

CJ Huff

Educator & Child Advocate

A native of rural McCune, Kansas, Dr. C.J. Huff earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Pittsburg State University, his Master and Specialist in Education from Missouri State University. Most recently he earned his Doctorate in Education with a focus in Educational Leadership from the University of Arkansas in 2003. He is the proud father of three children and has been married to his best friend, Jennifer, for over 20 years.



His wide range of experiences as a classroom teacher, building principal, and superintendent prepared him to lead his district of 1,100 employees and 7,700 students through the recovery effort that followed the most costly tornado in US History that ripped through the heart of Joplin, Missouri on May 22, 2011. This EF-5 tornado with winds in excess of 200 mph destroyed or damaged 10 of the 19 buildings in his district...leaving over half of his students without a school to return to on May 23. The Joplin community suffered loss more precious than the buildings though. In just 32 minutes that powerful storm killed 161 people and injured over 1,000 others including a staff member and seven students.

His commitment to school/community engagement in the years leading up to the disaster is credited with being a key factor that rallied the community of Joplin to efficiently and effectively support children and families impacted by the storm. His declaration that “We will start school on time” just days after the tornado provided a positive light for the community, the nation and the world to rally around Joplin’s children in the midst of such tragedy and destruction.

Since his retirement from public education in 2015, C.J. has remained committed to supporting the education and safety of all children. In addition to his role as founder of the national not-for-profit Bright Futures USA, Dr. Huff currently serves as a subject matter expert to the US Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Healthy Students, the Missouri Center for Education Safety and other organizations across the country supporting leaders in the education and safety of our nation’s youth. Most recently he has served as the Senior Advisor for Education to the US Department of Health and Human Services as a part of the Hurricane Harvey long-term recovery effort.

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Huff is well-respected by the community and his peers as a man of vision and a man that keeps his word. People magazine named him as one of their “2011 Heroes Among Us.” Other recognitions include the 2013 Missouri Superintendent of the Year award, 2012 Missouri National Education Association Horace Mann Award, National School Public Relations Association’s Bob Grossman Leadership in School Communications Award and the 2011 American School Board Journal Magna Award/Grand Prize Winner for Joplin’s Bright Futures initiative focusing on community engagement and drop-out prevention.

Hear from CJ Huff, along with survivors of school shootings and safety incidents, at the **National Summit on School Safety**, March 28-30, 2019 in Houston, Texas. This conference is presented by Safe and Sound Schools and Region 4 Education Service Center and will focus on comprehensive school safety. With deep-dive breakout sessions, hands-on workshops, leadership round tables, inspirational keynotes, and dedicated networking, attendees will add to their school safety toolbox to better meet their community’s school safety needs. Register here: <https://www.safeandsoundschools.org/national-summit-on-school-safety/>.