



HENRY
COUNTY SCHOOLS

Superintendent's **REPORT**

i³
HENRY COUNTY SCHOOLS
Initiate **Opportunity**
Integrate **Access**
Illustrate **Outcomes**

Pursuit to

Exceptional

Entry Plan

MARCH 2025

i³ = The ^{HCS} Formula for Exceptional



UNDERSTANDING THE STORY BEHIND THE DATA

As I reflect upon my first 90 days in the Office of Superintendent for Henry County Schools, I am deeply grateful for the warm welcome provided to me and my family. As a new superintendent, I have spent my first several months getting to know students, employees, parents, and community members. This process has given me the opportunity to meet with hundreds of people from all stakeholder groups as I sought to understand the district from each of their perspectives. While I have gained a great deal of insight during this time, I am also well aware that there is still much to learn.

The design of my 90-day entry plan provided me with the opportunity to gather and analyze information from a wide variety of sources. As I've walked the halls of each of our schools, our principals, teachers, and support staff quickly learned that I am a "data person." My tablet is never far from my reach as I frequently ponder the wealth of data available to us as school leaders and how we can use it to inform next steps toward improving student outcomes. However, the reason I like data may be surprising. To me, it isn't simply about the numbers; it is more about the students, the teachers, the people behind the numbers.

Each of our schools and each of the children and adults who walk the halls of our schools has a story. Data helps to illuminate that story. In any good story, the narrative progresses through twists and turns, ups and downs. Data gives us the opportunity to know and understand our students, teachers, and families. Comprehending the narrative as the story is being told and making the necessary adjustments along the way allow us to reach our desired outcome.

As a district of 53 schools and academies, we already have many of the elements of an exceptional story – a unified governance team, a powerful Community-Inspired Strategic Plan, driven and talented students and staff, and top-notch facilities, systems, and resources. The journey we've embarked on throughout my first 90 days will serve as a source to author our next chapters, which promise to bring us closer to a conclusion where every HCS student has access to a high-quality, world-class education that leads to success in a global society.

Dr. John Pace, III - March 2025



HENRY
COUNTY SCHOOLS

— and our COMMUNITY share —

A **VISION** TO
ensure a
**high-quality,
world-class**
education for
every student.

— and a singular —

MISSION TO
empower all students with
**exceptional
opportunities
and access**
that lead to
success
in a global society.



i3 = THE FORMULA FOR EXCEPTIONAL

The purpose of the i3 Plan was to ensure Henry County Schools is on the path to realizing its Vision, and its Mission is visible, understood, and valued through our actions and processes. The district's Strategic Plan served as the roadmap to guide the exploration and discovery process and inform next steps.

Implementing a plan that integrates seamlessly with HCS' daily operations was paramount to establishing the synergy essential for moving forward in the "Pursuit of Exceptional."

Executing the plan over the 90-day period encompassed targeted engagement with stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, principals, district staff, school board members, community partners, business partners, and inter-governmental local and state partners. The i3 Plan unfolded through three phases:



3 PHASE ONE

*initiate **Opportunities** to Learn and Communicate, Creating Cohesion and Confidence in Henry County Schools.*

3 PHASE TWO

*integrate **Access** to Assess Student Learning Aligned to the Strategic Plan.*

3 PHASE THREE

*illustrate **Outcomes** toward Exceptional in HCS through Process by presenting findings and recommending next steps, painting and visualizing the pathway forward in the "Pursuit of Exceptional."*

GOALS

The goals of the i3 Plan are as follows:

- 1. **Ensure an effective, efficient, and orderly transition of leadership**, with emphasis on increased student learning and achievement within safe and secure school environments*
- 2. **Build a cohesive and professional relationship** with the Board of Education*
- 3. **Create opportunities to listen broadly and deeply** to stakeholders across Henry County Schools and gain a comprehensive understanding of all key aspects, including the district's culture and climate, inclusive of student, employee, parent, and community morale*
- 4. **Amplify and connect the framework for success** to all stakeholders regarding HCS' Vision, Mission, and the Strategic Plan and its action steps while building on the commitment to continuous improvement*





FINDINGS

Governance Team

The Henry County Board of Education embraces a Unified Governance model designed to promote cohesiveness and efficacy in realizing the district's Vision and Mission. The board's success in adopting this approach factored significantly in its selection as 2023 Governance Team of the Year in the Large System category by the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA).

Since my appointment, we have continued to promote Unified Governance through Whole Board Training sessions, which focused on orienting new governance team members, communication, and embracing the community in which we live and work.

The Governance Team continues to intentionally build on the practices that led to its prestigious GSBA recognition. Two additional Whole Board Trainings are scheduled for the first half of 2025 to support and inform the upcoming development of the district's next five-year Strategic Plan. I look forward to collaborating with our Board of Education as we continue our "Pursuit of Exceptional!"

Organizational Alignment and Operations of Executive Cabinet and Cabinet

Building on the strong foundation of systems and structures, prioritizing student achievement, and understanding the interconnectedness between all entities and actions across the district will enable us to take next steps toward meeting our goals and realizing our Vision.

