

# Dr. Dōnnie R. Johnson

K–12 District Executive Leader | New Jersey–Certified Superintendent

## Biography

Dr. Dōnnie R. Johnson is a New Jersey–certified superintendent and K–12 district executive leader with 30 years of experience in classrooms, schools, and central offices across New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. Her work rests on one conviction: every student, including every student with a disability, deserves a school system built to help that student succeed.

Dr. Johnson began her career in 1995 as a special education teacher in Baltimore City Public Schools, where she advanced to Admit, Review and Dismissal (ARD) Manager, Instructional Associate, Assistant Principal, and Principal. As a principal intern at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School (Mervo), she served on the leadership team when the school advanced to the second round of the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program in 2004. In her first year as principal of Lafayette Elementary School, the school achieved 100% on the state’s special education performance measures (2005), and she was promoted to lead Dr. Lillie M. Jackson Elementary Alternative School. There, in 2006, she was one of ten Baltimore City principals honored with a banner for top-ten one-year gains in reading and math on the Stanford 10, results featured on WMAR-2 News, and she launched a food pantry for students and families. In New Jersey she has led schools and student services in Trenton, Orange, Newark, and Plainfield. As principal of Mott Elementary School in Trenton, a turnaround appointment, she led a 480-student school to exceed 37 of 38 state performance indicators and cut chronic absenteeism by 40% in one year. As District Director of Special Services at University Heights Charter School in Newark, she restored the department to 100% compliance with state regulations and secured a six-figure New Jersey Department of Education grant for professional development. She currently serves Trenton Public Schools as a K–12 District Substitute Administrator and Inclusion Special Educator.

Dr. Johnson holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy from Seton Hall University. Her dissertation, [\*Effectiveness of Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs to Teach Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders \(ASD\) in a Medium Southeastern Maryland School District\*](#) (2018), is published in Seton Hall University’s eRepository. She earned a Master of Education in Special Education and a Certificate in Administration and Supervision from Coppin State University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Rutgers University. In April 2026 she completed her third superintendent academy, with Howard University and HYA Associates.

She is the founder and president of Consulting Educational Leadership Services (CELS), LLC. Through CELS, she advises schools and districts on special education compliance, leadership development, and professional learning, and delivers keynotes and workshops for educators. She has conducted educational research in Freeport, Bahamas; St. Thomas and St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands; Punta Cana and Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic; Hamilton, Bermuda; and Dakar, Touba, and Gorée Island, Senegal. She is a member of ASCD, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), and the National Association for Female Executives, and was recognized in Who's Who Among American Female Executives (2024).

Dr. Johnson's community service is long-standing. She founded and hosts the annual Poetry Slam at Capital City High School in Trenton, now in its second consecutive year, and in 2026 delivered the keynote address at the JROTC Military Ball for Trenton Public Schools. She has served as Consulting Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School, and she serves as a Trustee and Capital Campaign Steering Committee member at Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton. She has served as a therapeutic foster care parent in Maryland and is certified with Mentor NJ. A Diamond Life Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, she is an officer of its Trenton Alumnae Chapter. Away from work, she enjoys hiking, boating, travel, and Broadway. Her guiding words come from the poet June Jordan: "We are the ones we have been waiting for."

### **Short biography (for programs and introductions)**

Dr. Dōnnie R. Johnson is a New Jersey-certified superintendent and K-12 district executive leader with 30 years of experience as a special educator, turnaround principal, and district director of special services in New Jersey and Maryland. She led a school turnaround that exceeded 37 of 38 state performance indicators and restored a district special education department to 100% compliance with state regulations. Dr. Johnson holds an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy from Seton Hall University and is the founder and president of Consulting Educational Leadership Services (CELS), LLC, in Trenton, New Jersey.

### **One-line introduction**

Dr. Dōnnie R. Johnson is a New Jersey-certified superintendent, K-12 district executive leader, and founder of Consulting Educational Leadership Services (CELS), LLC, with 30 years of service to students and schools.

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