

## **Superintendent - Dr. Romules Durant**

TPS Proud isn't just a catchphrase for Dr. Romules Durant. In everything he says and does – and wears – Dr. Durant shows the pride he has in his hometown's schools, the vision of excellence he has for the TPS district and the belief he has in the students and teachers to achieve that standard.

A native of East Toledo, Dr. Durant is extremely proud of being a graduate of two Toledo institutions: Waite High School and the University of Toledo. He was an outstanding football player at both, attending the university on a football scholarship and earning four varsity letters. He twice received the Jon Binder Award at UT, given to a player who exemplifies “true heart and courage.”

Dr. Durant received three degrees from the University of Toledo: a Bachelor's of Education degree in 1998, a Master's of Education degree in 2002 and a Doctorate Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision in 2007. His doctoral dissertation, *The Collective Factor of Social Oppression and Urban Poverty on the Achievement of Black Students*, was considered for Dissertation of the Year.

Employed by TPS since 1999, Dr. Durant has been a fourth grade teacher, a dean, an assistant principal, a principal, an administrator and assistant superintendent. When he was 20, he wrote out a career plan that saw him as a school district superintendent by the age of 37. He achieved that goal in December, 2013, when he was named the 30th superintendent of TPS and was given a five-year contract.

In Dr. Durant's tenure as superintendent, Toledo Public Schools has seen its ranking among Ohio's largest urban districts jump from 4th to 1st on the state report card because of an A grade in the all-important All Student Growth category in several years. The district was also the only large urban district to move from the highest state watch category to a middle level of oversight. In addition, Toledo Public Schools has seen its graduation rate jump 15 percentage points for all students and a 16 percentage point jump for both minority students and those at or below the poverty level.

Dr. Durant is particularly proud of using progressive measures such as pathways to college degree tracks and pipelines to various industries with the addition of 100 more industry partners. Those partnerships have led to increasing internships with industry partners from 75 to more than 500, adding Career Tech programs and increasing the funding to support those programs.

The district continues to progress toward universal PreK for all students, an important goal for Dr. Durant as he sees it as an equal starting point for all students, despite their socioeconomic status.

To make sure that all students can find the best school to foster their talents, Dr. Durant has overseen the creation of four thematic schools: two more STEMM academy elementary schools, plus Jones Leadership Academy of Business and the Aerospace & Natural Science Academy of Toledo, with those two schools aimed at preparing high school students for jobs of the future.

Finally, the district now has more than 800 students amassing college credit and Dr. Durant has made sure 12 associate degree tracks have been developed for high school students.

In 2018 alone, Dr. Durant has experienced two major highlights that many superintendents would envy: for the first time in the history of Toledo Public Schools, one of the district's educators has been named Educator of the Year for the state of Ohio, plus TPS can now boast of the first state championship in girls basketball in more than 30 years.

The Division II state championship win by the Lady Rams of Rogers High School is especially meaningful to Dr. Durant because he made it a top priority to restore athletics after a cost-savings move by a previous administration led to their elimination.

Knowing how important strong funding is to providing the services that students need, Dr. Durant has made it a mission to pass every levy that has been on the ballot since he has been superintendent or assistant superintendent. As of November 2018, he is five for five. That month, Dr. Durant and a team of dedicated volunteers led the successful campaign for two renewal levies – one for 6.67 mills and another for 5.8 mills. Both passed with 70 percent of the vote – the same margin of victory for the five-year, 6.5 mill levy renewed in November 2017. Even more impressive is the victory that came in November 2014, with the passage of Issue 1, an operating levy that brings in more than \$13 million to the district each year - the first new money since 2001. Finally, as interim superintendent in 2013, Dr. Durant led the successful campaign for the passage of a levy renewal.

Successful levies have meant that Dr. Durant has been able to complete a number of goals, including bringing back transportation for more than half of all TPS students, introducing more and more technology throughout the district and making sure that all employees have competitive wages that will help to retain and recruit the top educators in the state.

