

THOMAS M. AHART, ED.D.

PROFILE: Education leader with 33 years of experience in a wide range of professional roles. Understands the power and necessity of strong, efficient systems in producing results and the responsibility of modeling the courage and integrity desired in all staff. Committed to equity of opportunity and outcomes. Builder of collaborative relationships with board of directors, staff, students, and community.

EDUCATION

EdD	Drake University, Educational Leadership Dissertation: “A Comparative Analysis of Teacher Perceptions of School Culture in High-Performing and Low-Performing Iowa Schools” Committee: David Darnell, Ph.D. (chair), Robyn Cooper, Ph.D., Elaine Smith-Bright, Ed.D.	May 2014
EdS	Drake University, Educational Leadership	May 2007
MPA	Drake University	May 1998
BA	University of Denver, Mass and Speech Communications Minor in English, Graduated Cum Laude	May 1989

SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Consultant/Coach	Independent (under contract with CGCS)	2022 –present
Superintendent of Schools	Des Moines Public Schools (IA)	2012 – 2022
Associate Superintendent	Des Moines Public Schools (IA)	2011 – 2012
Principal, Harding Middle School	Des Moines Public Schools (IA)	2008 – 2011
Director of Human Resources	Ankeny Community Schools (IA)	2006 – 2008
Director of Instruction	Marshalltown Community Schools (IA)	2004 – 2006
School Improvement Consultant	Heartland Area Education Agency (IA)	2001 – 2004
High School Language Arts Teacher	Denison Community Schools (IA)	1997 - 2001
High School Language Arts Teacher	Roaring Fork RE-1 School District (CO)	1990 – 1997

DETAILED SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL WORK HISTORY

CONSULTANT/COACH

Independent

July 2022 to present

Provide consulting and coaching services to superintendents, superintendent cabinets, and building principals in a variety of areas, including: school improvement, student engagement, working with boards, governance, professional development, succession planning, leadership development, budget development, and individual coaching. Primary clients: Council for the Great City Schools and the Wallace Foundation.

SUPERINTENDENT

Des Moines Public Schools, Des Moines, IA

May 2012 to July 2022

Provide vision, leadership, and accountability for a seven-member board of directors, serving 31,000 plus students and 4,800 staff. DMPS is a majority-minority district, serving students from more than 80 countries of birth and speaking more than 100 languages. More than 75% of students are economically disadvantaged and more than 21% are non-native English speakers. Des Moines Public Schools is located in Iowa's capital city and is twice as large as the next largest district in the state. Annual budget of approximately \$600,000,000.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

ACADEMICS

- Redrew school attendance boundaries (first time in more than 25 years) to align school feeder patterns from elementary through high school and to improve the balance of student enrollment both in terms of size and diversity (both race/ethnicity and socio-economic).
- Created state's first virtual high school and state's first virtual middle school utilizing all district-created curricula fully aligned with the Iowa core and taught by district teachers. Enrollment has grown for four consecutive years, yielding a budget surplus, and attracting out-of-district enrollment.

- Implemented Schools for Rigor model district-wide over five years in partnership with Learning Sciences International (Michael Toth). Realized dramatic gains in reading and math scores among the most economically and language diverse schools at all three levels.
- Created Iowa's first state-certified apprenticeship program; now home to four certified apprentice programs.
- Provide the ACT college entrance exam free to all juniors during the school day.
- Implemented standards-referenced grading system from PreK through 12th grade.
- Achieved the district's highest ever four-year graduation rate (82.73%).
- Created an urban leadership program and multiple ethnic studies courses.
- Dramatically improved access to and enrollment in Advanced Placement courses at all comprehensive high schools.
- Collaborated with the Board of Directors to create the district's first SMART goals for student achievement; on track to reach all three aggressive goals.
- Created Community Problem-Solving Teams, engaging over 100 community members in ongoing root-cause analysis and action planning to support SMART goals
- Implemented culturally responsive reading and math curriculum at elementary and middle school levels.
- Reinvented gifted and talented program to improve equity among student racial and language groups.
- Created Turn Around Arts program in North feeder pattern (5 elementary schools, 1 middle school, 1 high school). The program continues to thrive despite the end of grant funding.
- Built comprehensive, integrated Multi-Tiered System of Supports, financed by a \$5 million competitive federal climate transformation grant.
- Established annual School Summit on Culture and Climate that has grown to attract thousands of participants from around the country, while fueling DMPS staff development with national and international leaders in education equity and anti-racism.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT & EQUITY

