

NOMINATION FORM

**2021-22 A Craig Phillips North Carolina Superintendent of the Year
AASA 2022 National Superintendent of the Year**

SUPERINTENDENT INFORMATION

Name: Dr. Ethan Lenker

School System: Pitt County Schools

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NOMINATOR INFORMATION

Name: Jennifer Johnson, PCS Public Information Officer + Senior Staff

Relationship to Superintendent (i.e. board member, colleague, parent, community member): Senior Staff Colleagues

School System: Pitt County Schools

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April 30, 2021

CCRESA Superintendent of the Year Selection Committee,

Incredibly challenging times call for incredible leaders. While typical challenges in any school system call for strength, the 2019-21 school years demanded something further- leaders with experience, resilience, steadfastness and clarity of vision. We, the Senior Leadership Staff of Pitt County Schools, believe Dr. Ethan Lenker exemplifies this leader profile and are delighted to offer our highest recommendation for Dr. Lenker for North Carolina Superintendent of the Year.

First, throughout this unprecedented year, Dr. Lenker has performed as the consummate leader for learning, with academics at the forefront of every decision. When Governor Cooper announced that schools would close for in-person instruction on Saturday, March 14, 2020, Dr. Lenker worked into the evening hours to mobilize different teams throughout the district to ensure that students would get the support they needed when school was closed. Our curriculum directors worked together to develop and distribute academic material, and many school districts in surrounding counties requested our packets for their own students.

During the two-week closure period, Dr. Lenker advised staff that he anticipated that the remainder of the school year would be virtual and that they needed to work to develop excellent remote instructional content that would help students avoid learning loss. Our principals, teachers, and counselors immediately went above and beyond in providing academic and emotional support to their students through developing streamlined Canvas courses, virtual onboarding for students, virtual counseling opportunities, and parent information sessions, all during the months of closure. Because Dr. Lenker has worked throughout his tenure to build strong community relationships, our district was even able to provide daily televised programming to K-2 students through the gracious support of a local law firm and the local CBS affiliate station. The *Eastern Carolina Education Connection*, focused on literacy for younger learners, helped close the temporary educational access gap, was widely watched and reached elementary-aged children beyond Pitt County, throughout Eastern North Carolina.

This school year, Dr. Lenker's forward-thinking pushed his team to ready schools for as much in-person learning as possible, with a strong emphasis on safety. During spring closures, he directed facilities teams to complete projects planned for summer, knowing those months would be needed to transform schools into in-person ready spaces. In August, our system seamlessly moved to Plan B with alternating weeks of instruction while supporting educators with virtual learning days meant for team-planning and parent support. In October, our elementary schools moved to Plan A immediately, providing an in-person space for our youngest learners. Around 75% of our K-5 students returned to in-person learning, providing the most ideal experience for them while also continuing a rigorous virtual learning environment for families still at home.

Once Plan A was available for upper grades, our older students began to return to schools well-equipped for safe, in-person learning experiences. Due to the leadership of Dr. Lenker and the teams he has built, our elementary schools had provided a model for action, and it easily translated to our middle and high schools. Now, our schools are academically poised for the greatest academic success during this challenging pandemic year. Our students are the benefactors of Dr. Lenker's resiliency and vision, focused on reducing learning loss to the greatest extent possible.

During this past year, communication and professionalism have also never been more important, and Dr. Lenker's experience and balanced leadership have helped Pitt County Schools emerge as a leader in these areas in NC. Early on, Dr. Lenker's heart for reaching all students, as well as communicating in a concise and professional manner to families desperately in need of information, led to a comprehensive approach.



Postcards were sent to every student in Pitt County Schools, in two languages, to direct families to a central bilingual hub of information on our school's website. Because of his partnership with our local chapter of Parents for Public Schools of Pitt County, over 10 question and answer sessions were recorded and distributed to parents through email, social media and our website. These videos, hosted and produced in conjunction with our community partner answered direct parent questions about academics, safety, meal distribution, tech support, exceptional children's support and many others. A dashboard of COVID-19 case data was also developed to authentically and consistently provide information to parents, which alleviated concern, built trust, and The district's data dashboard won a gold standard award with the North Carolina School Public Relations Association and created a model for other districts who requested its template. Each PCS communication piece has been developed with Dr. Lenker's insistence on transparency, excellence, and professionalism.

Dr. Lenker's community relationships and involvement during this challenging year are what we believe also set him apart as a candidate for the NC Superintendent title this year. Due to his years of experience, Dr. Lenker has learned that education cannot be done well without community support. Prior relationships with businesses and organizations led him naturally to reach out this year when times were challenging and also when envisioning future opportunities for students. Early on, our local university, East Carolina University, worked with us to provide a comprehensive survey for our parents which was performed and assessed under Qualtrix standards, leading to informed decisions with stakeholder buy-in. His relationship with the local Church Outreach Network yielded an immediate response to community needs, and cross-community teams were mobilized to provide food boxes and supplies to families throughout the county during a time of greatest need. His relationships with varied groups like Parents for Public Schools and the local NAACP helped to keep communication lines open during recent civil unrest. As a result of these relationships, Dr. Lenker has strengthened and added to our established focus on equity. During this year's term, two positions were added under our Division of Equity, Excellence and Leadership, and those leaders are tasked with examining equity throughout all strands of our system and equipping our staff to engage in strategies that hold equity as its standard for both students and staff.

Dr. Lenker's relationship with local organizations and businesses have added a depth to our system we are incredibly proud of and grateful for. Dr. Lenker's close relationship with our local health department enabled our system to work together with local health officials to beautifully manage a very complex system of contact tracing, notifications and case analysis this year. And looking forward, Dr. Lenker has also worked with the Pitt County Development Commission this year to create a new Biopharma Career Pathway for students, creating student opportunities for career exploration and building community workforce development. This is in addition to strengthening already existing programs, in conjunction with local businesses through PCS programs like Tradesformers (7 trade businesses offering paid pre-apprenticeships) and the Pitt Technical Academy (in conjunction with Pitt Community College trades programs). Another significant relationship with East Carolina University helped a new leadership program take off this year, the Pirate Leadership Academy, which is a "grow your own" program offering a Masters in School Administration to stellar educators while also continuing to employ them in our system throughout their coursework.

Dr. Lenker's accomplishments as a leader, his sheer will to succeed for the sake of students, his community relationships, and his experience-based resiliency are why our Senior Staff at Pitt County Schools highly recommend Dr. Lenker for North Carolina's Superintendent of the Year. We are proud to be his team!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Johnson'.

Jennifer Johnson, PCS Public Information Officer,

on behalf of our Pitt County Schools Senior Leadership Staff