The question we must ask ourselves every day is, "How is my work today improving learning and achievement for all students?" Such a focus requires the district to hone in on the Compass set forth by the board within the Community-Inspired Strategic Plan and ensure every department is moving in the same direction grounded in our Core Beliefs, Strategic Actions, Core Policies, and Priority Outcomes.

Several key events in the 90-day plan contributed to the organizational alignment of our leadership team. Culture and Climate Visits with Governance Team, Executive Cabinet, and Cabinet members allowed us to witness success stories as well as opportunities for improvement within our schools. Through the Cabinet team's study of Patrick Lencioni's "The 6 Types of Working Genius," we focused on improving organizational collaboration by employing the Working Genius framework to



Organizational Alignment - Continued

assign projects and teams based on individual strengths and talents. Following the successful execution of our first P.O.W.E.R. (Priority Outcomes Wielding Exceptional Results) Forum in November, the Governance Team and school leaders worked as a cohesive unit to listen, learn, problem-solve, and celebrate the work of our students, teachers, leaders, and staff through the lens of student performance data.

Cross-department collaboration with student learning and achievement at the forefront is crucial as we move forward. While we will be sustaining many systems already in place, evaluating them from the perspective of putting student learning and achievement first will enhance these existing systems. To shift this perspective organizationally will require some realignment within our current structure, including repositioning personnel and establishing a role to ensure collaboration across departments to meet the goals set by the board and the Community-Inspired Strategic Plan.



Student Learning and Achievement

How effectively and efficiently can we implement the continuous improvement model to positively impact student learning, educator development, and ultimately student achievement? With a goal to accelerate learning for students, we must accelerate learning for all, especially those who directly impact students. This requires leveraging the most accurate and relevant student and school data, along with research-based practices, to inform our next steps for professional learning, recruitment, and retention of highly qualified staff, as well as providing tools and resources necessary to accelerate learning and ultimately student achievement.





Student Learning - Continued

Data, both quantitative and qualitative, is a key tool to tell us the story of our students and what they need to access the opportunity of education. This story connects us to why they are performing how we expect, why they are not performing as we expect, and what we may need to do differently. This is valuable for identifying and highlighting student and district trends, enabling HCS to enhance learning opportunities and access for every child.

Our focus will be to use this information in a proactive manner as a tool that helps us to provide teachers, leaders, and staff the information and resources they need for every student to succeed. The greatest resource we can invest in our employees is professional development that is aligned to their needs and the needs of the students they instruct.

Support Structures for Health and Wellness

The board's investment in Mental Health and Wellness Facilitators in every school, has enabled the district to better meet students' emotional and mental health needs and has also been a hidden gem for our employees, who have come to find great value in this role embedded in each of our schools. As a testament to that value, the district's reigning ESPY (Educational Support Person of the Year), Marga Kirschner, is a Mental Health and Wellness Facilitator who was recently named one of two recipients of the statewide RISE (Recognizing Inspirational School Employees) Award.

Ensuring the safety and security of every HCS student also remains a top priority for the board. Employing a School Resource Officer (SRO) for every middle and high school was among several recent board initiatives, with the total complement of SROs increasing to 39 this school year, providing dedicated coverage for all secondary schools as well as rotating coverage districtwide.

With pertinent discussions taking place in this year's Georgia legislative session regarding school safety and security, I believe Henry County Schools may rise as an innovator and model in the area of student health, wellness, safety and security. We will continue to monitor best practices within and outside of our district to ensure a safe and welcoming learning and working environment for all students and staff.



Stakeholder Engagement

In embracing opportunities to cultivate community relationships, I attended eight of the district's fall Community Cluster Conversations in person, as well as one virtually. I was also proud to witness student and teacher excellence through various events and activities, such as:

- Henry County Board of Commissioners Legislative Breakfast
- Henry County Chamber of Commerce "Lunch with a Leader"
- Rotary Club of Henry County
- Henry County NAACP Martin Luther King Jr./Black History Month Parade
- HCS Legislative Breakfast
- Henry County STAR Student Luncheon
- HCS Community Leadership Academy
- Inaugural HCS Robotics Competition
- HCS District Math Competition
- HCS District Marching Band Exhibition
- HCS Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration
- HCS Superintendent's Teacher Advisory
- HCS Superintendent's Student Advisory
- HCS Superintendent's Parent Advisory
- Numerous athletic events

Operational Culture

The board's commitment to advancing a high-performing operational culture to drive student achievement, employee productivity, and an overall culture of excellence is evident. Initiatives aimed at driving operational success include expanding and enhancing learning and working environments to ensure opportunities and access for every student.

Birch Creek Elementary School opened its doors in the fall, welcoming more than 700 students, once again reflecting the visionary board's responsive governance in one of the fastest-growing counties in Georgia. Recent and ongoing capital projects also include a new administration facility, new westside transportation hub, additions to two middle schools, site preparation for a state-of-the-art STEM high school, athletic facility renovations at two middle schools, and the installation of electronic message boards at all schools and HVAC in all elementary school gymnasiums.

