

NASS FEATURED MEMBER ARTICLE

Dr. Alice Elizabeth Barfield, Ed.D., Superintendent

Glades County School District

Moore Haven, Florida

EDUCATION

Dr. Barfield holds a Doctor of Education degree in Organizational Leadership with a specialization in Educational Leadership and School Law from Nova Southeastern University, where she also earned a Master's degree in Educational Leadership. Dr. Barfield hold a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Florida Southern College.

EXPERIENCE

Dr. Alice Barfield brings over 30 years of experience in public education experience, with a strong foundation in both instructional leadership and district operations. Dr. Barfield began her career as a kindergarten teacher and went on to teach multiple grade levels, including more than seven years at the middle school level. Her extensive classroom experience across diverse age groups built a deep, practical understanding of curriculum, instruction, and student development, as well as established the strong instructional foundation that continues to guide her leadership. In addition to her K-12 experience, Dr. Barfield served as an adjunct professor at Florida Southwestern State College, where she taught teacher preparation courses and played a key role in developing and mentoring future educators entering the profession.

Dr. Barfield transitioned into administration and became a highly successful turnaround principal in the Lee County School District- one of the top twenty largest districts in the nation; leading schools previously designated as failing to significantly improved outcomes.

In 2020, Dr. Alice E. Barfield was named Superintendent of Schools of the Glades County School District, in Glades County Florida, a small, rural, high-poverty district that held the state's lowest designation at the time. Within five years, under Dr. Barfield's leadership, the district improved to an "A" rating, the highest possible distinction.

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS

Under Dr. Alice E. Barfield's leadership, Glades County School District has achieved significant milestones in student performance, teacher pay, and expansion of Career and Technical Education (CTE):

- **Graduation Rate Improvement:**

- 2020-2021: The GCSD's Graduation Rate was 78.5%, Florida's lowest out of 67 Counties
 - 2025-2026: An increase to 90%, marking the fourth year of consecutive growth
- **School Grades:**
 - School Year 2020, the projected school grade was rated and F by the state assessment scores, which is the lowest level that a school can achieve
 - School Year 2021-2024: District improved overall all District Scores at an increase from an F to a B
 - School Year 2024-2025: District became an A-rated district. First time in over a decade
 - School year 2025-2026: Projection is for District to repeat A-rating, which will be the first time ever accomplished back-to-back A's.
- **Teacher Pay:**
 - 2019: Glades County Beginning Teacher Salary was third lowest in the state at \$38,000.
 - 2020: Raised all salaries, especially beginning Teacher Pay to \$50,000. Showing the commitment of placing the most qualified and well payed teachers in front of students.
 - 2021: Raised again to show commitment to teachers, to \$50,100, also raised all non-instructional employees to minimum wage of \$15.00 and retro paid for the school year. This brought Glades County, a rural, fiscally restrained district to the top ten in the State of Florida
 - 2025: Currently in negotiations with all staff pay advancements through non-financial incentives, but through wording and contracted services.
- **Expansion of Career and Technical Education (CTE)**
 - 2025: Expanded CTE programs in Middle and High Schools to include a Business Department, Nursing Academy, and Agriculture Program.
 - Over \$1,000,000 awarded in Competitive grants to fulfill needs for equipment and supplies
 - In partnership with Collier County School District the ITECH Glades Center, offering Culinary, HVAC, Business, and Advanced Nursing
- **Creation of Moore Haven High School Collegiate Academy**
 - Due to rural location and socio-economic status of the students, a college degree was not obtainable. Dr. Barfield's creation of the MHHS Collegiate Academy has transformed

the generational story for many students. Since 2021, over twenty students annually have graduated with their Associates of Arts Degree from Florida Southwestern College.

- **Presentations and Speaking Engagements**

- Presenter, National School Safety Conference
- Presenter, National Healthy Meals Summit
- Presenter, National Superintendent's Forum

- **Honors and Nominations**

- Harvard Graduate School of Education-Certification in Educational Leadership
- Nominated, 2025 Power Leadership Award (Districts Under 2,500 Students) – National Association of School Superintendents
- Nominated, 2025 Excellence in Innovation – National Association of School Superintendents

- **Professional Leadership, Boards, and Committees**

- Board Member, Southwest Florida Alliance of Educational Leaders
- Board Member, Traffic, Incident, and Management (TIM)- Florida Department of Transportation
- Member, President's Advisor Circle on Workforce and Economic Development
- Board Member, Glades Educational Foundation
- Member, Moore Haven High School Scholarship Committee
- Board of Directors Member, Florida Gulf Coast University – College of Education
- Advisory Board Member, Florida Southwestern State College
- Member, Glades County Technology Planning Team
- Member, Glades County Economic Development Council
- Co-Chair, Heartland Educational Consortium Board of Directors
- Member, Glades County Emergency Management Disaster Team
- Member, Florida Women's Superintendent's Organization

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ALICE ELIZABETH BARFIELD

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

A rural superintendent today embodies outstanding achievement through a deep commitment to students, staff, and community, while navigating unique challenges with purpose and resolve. The role demands serving as the common denominator—setting the tone, shaping conversations, and ensuring all efforts remain focused on what is best for kids. In rural districts, it is essential to lead with the belief that low income must never equal low expectations. Today's superintendent is a consumer of evidence,

using data and research to drive decisions, a curator who identifies and adapts effective practices, and a creator who builds systems and opportunities where none may have existed before. This work reflects a demonstrated belief in continuous improvement, always striving to grow and refine practices for better outcomes. Equally important is a strong commitment to collaboration and mutual support within the profession, recognizing that progress is strengthened through shared knowledge and collective effort. Ultimately, the rural superintendent is a connector, champion, and catalyst for excellence, equity, and opportunity for every child.

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

After several years in this role, I have come to understand that turbulence is often a byproduct of elevation. As expectations rise and meaningful change takes hold, resistance, uncertainty, and pressure naturally follow. Early on, I viewed challenges as obstacles to stability; now I recognize them as indicators of progress. Growth—whether in student outcomes, staff capacity, or organizational systems—requires disruption of the status quo. I have learned to lead through that turbulence with clarity, consistency, and trust in the process. This perspective has strengthened my resolve to make decisions grounded in long-term impact rather than short-term comfort. Ultimately, I now see that navigating turbulence is not something to avoid—it is evidence that we are moving forward and upward.

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

One idea I would share with colleagues is the power of establishing clear, non-negotiables to build a team-centered culture of excellence. In my experience, alignment begins when everyone—students, staff, families, and the broader community—understands what we stand for and what we expect. Our non-negotiables center on support, high expectations, consistency, positivity, and grit. These are not just words, but daily commitments that guide decisions and interactions at every level.

This approach is especially critical in a rural, high-poverty district, where challenges are real but so is the opportunity to make a lasting impact. We emphasize that hard work and strong work ethic are not the goal—they are the standard. Positivity is intentional, expectations are unwavering, and we always do what is best for kids. When adults model consistency and commitment, students rise to meet those expectations. A unified culture grounded in purpose ensures that success is not accidental—it is earned, sustained, and shared by all.