

Meet the ESD 123 Superintendent Candidate Finalists

Steve McCullough

Steve McCullough has been an educational leader for the past 22 years, serving as a principal and a superintendent in rural Eastern Washington. He is currently in his sixth year as superintendent of Tonasket School District in Okanogan County. Steve is active in several local, regional and state organizations including Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, Washington Association of School Administrators, American Association of School Administrators, Eastern Washington Quality Schools Coalition, Rural Alliance, Rural Education Center, Employee Relations & Negotiations Network, and North Central Educational Service District 171. He currently holds or has held leadership positions in many of these organizations.



His focus as a leader has been on:

- a commitment to the success of each student,
- the inherent dignity of each individual,
- implementing research-informed practices,
- developing cohesive teams focused on an inspirational mission,
- the importance of organizational trust.

Steve strives to be an approachable leader who looks for unique solutions to challenges and encourages differing opinions so that the best ideas are the ones implemented. Peter Drucker's quote, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast," exemplifies his values and relationship-based approach to leadership, and his leadership motto for Tonasket Schools, "One School - One Team - One Purpose - Student Success," exemplifies his mission focused approach to leadership.

Prior to working as an educational leader, Steve taught English, math, and social studies at Colville Junior High in Colville, Washington. Prior to teaching, Steve was an Employee Benefits Consultant at Hewitt Associates, setting up and running 401K plans for fortune 500 companies.

Steve has a BA in Economics, MA in Education Psychology, and his teaching certification from Pacific Lutheran University. He obtained his Principal credentials from Eastern Washington University and his Superintendent credentials from Washington State University. He grew up in Port Angeles, Washington but greatly appreciates the four seasons, sunshine, and quality of life that Eastern Washington provides. Steve has been married to Lisa for the past 32 years, and has four adult children. He spends his free time with family, outdoor activities, reading, home projects, and his newest hobby, cooking.

Sarah Thornton is the Assistant Superintendent of Legal and Business Services for Pasco School District. In this position, Sarah serves as General Counsel to the district and has held that role for eighteen years. As General Counsel, she advises the Superintendent and Board of Directors on all legal matters. Since being named an Assistant Superintendent in 2014, she has been responsible for several district departments, including Employee Services, Operations, Capital Projects, Information Systems, Fiscal Services, Risk Management, and the Public Records program.

Before she was an Assistant Superintendent, Sarah joined Pasco in 2002, serving as Director of Employee Relations and Executive Director of Human Resources. Her work has included collaboration with principals, administrators, staff, and numerous community partners for implementation of the district's priorities. Sarah has also led numerous trainings and presentations for local and state-wide audiences, including the Washington Association of School Business Officials, the Washington School Personnel Association, and the Employee Relations and Negotiations Network. Sarah also taught School Law for Heritage University in the Educational Leadership Program.

During her career in Pasco, Sarah has served on the boards of several professional organizations. These include the Washington Association of School Administrators, where she is currently a board member and Business and Personnel Component Chair. She has served twice as President of the Washington Council of School Attorneys and participated on the Executive Board of the Network for Excellence in Washington Schools.

Prior to joining Pasco School District, Sarah was a Senior Civil Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for Benton County, advising on labor and employment law matters. While at Benton County, she was an ethics instructor in the Court Appointed Special Advocate/Guardian Ad Litem Program and coached students in the YMCA Mock Trial Competition.

Sarah has lived in the Tri-Cities for twenty-six years. She and her husband currently live in Richland with their son who attends middle school in the Richland School District. Sarah is a graduate of Leadership Tri-Cities (Class X) and served on the board as an Education Day Session Coordinator. She is committed to volunteer community service and is a former board member for the Support Advocacy and Resource Center (SARC), Women Helping Women Fund Tri-Cities, Lourdes Foundation, and Boys and Girls Clubs of Benton and Franklin Counties.

Outside of her professional interests, Sarah describes herself as a lifelong learner and avid traveler. Originally from Cambridge, New York, she has lived in both Venezuela and Germany and is fluent in conversational Spanish. She enjoys connecting with people from other cultures and backgrounds and has had the honor of being able to incorporate her personal passions into her work. With her husband's extended family in the Puget Sound region, she and her family enjoy spending their free time camping with their two dogs on Hood Canal. Sarah holds a law degree from the University of Washington and a Bachelor of Arts in Government from Smith College.

Sarah Thornton



Troy Tornow

Troy Tornow currently serves as Assistant Superintendent, Instructional Services at Educational Service District 123. The Instructional Services division at ESD 123 is made up of nine departments with 185 staff members. The Instructional Services division provides a variety of services to regional school districts and maintains partnerships with state and local agencies. He is currently in his sixth year as an Assistant Superintendent at ESD 123. A genuine commitment to a collaborative environment, systems thinking, and a belief that the mission of educational service districts is to serve and support all of the region's 23 school districts and community partners in order to meet the diverse needs of students is a hallmark of Mr. Tornow's work at ESD 123.



Prior to working at ESD 123, Mr. Tornow served for four years as Assistant Superintendent for Student Learning in the Selah School District. He also spent two years as principal at Selah High School. While in Selah he spearheaded the development and implementation of Professional Learning Communities across the district. In addition, he was responsible for professional development initiatives and coordinated the adoption of instructional materials.

During his 29 years in education, Mr. Tornow has also served as an Assistant Principal at South Kitsap High School and worked as a high school Social Studies teacher and basketball coach in the White River, Toppenish, and Onalaska school districts.

Mr. Tornow earned his undergraduate Bachelor of Arts Degree in Geography Secondary Education from Western Washington University. Later, he completed his Master of Arts in Educational Administration from Heritage University. He also earned a Superintendent's certificate through Washington State University. He currently resides with his family in Richland and enjoys spending time supporting his children as they compete in a variety of youth sports.