Additionally, responding effectively to the needs of a growing school district also relies on efficient internal processes that provide seamless interaction between all the district's divisions and systems. The district's Finance, Human Resources, and Information Services divisions implemented AccessHCS in late 2024/early 2025 to replace outdated systems and optimize processes related to finance, procurement, business document management, and human resources.



SUMMARY

As a result of my experiences over my first 90 days in the Office of Superintendent, several key themes emerged:

HCS HIGHLIGHTS

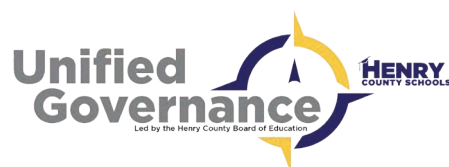
- A unified Governance Team focused on what's best for all students
- A powerful Community-Inspired Strategic Plan in place with clear Priority Student Outcomes and consistent reports of progress
- A comprehensive safety and security strategy that provides uniform campus security investments, student and staff safety training, and conduct and behavior expectation across all school facilities, including dedicated SROs at all secondary schools
- Dedicated investment and implementation of innovative STEM practices in all schools, including a state-of-the-art STEM high school set to open in 2027
- Dedicated investment and implementation of Fine Arts districtwide, with a nearly completed plan for implementing orchestra programs across all middle and high schools
- A graduation rate that is above the state average
- A total of 14 schools recognized as Literacy and Math Leaders in November by the Georgia Department of Education
- Innovative teacher recruitment strategies, including attracting retirees through Georgia House Bill 385 and international teachers through outside agencies, as well as a strong substitute staffing partnership
- 1:1 access to mobile devices/technology for learning in school and at home
- Family and community involvement through initiatives such as the HCS Community Leadership Academy, Community Cluster Conversations, Superintendent Advisories, and more
- A robust current E-SPLOST program that will prepare the county to serve a total of 5,000 additional students through completed and planned projects that include a state-of-the-art STEM high school, two new elementary schools, and additions to five schools
- Recent launch of the Henry County Public Schools Foundation to provide philanthropic support for the district's students and staff to optimize the learning experience and enhance educational outcomes



HENRY
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HCS HIGHLIGHTS





OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

- Effective cross-collaboration among departments centered on the achievement of all students connected to the Strategic Plan
- Proactive use of streamlined data to improve implementation of the continuous improvement model
- Differentiated professional development programming that aligns to student performance data metrics, historical school data, and standards, while building capacity for professional efficacy and growth opportunities for all teachers and providing on-the-job training for novice teachers and career changers - ultimately having a positive impact on employee retention and wellness
- Communication and engagement that evaluates and resolves varying stakeholder and organizational concerns in a more efficient and effective manner
- Ensuring teachers have the pedagogical and technological tools for instruction in the classroom that improves engagement, learning, and achievement



ILLUMINATING OUR NEXT STEPS IN 'OUR PURSUIT OF EXCEPTIONAL'

In seeking to prepare students for success in a global society, we will continue to pursue opportunities that further our Mission and Vision and assure our community of our commitment to providing the highest quality education for Henry County Schools students.

Accomplishing the goals set forth in the current five-year Community-Inspired Strategic Plan and nurturing a highly effective school district remain the overarching objectives of HCS. The Strategic Plan encapsulates board mandates inspired by our community's voice and guides and informs our work in creating the best educational opportunities and experiences for all students.

As we move forward, examples of our ambitious "Pursuit of Exceptional" will be found in:

- Continuing the award-winning model of Unified Governance set forth by our Board of Education
- Embarking on a new five-year Strategic Plan and E-SPLOST referendum that provide all students with access and opportunity
- Advancing the supportiveness, safety, and security of all learning environments as a top priority, inclusive of physical, mental, and emotional wellness, which involves exploring weapons detection procedures at high schools, limitations on electronic devices in schools, and increased mental health and behavior support strategies
- Implementation of a districtwide mentorship model focused on middle and high school students, supporting the goal of all students achieving through the theme of "Pursuing our Positive Purpose"
- Deepening investments and innovative implementation of professional development for teachers and school leaders, who are the most important drivers of student learning and achievement, while mastering and implementing high-yield, research-based practices/strategies along with exploring the feasibility of an HCS Educators Institute that provides differentiated professional learning for all teachers and staff
- Ensuring a culture that embraces organizational capacity-building with a growth mindset while offering competitive compensation packages to recruit, retain, and reward employees
- Realigning structures as needed to support and meet the needs of student achievement and teacher development, while being fiscally responsible and viable



POWER Forums - November 13-14, 2024

TIMELINE

- Appointment by School Board - **August 6, 2024**
- Pre-Entry Meetings - **August 21-30, 2024**
- First Day - Swearing-In - **September 9, 2024**
- Culture and Climate Visits - **September 10-October 4, 2024**
- Whole Board Training - **October 31, 2024**
- P.O.W.E.R. Forums - **November 13-14, 2024**
- Instructional Walks - **January 5, 2025-current**
- Conclusion of 90-Day Plan - **January 27, 2025**
- P.O.W.E.R. Forums - **February 26-27, 2025**
- 90-Day Plan Board Report - **March 10, 2025**