must also be agile and forward-thinking. This includes embracing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, while ensuring that our approach remains grounded in human-centered values. We must lead with a deep commitment to inclusive excellence, recognizing that belonging does not happen by chance. It requires intentionality, proactive leadership, and a genuine appreciation for the diverse voices that strengthen our communities.

Importantly, we must recognize that we do not lead alone. We are strengthened and guided by the collective wisdom of the incredible network of leaders we work alongside. These relationships sharpen our thinking, expand our perspective, and help us navigate the complexities of this work. With that privilege comes a responsibility to give back, to invest in new and aspiring leaders, and to nurture their growth so that the legacy of leadership continues for generations to come.

Above all, I see today's superintendent as someone who loves the work and the people in it. This role calls for leaders who are both confident and courageous, yet humble and always learning. I am inspired every day by the educators and staff I have the opportunity to serve alongside, individuals who are deeply committed to making a difference. It is a profound honor to lead with them, and to lead for our students, who deserve nothing less than our very best.

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

In my first few years as superintendent, I encountered challenges and opportunities that pushed me to grow and shaped my understanding of leadership in profound ways. Early on, I led alongside our team through a successful levy campaign, our first in 15 years, which was supported overwhelmingly by our community. Experiences like that reinforced the importance of trust, communication, and shared ownership in the work we do.

One of the most important lessons I learned is the critical role of building a strong team and trusting them fully. Leadership at this level is not about having all the answers. It is about surrounding yourself with exceptional people, empowering them to lead, and creating the conditions for them to thrive. Over time, I have come to see that the greatest impact we can have is not just through the decisions we make, but through the leaders we develop.

I also learned the importance of staying grounded in core values. Leadership begins with knowing your true north. When challenges arise, clarity of values allows you to lead with consistency, authenticity, and purpose. People are not just looking for direction. They want to feel seen, heard, and valued. When leaders operate with humility, own their mistakes, and celebrate the success of others, it builds trust and strengthens the culture of the organization.

Another key understanding has been the importance of building systems that support clarity, alignment, and growth. This includes everything from communication cadence and meeting structures to goal-setting frameworks such as Objectives and Key Results. When these systems are intentional and consistent, they create focus, reduce noise, and allow leaders across the organization to move forward with confidence and alignment.

As our work has evolved, we have also focused on building structures that support innovation and adaptability. Through our Journey to 2030 framework and the development of our Momentum strategy, including our Fusion and Futures teams, we have created a space for research and development within the district. This has allowed us to move with greater agility, encourage thoughtful risk-taking, and build a

culture of psychological safety where new ideas can be explored, refined, and scaled. In a rapidly changing world, especially with the emergence of artificial intelligence and new learning opportunities for students, this mindset has become essential.

I have also come to understand the importance of intentionally developing future leaders. Through the creation of our leadership pipeline and legacy leadership work, we are investing in the next generation of leaders who will continue to carry the work forward. This commitment ensures that our impact is sustained and continues to grow over time.

On a personal level, I have learned that leadership requires a deep investment in your own growth and well-being. Superintendents are called to bring energy to their organizations, not just direction. That means developing habits and disciplines that allow you to show up as your best self each day. You cannot give what you do not have, and taking care of your health and wellness is essential to sustaining this work.

Finally, I have learned that leadership is strengthened through connection. Leaning into networks of colleagues, mentors, and trusted advisors has been invaluable. These relationships provide perspective, challenge your thinking, and remind you that you are not alone in the journey.

At the center of all of this is a simple belief that continues to guide my leadership: love, learn, and lead. When we lead with care for people, commit to learning alongside one another, and move forward with purpose and clarity, we create the kind of environment where both adults and students can discover their purpose and potential.

Through these experiences, I have come to realize that serving as a superintendent is not just a role. It is a responsibility and a privilege, and one that continues to inspire me every day.

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

There are many lessons I've learned in this role, but one idea that has consistently guided my leadership is the importance of anchoring your work in a clear and simple foundation. For me, that foundation comes down to three words: love, learn, and lead.

Love is where it begins. When people experience that you genuinely care about them, their growth, and their success, it creates trust, belonging, and the conditions for great work. It is not just about what we say, but how people experience us through our presence, our listening, and our actions. When you love the work and the people in it, you create a culture where others can do the same.

Learn is the commitment to continuous growth. When we stop learning, we stop growing. One of the most impactful ways we bring this to life is through a practice we call our Read to Lead Peak Moment. At the start of our meetings, we take time to read something meaningful and reflect together. It is a moment to step back, gain perspective, and look up and out before diving into the work. Over time, this simple discipline has helped us grow together, challenge our thinking, and stay aligned to our vision. It has also led to meaningful shifts in our work, including the adoption of frameworks like Objectives and Key Results, which have helped us stay both focused and agile.

Lead is about taking action with purpose and courage. Leadership is especially important in the moments that are most challenging. It requires consistency, integrity, and a willingness to step forward while also

creating space for others to lead. The goal is not to be the only leader, but to build leadership capacity across the organization so that the work is shared, sustained, and continuously improving.

If I were to offer one takeaway to colleagues, it would be this: take the time to define your foundation. Identify the values or guiding words that anchor your leadership, and then build systems, habits, and culture around them. When your leadership is grounded in a clear foundation, it creates alignment, strengthens relationships, and helps your organization stay focused on what matters most.

Submitted by:



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Name/Signature

Date