

Iranetta Rayborn Wright

A Champion for Educational Excellence

In an era where education systems are continually scrutinized, Iranetta Rayborn Wright has emerged as a beacon of transformative leadership, not only enhancing academic outcomes but also nurturing sustainable improvements across districts. From Jacksonville, Florida, to Detroit, Michigan, and most recently Cincinnati, Ohio, her track record speaks volumes about her commitment to creating equitable opportunities for all students. Whether as a principal, cabinet-level leader, or superintendent, Wright has left an indelible mark on each district she has touched, improving outcomes and implementing innovative reforms.

A Legacy of Improvement in Jacksonville, FL

Iranetta Wright's journey began in Jacksonville, where she served as a bookkeeper, teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and eventually Chief of Schools in Duval County Public Schools (DCPS), a district of over 117,000 students. Perhaps one of her most impressive feats was her tenure as principal of Andrew Jackson High School. Once the lowest-performing high school in the state of Florida, Andrew Jackson was on the verge of collapse. Under Wright's leadership, the school improved from an "F" to a "B" on the state's performance scale, marking one of the most dramatic turnarounds in the state and district's history.

Wright implemented several key initiatives to drive this transformation, including a focus on rigorous academics, data-driven decision-making, and establishing a culture of high expectations. This turnaround not only saved the school from closure but also gave hope to thousands of students, proving that with the right leadership, even the most challenged schools can succeed.

Her leadership extended beyond metrics; As a cabinet-level leader, Wright transformed the role of principals into instructional coaches, a shift that fostered deeper student engagement and better instructional delivery across the district. Additionally, as Chief of Schools for DCPS, she helped improve the district's graduation rate from 79% to 81% and increased college readiness by 3%. DCPS also ranked in the top four on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), with African American students placing first in 4th-grade math and 8th-grade reading. These outcomes are a testament to Wright's commitment to both academic excellence and equity.

Transforming Detroit Public Schools Community District

Wright's tenure in Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) from 2017 to 2022 was another hallmark of her career. As Deputy Superintendent, she spearheaded a district-wide overhaul, transforming the curriculum and introducing restorative practices to address student discipline. DPSCD, serving over 53,000 students, saw significant academic progress. Wright's focus on reimagining leadership, improving literacy, and reducing absenteeism led to a 5.6 percentage-point increase in English Language Arts and a 63% reduction in suspensions. Chronic absenteeism, a long-standing issue, dropped by 19% during her tenure.

Her work in Detroit also tackled equity head-on, particularly in special education. Under her guidance, compliance complaints were reduced by 40%, and the district's lowest-performing schools were placed on track to exit state oversight.

In 2022, Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) successfully exited state oversight for its Partnership Schools. Under a Partnership Agreement with the Michigan Department of Education, these schools were subject to targeted interventions due to low academic performance. By 2022, all 13 partnership schools had met the required performance benchmarks, allowing them to exit state oversight and return to full local control.

As Wright had oversight of the Partnership Schools until being hired as Superintendent in Cincinnati, her legacy of improvement continued, playing a key role in setting the foundation for the schools' progress and ultimate success in meeting the benchmarks required for release from state supervision.

Wright's commitment to rebuilding Detroit's educational framework left lasting improvements in teacher recruitment, school safety, engagement and academic achievement.

Stabilizing and Elevating Cincinnati Public Schools

In May 2022, Iranetta Wright was appointed Superintendent of Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS), Ohio's second-largest district, with over 36,000 students. Her impact was both immediate and profound. When she took the helm, CPS was grappling with several systemic issues, including low academic performance and operational inefficiencies. However, under Wright's leadership, CPS made remarkable strides as

evidenced in the 2024 Ohio State Report Card, which highlights the district's significant improvement in various academic metrics.

Math Performance: CPS became the second-fastest improving urban district in math nationwide. This was particularly significant, as Ohio's urban districts had historically lagged behind the state average. From 2022 to 2024, CPS saw a 7-percentage-point increase in Algebra 1 scores, marking a critical turnaround in mathematics, an area where the district previously struggled.

Reading Improvement: Third-grade reading scores also saw a marked improvement. CPS recorded the best third-grade reading results among Ohio's eight largest districts, showcasing Wright's focus on early literacy. This is a remarkable contrast to 2022, where third-grade reading scores had been stagnant, with little improvement from the previous year. By 2024, CPS had not only narrowed the performance gap but had also reduced the equity gap in 6th-grade reading outcomes by 4 percentage points, demonstrating the district's success in creating a more inclusive academic environment.

Star Ratings and Accountability: In 2022, CPS faced significant challenges with its accountability measures. The majority of its schools were struggling to meet state expectations, and only a handful achieved the three-star rating or higher on the state report card. By 2024, CPS had increased the percentage of schools rated 3 out of 5 stars, showing a significant upward trajectory in overall district performance.

AP Course Access: Wright's tenure also saw an expansion in advanced academic opportunities. Access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses was expanded, and the number of students earning a score of 3 or higher on AP exams increased by 3 percentage points. This represents a key element of Wright's strategy to increase college readiness and rigor within the district.

Engagement and Well-Being: Wright understood that academic achievement goes hand-in-hand with student engagement and well-being. Under her leadership, the district recorded a 6-percentage-point increase in student school engagement, reversing a trend of declining student participation seen in 2022. Furthermore, confirmed cases of bullying in CPS were reduced by 12%, which underscores Wright's commitment to fostering a safe and supportive learning environment.

A Clear Contrast: 2022 vs. 2024

The improvements in CPS are even more impressive when compared to the data from 2022, the year Wright began her tenure. In 2022, CPS was facing widespread issues, including:

- Low academic performance across many subjects
- A 30% teacher vacancy rate
- Transportation inefficiencies, with on-time performance falling below 80%
- High rates of student absenteeism and bullying

By 2024, CPS had made notable progress in each of these areas. Teacher vacancies were reduced by 30%, ensuring that more students had access to consistent, high-quality instruction. Transportation performance, which was a major pain point in 2022, improved dramatically, with on-time performance rising to 95%. Wright's focus on operational efficiency translated into tangible improvements that directly benefited students and families.

Perhaps most striking is the district's academic turnaround. In 2022, CPS was not performing at the level needed to meet Ohio's accountability standards. By 2024, not only had academic performance improved in 12 out of 20 tested areas, but more schools were receiving three-star ratings or higher, and the district had narrowed equity gaps in key academic areas like reading and math, moving the district to their highest level of performance in more than 10 years.

A Proven Track Record of Systemic Change

Throughout her career, Wright has championed a data-driven and student-centered approach, from raising test scores and graduation rates to restructuring school systems and fostering restorative practices. She understands that education is not just about academic success but also about creating safe, nurturing environments that allow students to thrive.

As districts across the country seek leadership that can address the complexities of modern education, Wright's work in Duval County, Detroit, and Cincinnati sets a high bar for what is possible when visionary leadership is combined with a focus on equitable outcomes. Her legacy is clear: she has improved outcomes at every turn, not only for students but for entire school communities.

Iranetta Wright's story is one of resilience, innovation, and unwavering dedication to the betterment of public education. With a career defined by improving outcomes for children, she stands as an exemplary model of what educational leadership can and should be.