

Dr. Tyrone Brookins

Dr. Tyrone Brookins serves as Assistant Superintendent for South Washington County Schools, where he provides executive leadership for elementary education, directly supervises 9 elementary sites and 2 high schools, and oversees a broad portfolio that includes facilities and maintenance, program research, evaluation and assessment, student information, safety and security, and technology infrastructure. South Washington County Schools serves more than 18,900 students and is one of the largest districts in Minnesota. Since stepping into the assistant superintendent role in 2020, Dr. Brookins has led work connected to instructional systems, district operations, strategic planning, and long-range facilities efforts. His earlier experience includes more than two decades in school leadership as a principal, assistant principal, and teacher in both Minnesota and Texas, giving him experience across a wide range of school settings.

Across his career, Dr. Brookins has focused on strengthening instructional practice, improving systems, and creating conditions that support both students and staff. In his current district, his leadership has included advancing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, districtwide literacy training, implementation fidelity measures, and collaboration across departments. He has also been closely involved in long-range facility planning associated with a \$200 million bond referendum and oversight of multiple construction projects over a five-year span. In prior principal roles, he led sustained academic improvement through literacy gains, data-informed intervention systems, curriculum alignment, strong staff retention, and increased family engagement. He has also contributed to leadership development through professional learning, university teaching, and statewide leadership programs.

Dr. Brookins holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and a Master of Education from the University of Minnesota, along with a Bachelor of Science from Wiley College. He holds Minnesota licensure as a District Superintendent and Principal, K-12.

Dr. Robert McDowell

Dr. Robert McDowell serves as Assistant Superintendent of Robbinsdale Area Schools, where he works with the superintendent to provide executive leadership across district operations and instructional services. Robbinsdale Area Schools serves approximately 10,000 students, and his responsibilities include supervision of building principals and leaders in teaching and learning, student services, special education, and achievement and integration, while coordinating closely with human resources, communications, finance, and operations. Before joining Robbinsdale in 2025, he served as Senior Vice President at the Center for Effective School Operations, supporting district clients in strategic planning, operations, finance, transportation, technology, and school board development. His background also includes service as Superintendent of Hastings Public Schools and Assistant Superintendent of Stillwater Area Public Schools.

Dr. McDowell's career reflects extensive experience in district leadership, strategic implementation, and leading through complex change. In Robbinsdale, his recent work has included long-range facility planning, development of the district's statutory operating debt plan, building consolidations, program realignment, referendum planning, and updates to literacy, safety, technology, special education, and MTSS systems. As superintendent in Hastings, he led the district through its first strategic plan, directed more than \$3.5 million in budget reductions, oversaw \$50 million in bond-funded facility projects, and guided the district through the COVID-19 pandemic and a food service strike.

Dr. McDowell holds a Superintendent Licensure and a Doctor of Education from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, an Education Specialist degree and Principal Licensure from Minnesota State University, Mankato, and a Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of St. Thomas.

Melissa Sonnek

Melissa Sonnek serves as Senior Academic Officer for Minneapolis Public Schools, where she leads the Academic Division in support of approximately 600 staff and manages a budget of about \$100 million dedicated to teaching and learning. In this role, she provides executive leadership for core academics, academic programs, multilingual learner and magnet programs, MTSS, community education, and several student achievement offices, while also serving on the Superintendent's Senior Leadership Team and supporting 77 principals through coaching and instructional leadership. Prior to joining Minneapolis Public Schools in 2025, she served as Associate Superintendent for Roseville Area Schools and previously held district leadership roles in teaching and learning and elementary programming. Her earlier experience includes service as an elementary principal, instructional coach, literacy specialist, and classroom teacher.

Ms. Sonnek's background is rooted in instructional leadership, literacy, principal development, and relationship-centered leadership. Over the course of her career, she has led strategic plan development and implementation, district instructional leadership structures, principal mentoring and support, board relations, policy implementation, school operations, and crisis response. She has worked closely across departments including student services, communications, finance, human resources, and community education, helping align systems in support of district goals. She has also led literacy work tied to the science of reading, LETRS, and curriculum implementation, and her principal experience reflects success in improving student achievement, reducing discipline referrals, and strengthening school culture.

Ms. Sonnek is currently a Ph.D. student at the University of Minnesota and holds a District Superintendent License, a K-12 Principal License, a K-6 Elementary Teaching License, and Reading Recovery Certification. She earned a Master of Science in Education from Winona State University and a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education.