One of the highlights of Dr. Durant's first year as superintendent was his weeklong visit to Germany in the fall of 2014. He visited the operations of such large companies as Daimler and Deutsch Bank and learned a great deal about Germany's apprenticeship structure, in which students as young as 10 commit to one industry. Their education and apprenticeship choices are then geared to learning that one particular industry from the ground up. It is a concept that Dr. Durant is working to incorporate by expanding the Career Tech offerings at Toledo Public Schools and adding 100 partners to its School to Work program.

Dr. Durant is using very progressive measures, such as a 5<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade pipeline degree track along with tracks for industry.

Highlights of the 2016-2017 school year include the administration staff settling in to the newly-renovated, energy efficient Toledo Public Schools Educational Campus near downtown Toledo – a project that was a top priority for Dr. Durant. In addition, the start of that school year saw the awarding of a grant from the National Foundation for Governors' Fitness Councils for a fitness center – complete with \$100,000 in equipment – at Glendale-Feilbach Elementary. The school was one of only three in the entire state of Ohio to receive the grant.

The 2015-2016 school year was another exceptionally busy one for Dr. Durant, as he forged a number of community partnerships that resulted in more services and enhanced academic programming for students.

A \$1.8 million commitment from local health care provider ProMedica (along with funds from TPS) means that there is now a full-time school nurse in every building. These health care professionals have been instrumental in identifying health risks and referring students and their families to community resources. Continuing the theme of healthy students, the district received \$325,000 in grants – Fuel Up for 60, Action for Health Kids and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable grant – that are all aimed at making sure the students are eating right and staying active.

Area financial institutions – First Federal, PNC and Huntington – have given donations of money, clothing or time to help students in need and AT&T presented a check for \$8,000 to fund college and field trips for students in the AVID program.

What started as a pilot program with 24 students was expanded in the fall of 2015 to 150 students taking online classes at the University of Toledo. Such learning is made possible through a partnership with Buckeye Broadband that calls for TPS to provide free laptops and Buckeye to provide free, in-home Internet access to those students who needed one or both.

Dr. Durant is proud of the collaboration he has fostered with the Area Office on Aging that focuses on initiatives for senior citizens, including the annual Senior Prom that draws more than 200 guests, Hall Walks at TPS high schools, the Senior Reading Buddy program and recording Social Studies and History stories.

In April, 2016, BP and the University of Toledo joined forces for the Rocket Engineering Prep Program, a \$1.28 million commitment to fund full tuition and pay all fees for 16 Toledo Public Schools students to receive engineering degrees from the university.

As a TPS Proud graduate of Waite High School, Dr. Durant has been keen to harness the talents of alumni across the country. Under his leadership, a revitalized alumni foundation, now called the Toledo Public Schools Foundation, received a \$450,000 commitment from Medical Mutual of Ohio to fund scholarships for three years and give added funding to the Young Men of Excellence and the Young Women of Excellence mentoring groups. The first 29 scholarships were given out by the foundation during the annual Celebration of Excellence in late April, 2016. In the fall of 2017, a full-time executive director was hired to further the foundation's goals.

The TPS team, under Dr. Durant's leadership, continued to implement two major federal grants: an \$8.1 million grant to run a large portion of the Head Start program in Lucas County and a \$3.8 million grant, part of a national program called Pathways to Prosperity that focuses on making students career-ready through rigorous academic and career-focused curriculum.

The 2015-2016 school year also saw the addition of the 10th grade to Jones Leadership Academy, a school that was started in 2014-2015 with 7th through 9th grades (the school will eventually go to 12th grade). The 11<sup>th</sup> grade was added the following year and the school's first senior class will graduate in the spring of 2018. This unique school has girls and boys being taught separately and then brought together for coordinated events. The curriculum emphasizes leadership, entrepreneurship and service to the community. Central to the school's mission is the requirement that all students join Young Men of Excellence or Young Women of Excellence, student leadership groups founded in Toledo Public Schools by Dr. Durant.

The start of the 2017-2018 school year has seen an announcement by Dr. Durant that two of the district's high-profile programs – the Aviation Center and the Natural Science Technology Center will be incorporated into a brand-new school for the 2017-2018 school year. The

emphasis of the Aerospace and Natural Science Academy will be on developing trained workers for growing industries while giving the students an all-around strong education.