- Increased number of students enrolling in instrumental music; engaged with local foundation to provide band and orchestra instruments.
- Erased inequities in student participation in student activities and athletics; created district-wide youth programs for economically disadvantaged students in partnership with the City of Des Moines.
- Created a new central Iowa athletics conference (starting in FY 23) to create improved competition and equity for district high schools.
- Established and hosted an annual student Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Conference in partnership with Wellmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield to improve youth relations among suburban and urban high school students.
- Created an Urban Leadership Program. Movement 515, its spoken-word program, competes internationally and won the Brave New Voices International Spoken Word Festival grand prize in 2020. The high school students also coach middle and elementary students in the “Half-Pints” afterschool program.
- Flipped school start times district-wide to align school hours with science-based best practices for adolescents.
- Established Superintendent’s Student Advisory Team with whom my cabinet and I partnered to solve student-related district challenges.

FACILITIES

- Created a novel sharing agreement with Drake University to build a \$30 million centralized soccer/football stadium on Drake’s campus; DMPS owns the facility while Drake manages it. It serves as Drake’s Division I NCAA men’s and women’s soccer stadium and the home stadium for four DMPS high schools.
- Built a \$9.25 million award-winning early childhood and alternative middle school in the heart of Des Moines’ urban core.
- Built a \$10.25 million, award-winning elementary school, replacing a failing school in one of Des Moines’ poorest and most culturally diverse neighborhoods.
- Eliminated more than 40 portable classrooms, replacing them with new, brick and mortar school additions.

- Discontinued all leases of non-district facilities.
- Partnered with the City of Des Moines and Polk County to build 12 walking tracks and a park/soccer venue at multiple district school sites.
- Awarded EPA Energy Star Partner of the Year Award for nine consecutive years, despite the average age of buildings exceeding 68 years and installing air-conditioning in every classroom.
- Created safe entrances and secure access at all district facilities.
- Installed over 1,000 high-definition video cameras, blanketing all campuses both inside and out.
- Installed smart projectors in every classroom
- Improved student to computer ratio to 1:1

BUSINESS & FINANCE

- Built and maintained healthy fund balance and spending authority despite 10 consecutive years of record low state funding.
- Simultaneously passed new voter-approved Physical Plant and Equipment Levy while lowering the overall tax rate.
- Discontinued legacy early retirement program, improving teacher retention and saving millions of dollars.
- Successfully lobbied the state legislature, twice, for increased ELL funding and again for more targeted ELL funding.
- Earned national distinctions in financial management from the International Association of School Business Officials and the Government Finance Officers Association for 10 consecutive years.

TALENT & PERSONNEL

- Created the BLUE (Building Leadership in Urban Education) Contract, an alternative contract for teachers which provides intensive mentoring and support and ultimately a Master of Science degree in Culturally Responsive Leadership in Education; increased 5-year retention rate of new teachers to over 93%.

- Created the Master of Science degree in Culturally Responsive Leadership (above) in partnership with Drake University.
- Awarded a \$4 million grant from the Wallace Foundation as part of its Principal Supervisor Initiative.
- Redesigned school leadership structure to improve equity and leadership development, dramatically increasing the percentage of leaders of color.
- Redesigned central administration to create more intensive support for building principals in instructional leadership.
- Created Office of Talent Development to drive the creation of career pathways, coaching and development opportunities for all staff, and more strategic minority recruitment strategies.
- Created principal pipeline (90%+ of principal hires come from within the district).
- Implemented a comprehensive wellness program for all employee groups.

ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT

Des Moines Public Schools, Des Moines, IA

July 2011 to May 2012

Served as the district's only associate superintendent. Provided direct oversight for all teaching and learning functions; administered Title I, II, III, and IV programs; directed professional development efforts; led all school improvement planning and implementation; provided leadership and oversight for all state and federal reporting and special grant programs relative to school improvement and student achievement.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Negotiated innovative, alternative teacher contract (BLUE: Building Leadership in Urban Education) providing for increased starting teacher pay, improved new teacher support, and a District-created master's degree in culturally responsive leadership in teaching
- Redesigned Educator Quality Day, in collaboration with the teachers' association, for improved efficiency, goal-focused content, higher teacher satisfaction, and tremendous cost-savings
- Led development of the district's first comprehensive school staffing formula, providing equity in staffing among all buildings and more efficient use of teaching staff

