James Murray has 17 years of experience as a principal, 14 of which he has served at Tilford Elementary School. According to Superintendent Mary Jo Hainstock, Murray understands that a strong, positive school culture is central to improving student achievement, which explains why Murray has been successful in closing the achievement gap while rising to the significant challenges of merging two schools and combining two staffs to make Tilford the school it is today. Applying significant experience and expertise as the former Instructional Services Director for Vinton-Shellsburg Community School District, Murray takes on a facilitator role in data and intervention team leadership as a way of growing internal capacity with embedded opportunities for professional growth. Under his leadership, Tilford has made significant gains in reading proficiency, achieving in the high 80s and low 90s on the Iowa Assessments, up from the low-to-mid 70s when he became principal. Murray credits this success to strong teamwork, facilitated by the effective implementation of a multi-tiered system of support, which he describes as embedded, systematic, and sustainable. Murray’s commitment to leadership extends beyond his role as principal; he has served as president of the Benton County Foundation, spearheading efforts to provide scholarships and community betterment grants. He holds a Master of Science & Education degree from Buena Vista University and a Bachelor of Science & Education degree from Iowa State University.