



LEADERSHIP LENS

Dr. Douglas Hendrix Sr.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools

When the Fruit Finally Begins to Show

May 26, 2026

There are moments in the life of an organization when progress no longer hides inside spreadsheets, presentations, or carefully crafted talking points. It begins to reveal itself in visible ways. The atmosphere changes. The conversations change. The direction becomes clearer. Clayton County Public Schools is beginning to experience one of those moments.

For too long, many educational systems across this country have resembled large ships moving through heavy fog. Engines roaring. Crew members are working tirelessly. Orders are coming from every direction. Yet despite all the movement, the ship continues to drift because motion is not the same as direction. A district can become incredibly busy while still losing alignment. Meetings can happen daily, initiatives can launch monthly, and reports can pile endlessly onto desks while children continue to experience completely different versions of the same district depending on which school, classroom, or adult they encounter.

That is why the work of the last hundred days mattered.

When this administration began the 30-60-90 framework, the goal was not performance for applause. The goal was level-setting before leveling up. Before acceleration could occur, the district needed stabilization. Before transformation could occur, the district needed alignment. Because coherence is not cosmetic language for presentations. Coherence is what keeps organizations from pulling themselves apart.

And now, for the first time in several years, this district will present a budget that eliminates reliance on fund-balance expenditures to sustain operations. That matters because eventually every family, every business, every church, and every school district must decide whether it will survive on stewardship or survive on depletion. A farmer who continuously consumes seed eventually runs out of harvest. School districts are no different.

At the same time, the district successfully brought in an operator for The Arena at Southlake without negatively impacting its operating budget through the first-installment structure. That matters because the arena was never intended to become a monument to adult ego or public spectacle. It was intended to serve as a bridge connecting education, workforce development, opportunity, entrepreneurship, and community engagement. Today, that bridge is beginning to carry weight.

Then came literacy.

At a time when districts across the nation continue to battle reading loss and foundational learning gaps, Clayton County Public Schools secured a \$4.5 million investment from the United Way of Greater Atlanta to continue strengthening early literacy efforts districtwide. That accomplishment represents more than funding. It reflects belief in the direction of the work. Literacy is not simply another initiative competing for attention. Literacy is survival work. A child who learns to read fluently gains navigation, confidence, independence, and access to the world beyond their immediate circumstances. Illiteracy quietly becomes one of the most expensive forms of poverty any society can produce.

While official test scores are embargoed, early indicators suggest the district may achieve very promising results across multiple academic areas. In this educational climate, stability matters, and increases are to be commended. Recovering systems do not immediately sprint. First, they stop the bleeding. They stabilize structures. They rebuild foundations. They restore consistency.

Perhaps no example better reflects this district's movement toward coherence than the emergence of the Cross-Functional Teams. These teams were not formed to create ceremonial committees or decorative binders. They were formed because leadership has a responsibility to solve problems rather than merely discuss them. In barely more than one hundred days, teams have engaged in work connected to Academic Coherence, Tier I Instruction, Transportation, Safety and Security, Unified Messaging, Attendance, Leadership Development, Facilities Usage, IEP Coherence, Maintenance, onboarding systems, literacy implementation, and strategic improvement efforts. Many of these teams include parents, students, school-based employees, district staff, and community stakeholders sitting side by side to solve problems collaboratively rather than protecting silos competitively.

That is what coherence looks like in practice.



LEADERSHIP LENS

Dr. Douglas Hendrix Sr.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools

When the Fruit Finally Begins to Show

May 26, 2026

It is transportation understanding that instruction matters. It is governance understanding that clarity matters. It is operations understanding that every unresolved problem eventually lands on the shoulders of children. A district without coherence resembles an orchestra tuning forever but never performing the music. Every section may contain talented people, but if nobody maintains the same score, the audience hears confusion rather than harmony.

The district also reorganized its structure, not for optics or appearances, but to improve efficiency and create approximately \$1.3 million in savings. At the same time, efforts continue to clarify the lines between governance and administrative responsibilities. That work must continue because organizations weaken whenever adults become more focused on influence than responsibility.

The district also reorganized its structure, not for optics or appearances, but to improve efficiency and create approximately \$1.3 million in savings. At the same time, efforts continue to clarify the lines between governance and administrative responsibilities. That work must continue because organizations weaken whenever adults become more focused on influence than responsibility.

Then came graduation inside The Arena at Southlake.

Thousands of students crossed the stage while families rose to their feet, carrying years of sacrifice in their applause. And despite the detractors, the critics, and those who often seem emotionally invested in publicly seeing the district fail, the ceremonies succeeded magnificently. Led masterfully by Mrs. Stephanie Trice, Secondary Executive Director for Teaching and Learning, alongside teachers, principals, counselors, custodians, support staff members, district personnel, parents, volunteers, and countless stakeholders, the district delivered one of the most memorable graduation seasons I have witnessed in twenty-seven years of service in Clayton County Public Schools.

And perhaps that moment symbolized something larger.

Graduation is what coherence looks like when it finally becomes visible.

A diploma may be handed to a student in a single evening, but that moment was planted years earlier by adults choosing consistency over confusion. Somebody taught foundational reading skills. Somebody protected instructional time. Somebody corrected behavior before it became destruction. Somebody drove the bus. Somebody solved operational problems quietly behind the scenes. Somebody stayed late. Somebody refused to let a child disappear academically or emotionally.

That is the fruit of coherent labor.

Not perfect labor.
Not finished labor.
But focused labor.

Now comes the challenge. Will every stakeholder group become courageous enough to fight for coherence within its own ranks? Not temporary cooperation. Not alignment for appearances. Real coherence. The kind where adults stop asking childish questions about credit, popularity, territory, or influence.

Children do not care about adult turf wars.

A student struggling to learn to read does not care who receives applause during meetings. A graduating senior does not care whose ego survived the week. Families searching for stability and opportunity do not care about invisible adult games. This work is too important for that.



LEADERSHIP LENS

Dr. Douglas Hendrix Sr.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools

When the Fruit Finally Begins to Show

May 26, 2026

For the first time in a very long time, it feels like Clayton County Public Schools is moving toward the right somewhere instead of everywhere and nowhere at the same time. That matters because direction matters. The children deserve adults mature enough to place mission above self. The community expects it. And the work demands it without exception.

So today, congratulations are appropriate. Congratulations to teachers who are still pouring themselves into children despite the weight of the profession. Congratulations to principals carrying schools through difficult terrain. Congratulations to district staff members for solving problems that most people will never see in public. Congratulations to parents who continue believing in public education. Congratulations to students who continue to persevere despite the obstacles adults often underestimate. Congratulations to everyone who chose contribution over confusion.

The fruit is beginning to show.

Now comes the responsibility of protecting the roots.

Together and only together can we continue Building a Better Tomorrow, Today.

Respectfully,
Doug

Douglas Hendrix Sr., Ed.D.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools