September 2, 2020 – On Wednesday, September 2, 2020, the National Public Relations Association (NSPRA) announced that Dr. Robert Downs, Superintendent of Buford City Schools (BCS), was selected for their "Superintendents to Watch" recognition. Each year, this NSPRA program recognizes up to 25 school district leaders with fewer than five years of experience as a superintendent for demonstrating dynamic, fast-paced leadership with strong communication at its core.

NSPRA Executive Director, Rich Bagin, said, "Dr. Downs was chosen for this honor because he uses communication technology in innovative and effective ways to engage and inform the school community and expand two-way communication and outreach efforts."

To be nominated, superintendents must have been in their role for less than five years and should have the following:

• Implemented a communication program for the district that includes the use of new communication technology as well as more standard communication tools;
• Integrated communication goals and strategies into the district’s strategic plan; and
• Active, visible involvement in the district's communication effort (e.g., tweets, blogs, participates in face-to-face engagement activities, responsive to media requests, models good communication for staff).

The nomination process consisted of samples of Dr. Downs's written communications, video messaging, and recommendation letters.

"It is evident that he not only feels it is important to gather input but to show stakeholders he values their input," Buford Middle School principal, Laura Beth Short, wrote in her letter of recommendation. "His thoughtful and analytical approach is appreciated, especially when he
transparently communicates the decisions and the reasons behind why other options were not chosen."

"One of the first qualities I noticed when Dr. Downs began was his humility," commented BCS Assistant Superintendent, Melanie Reed. "The relatability he shows in his regular communications has been the source of many compliments from our stakeholders." She added, "If I were to point out a single initiative that exemplifies the importance he places on communication, it would be the decision to purchase Canvas (learning management system. We have over 35 languages spoken by families in our district, and Canvas provides the translation capabilities that will ensure all families have the ability to partner with us in their child's education."

Dr. Downs commented, "I am extremely humbled to be recognized by the National Public Relations Association and even more so by my staff’s recommendations and nomination. Transparent communication has been a consistent priority since I came to Buford last year."