



**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 School District  
Mason, Ohio**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Dr. Jonathan Cooper serves as the Superintendent 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 best school districts in the nation.

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

Embracing a community-sourced leadership approach, Dr. Cooper prioritizes listening, collaboration, and alignment with the values of students, staff, and families. His servant leadership style fosters a culture of empathy, transparency, and trust, ensuring that every student is empowered to discover 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 a district that holds a bold vision of each and every Comet discovering 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. Under his leadership, Mason has been consistently ranked among the top school districts in the state and nation. He has introduced 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's leadership is marked by his community-sourced approach, innovative vision, and unwavering commitment to growing learners, leaders, and citizens through meaningful, purpose-driven education.

## **Outstanding Achievement(s)**

Dr. Jonathan Cooper has a long list of remarkable achievements, including but certainly not limited to successfully passing a major operating levy—the first in 15 years—with record community support during the uncertainty of a global pandemic, leading the development of a district-wide mental wellness strategy that has become a statewide model, and securing millions in additional state relief funds through collaborative legislative advocacy. He has also implemented a district-wide personalized learning model, introduced inclusive excellence as a core strategic priority, and launched the Mason Futures Team to reimagine education for 2030 and beyond.

Dr. Cooper has restructured district leadership through a "Team of Teams" approach, created innovative business and community partnerships, led robust professional learning systems, and developed comprehensive OKR (Objectives and Key Results) frameworks to align priorities and drive accountability.

While these accomplishments are significant, Dr. Cooper considers his most outstanding achievements to be "creating space for others to lead, grow, and thrive—and doing so 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 allocate resources in ways that reflect our unwavering commitment to serving each and every student.

In today's world—where communities are often tested by uncertainty and division—the superintendent must be a steady presence. We bring calm to the storms and model level-headed leadership. We are called to be courageous CEOs who champion innovation and advocate tirelessly for our students, while also being humble servants who listen deeply and act with compassion.

A modern superintendent is not just an administrator; we are leaders of leaders, architects of culture, and stewards of hope. We must be tenacious learners, always evolving to meet the changing needs of our communities. We must be innovators and entrepreneurs, ready to chart new paths and design systems that elevate every learner's voice and potential.

Importantly, we must recognize that we do not lead alone. We are strengthened and guided by the wisdom of the incredible network of leaders we work alongside—those who share their experience and insight, and who help us see around corners and think bigger. It is this collective wisdom that sharpens our focus and expands our possibilities. And with that privilege comes the responsibility to give back—to invest in new and aspiring leaders, to nurture their growth and courage, and to ensure the legacy of leadership is sustained for generations to come.

Above all, I see today's superintendent as someone who loves the work and the people in it. I am inspired every day by the amazing educators and staff I get to serve alongside—people who know their purpose and use their gifts to influence a better tomorrow. 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 two or three years as superintendent, I encountered challenges and opportunities that pushed me to grow and taught me more than I could have ever imagined. During that time, I led with my team to navigate a successful levy campaign—our first in 15 years—which was approved by our community with an overwhelming 70% support. Just as we celebrated that milestone, the world changed overnight with the COVID-19 shutdown, and I quickly realized that adaptability and resilience were essential qualities for any leader.

One of the most powerful lessons I learned in this role is the importance of building a great team and trusting them fully. I discovered that, even in the most turbulent times, we are never alone on the journey. The power of leaning into networks of other superintendents, mentors, and community leaders was transformative for me. I discovered that investing in these relationships—offering support and learning from others in turn—is one of the greatest gifts and responsibilities of leadership.

I also learned how essential it is to lead authentically and stay grounded in core values. In times of uncertainty and division, superintendents often find themselves as peacemakers—bringing people together from vastly different ideological places and focusing them back on what matters most: our

students. I learned that, at the end of the day, people want to feel seen, heard, and valued—especially in the tough times.

One of my most profound lessons was how powerful a commUNITY-sourced leadership model can be when navigating change. It became clear to me that, while technology and innovation are important tools, our future relies on our unwavering commitment to human-centered education. We must lead with empathy and vision, creating spaces where our students and staff can discover their purpose and potential.

Through all of these experiences, I also discovered that I truly love this role. Serving as a superintendent is not just a job—it is a privilege and a joy. Every day, I am inspired by the opportunity to serve our community and to grow alongside our incredible staff and students.

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

There are so many valuable lessons I’ve learned in this role, but one idea that has served my leadership team—and our entire district—exceptionally well is creating a culture of leadership learning. One of the most impactful ways we do this is through a practice we call our “Read to Lead Peak Moment.” At the start of every meeting, we come together and read something inspiring or thought-provoking. We see this as a moment to step out onto the balcony—to pause, gain perspective, and appreciate the future horizon before we dive back into the details of our work.

This simple yet powerful practice has become a cornerstone of our culture. We’ve been doing it for nearly eight years now, and it has led us to embrace some truly transformative ideas. For example, it was during these leadership learning moments that we discovered and adopted the Objectives and Key Results (OKR) framework, as outlined in *Measure What Matters* by John Doerr. This framework has served as our operating system for the past seven years, allowing us to be both agile and aligned—living out our philosophy of “aligned autonomy.”

These “Read to Lead Peak Moments” have become much more than a routine. They have shaped how we lead, how we learn, and how we grow together as a team. I believe this practice—creating intentional spaces for learning and perspective—can be a powerful idea for any leadership team looking to stay centered on purpose while navigating the complexities of our work.

### **Submitted by:**



Jonathan Cooper

6.1.26

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**Name/Signature**

**Date**