- Created pilot programs for administrator and teacher evaluations for SIG-funded schools
- Collaborated with CFO and CEO to identify opportunities for improved central administration efficiencies, resulting in cost savings in a number of areas (reduced printing costs; improved turn-around time of purchasing, accounts payable, and payroll functions; implemented district-wide learning materials and technology inventory management system)
- Created standard student furniture and technology replacement schedule
- Created the district's first assessment, data, and evaluation function

PRINCIPAL

Harding Middle School, Des Moines Public Schools, Des Moines, IA

July 2008 to June 2011

Served as principal of comprehensive, inner-city middle school serving approximately 600 students (approximately 30% Black, 30% Latinx, 30% White; 90% economically disadvantaged; 23% English Language Learners)

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Engineered and executed the first-ever reconstitution process at an Iowa public school
- Instituted a new student dress code policy requiring student uniforms (1st in the state)
- Instituted a new master schedule that increased instructional time and increased reading and math instruction in grades 7 and 8, improved special education services, and restored equity to teacher planning time
- Re-organized administrative team to focus more time and energy on student academic performance, including creating and piloting the first School Improvement Leader positions (district adopted the position across all secondary schools the next year)
- Restored building budget to the black after recovering from several years of deficit spending
- Restored the teacher evaluation schedule so that all teachers had current evaluations

- Dramatically reduced student discipline referrals and implemented an innovative student behavior management plan, including a student leadership development program
- Redesigned Schools In Need of Assistance plan to focus resources on professional development.
- Represented Des Moines middle schools on the Iowa Core Curriculum planning committee
- Wrote and was awarded \$2.1 million School Improvement Grant
- Improved ELL student performance on I-ELDA to well above district average
- Implemented high school credit-bearing courses for qualifying 8th-grade students in four content areas. Students scored above the district average on district assessments
- Implemented aggressive, monitored, focused professional development to improve student reading performance and classroom instruction
- Improved staff attendance from 68% to 94% over three years
- Realized improvement in ITBS scores in both reading and math
- Increased student participation in band, orchestra, and vocal music
- Started parent-teacher organization
- Reorganized management of Full-Service Community Schools Grant and 21st Century Learning Communities programming to provide nearly 40% more student programming without an increase in funding
- Leveraged private donations and grants to make significant improvements to the campus, adding a paved walking track and a row of pine trees to beautify the park and provide a natural barrier to the busy four-lane thoroughfare and increase neighborhood engagement with the school
- Created an innovative and very successful summer school program that targeted the most at-risk students resulting in improved attendance, behavior, and academic achievement
- Implemented a comprehensive student leadership organization to empower students, improve student engagement and behavior, and improved student-community engagement

DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Ankeny Community Schools, Ankeny, IA

July 2006 to June 2008

As part of the superintendent's cabinet, served as this fast-growing suburban district's first Director of Human Resources. Led personnel processes from recruitment to hiring, from induction to termination for all employee groups. Led collective bargaining negotiations, managed student-teacher, practicum, and field experience placements; administered teacher salary advancement schedule; administered classified and certified master contracts, including leave administration, grievance resolution, and discipline and discharge.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Successfully led Transfer Study Team to a successful resolution, resulting in re-writing Chapter 17 of the teacher master contract (transfers, reassignments, reductions-in-force)
- Created online salary schedule system to allow staff to monitor progress toward lane advancement
- Created and successfully administered protocol for equitable staffing of new schools
- Provided training for the administrative team in the Iowa Evaluator Approval program
- Implemented a new online application system and TeacherInsight (Gallup) teacher candidate assessment tool
- Completed comprehensive evaluation audit for all employee groups

DIRECTOR OF INSTRUCTION

Marshalltown Community Schools, Marshalltown, IA

July 2004 to June 2006

As part of the superintendent's cabinet, provided direct oversight for all teaching and learning functions; administered Title I, II, III, and IV programs; directed professional development efforts; led all school improvement planning and implementation; provided leadership and oversight for all state and federal reporting and special programs relative to school improvement and student achievement, including At-Risk, Drop Out Prevention, Gifted and Talented, and English Language Learners.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Created innovative solution to meet HF 816 (additional state-funded teacher quality staff development day) requirements in cooperation with the teachers' association
- Led district staff to improved ITBS/ITED reading, math, and science scores at grades 4, 8 and 11
- Wrote and was awarded 3-year Model Schools Grant for high school reform and National Governors' Association grant for high school reading improvement
- Worked with Director of Special Services to implement a cooperative teaching program for Level I special education students at high school
- Led faculty and administration reorganization efforts for new 5/6 and 7/8 grade buildings with a focus on project-based learning, looping, literacy across the curriculum, and extension of the 2-way bi-lingual program into the middle grades
- Partnered with local YMCA in providing afterschool programming for middle school students and in writing successful Healthy Communities Grant
- Wrote successful Reading First grant for Anson Elementary School