Prior to being named superintendent, Dr. Durant played a crucial role in creating the district's multi-year TPS Transformation Plan that aimed to increase community partnerships, broaden educational opportunities for students and establish neighborhood schools. He is passionate about collecting and analyzing test scores and other student information to increase state performance ratings and is proud that his team has introduced the Data Dashboard that all citizens can view. Yearly, Dr. Durant meets in New York with other professional educators from across the country to help devise plans for the U.S. Department of Education.

Dr. Durant and his team continue to implement a six-pronged Strategic Plan for the district that will provide performance benchmarks that the community can track. That dedication to meeting goals has led to two SOAR awards from Battelle for Kids for significant progress made across the district.

One of Dr. Durant's proudest achievements is founding the Young Men of Excellence and the Young Women of Excellence mentoring groups for TPS students. The members of the two organizations are very involved in their communities through numerous service projects. The two groups have grown to more than 900 members.

Dr. Durant is on the executive board of the National Principals Leadership Institute (also serving as a national coach) and is on the executive board of the Ohio 8 Coalition and of Partners in Education. He is a member of the board of directors of the Council of the Great City Schools, and serves on the executive boards of After-School All-Stars Ohio, Aspire, the City of Toledo Board of Community Relations and the United Way of Greater Toledo. He is a former trustee of the Economic Opportunity Planning Association and is one of the youngest members of the Rotary Club of Toledo.

The co-chair of the nationally-recognized teacher peer review program called The Toledo Plan, Dr. Durant is also involved in the Urban Leadership Institute's development program, designed to develop future instructional leaders.

It is as TPS superintendent that Dr. Durant is making his true mark. He developed a new mission and vision statement, both designed to reinforce the idea of always putting the students first -- by creating an atmosphere of excellence with an emphasis on technology and accountability -- so all students can be college or career ready. TPS Proud is not just a catchphrase.

In his spare time, Dr. Durant sits on nine community boards, including the University of Toledo's Alumni Association board of trustees and the board of directors of the Council of the Great City Schools. He is also a member of the 12<sup>th</sup> largest Rotarian group in the world, the Rotary Club of Toledo.

With such an outstanding career, it is no wonder that Dr. Durant has received nearly 30 awards. With the strong love he has for his alma mater, the University of Toledo, Dr. Durant was deeply honored when he was chosen to receive the Outstanding Alumnus of the Year Award from UT's Judith Herb College of Education during the university's 2015 homecoming festivities.

His 2018 honors include being inducted into the Boys and Girls Club Hall of Fame and winning the Leadership Award from the Ohio Association of Black School Educators. Other recent honors include being a finalist for a 2017 Touchstone Award from The Press Club of Toledo in

the Contributor category, The Unsung Hero Award from BCSN and being named Toledo's Guidance Counselor by the *Toledo City Paper*, which has also honored him in recent years as the 2014 Toledo City Paper Community Role Model of the Year (and runner-up as Best Dressed).

Early in 2015, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated, Alpha Xi Lambda Chapter, chose him as the recipient of the 2015 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drum Major Award. The award recognizes the person or organization that is doing exemplary work for residents in Toledo, which is representative of the ideas espoused by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. Durant was chosen because he is "a tireless advocate and spokesperson for people in the Toledo community."

Other prestigious honors include:

- Induction into the Distinguished Waite Alumni Hall of Fame, the Morrison R. Waite Athletic Hall of Fame and the Birmingham Hall of Fame
- Being named a Distinguished Citizen by the state of Ohio
- Receiving the President's Award from the Area Office on Aging for his efforts on behalf of senior citizens- - Receiving the Emerging Leader Award by the African American Legacy Project and the Freedom Fund Award from the Toledo Branch of the NAACP
- Earning the NAACP's Youth Award for his work with the Student African American Brotherhood group. His SAAB mentor group was twice nationally recognized as SAAB Chapter of the Year and he was honored with the Outstanding SAAB Advisor Award.
- Being recognized with the 20 Under 40 Leadership Award and the Calla Lily Educator's Award from the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa
- Receiving the Community Image Award from the Perry Burroughs Democratic Women's Club and being honored for his work with the North End Community Beautification Project

While his honors are many, Dr. Durant has never lost sight of the fact that he has the same goal for today's TPS students as he had for himself: to rise up from modest means to achieve success first in school and then in life.