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT CONSULTANT

Heartland Area Education Agency 11, Johnston, IA

July 2001 to June 2004

Provided consultation for public and private schools in the central Iowa region in all phases of school improvement. Provided professional development, grant writing, needs assessment and facilitation of strategic planning.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Led re-organization of county Catholic school system
- Co-wrote two successful Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grants
- Designed and delivered all professional development for Glidden-Ralston Community Schools in 2003-2004, a school that had previously not allowed AEA 11 staff into the district.
- Provided all teacher evaluation and data-driven leadership training for school administrators in three counties.

TEACHER

Denison High School, Denison Community Schools, Denison, IA

July 1997 to June 2001, and

Glenwood Springs High School, Roaring Fork RE-1 School District, Glenwood Springs, CO

July 1990 to June 1997

Taught language arts at comprehensive high schools with significant ELL populations; served as president and chief negotiator for teachers' association; directed theater and speech and debate programs; served as department chair and on various school and district level committees.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Created and taught successful high school reading course, improving student reading and ACT scores
- Successful resolution of all filed grievances; led successful extra-duty pay schedule restructuring; successfully negotiated three contracts while maintaining positive, collaborative relationships among staff, school board, and administration
- Coached numerous students to state championships in competitive speech and debate program

OTHER PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

- Presenter at Iowa School Board Association Annual Conference (2015, 2017, 2018)
- Testified before US Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee on ESEA (2016)
- Member of United States Department of Education ESEA Regulations Negotiations Committee (One of two superintendents on the committee) (2016)
- Presenter at The Council of the Great City Schools Annual Conference (2012, 2014)
- Faculty member for The Aspen Institute's Senior Congressional Education Staff Seminar Program on Education and Society (2012)
- Presenter at Iowa Superintendents' Finance Leadership Consortium (2012)
- Presenter at the Governor's Teacher & Principal Leadership Symposium (2012)
- Served as President of Iowa Association for Curriculum & Supervision Development
- Served as Editor of Iowa Educational Leadership
- Served on Iowa Department of Education's Charter School Advisory Board
- Served on Iowa Board of Education's Focus on the High School Team

- Served on Marshalltown YMCA's Pioneering Healthy Communities Leadership Team
- Served on Iowa Department of Education's Language Leadership (L2) Group
- Presented at Iowa ACT Conference (2003)

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP & SERVICE

- Executive Committee, Council for the Great City Schools, Washington, DC
- Chair of the Board, Urban Education Network, Des Moines, IA
- Chair of the Board, IMPACT Community Action Partnership, Des Moines, IA
- Director, Des Moines Performing Arts Board, Des Moines, IA
- Director, Greater Des Moines Partnership Board, Des Moines, IA
- Director, United Way of Central Iowa Board, Des Moines, IA
- Director, Des Moines Area Religious Council Board, Des Moines, IA
- Director, Junior Achievement of Central Iowa Board, Des Moines, IA
- Director, Wallace Centers of Iowa Board, Des Moines, IA

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS & AFFILIATIONS

- American Association of School Administrators
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Council of the Great City Schools
- Iowa Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Learning Forward
- National Superintendents' Roundtable
- Phi Delta Kappa
- School Administrators of Iowa
- Urban Education Network (IA)

HONORS AND AWARDS

Iowa State Education Association: Team Award	2021
Des Moines Education Association: Friend of Education Award	2021
Orgametrics: Alignment Award	2020
National Association of School Boards: Magna Award Grand Prize Comprehensive Approach and Dedication to Equity	2019
Des Moines Pride: Ally Award	2018
National School Public Relations Association: Excellence in Writing <i>Message from the Superintendent on School Shootings</i>	2018
Dads With a Purpose: Special Commendation For Tireless Dedication to the Worthy Causes in Our Community	2017
District Administration: District of Distinction Award	2015
National Association of School Boards: Magna Award First Place Graduation Walk and Student Re-engagement Efforts	2015

RECOGNITIONS

DSM Magazine, Nov/Dec 2017, *Making the Grade*

District Administration, September 2015, *Striving for Urban School Equity*

National Journal, October 2014, *Why Des Moines Can Be a Model for Urban Schools*