



LEADERSHIP LENS

Dr. Douglas Hendrix Sr.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools

The Harvest and the Horizon

June 1, 2026

There is an old saying that a tree is known by its fruit.

Not by its intentions.
Not by its promises.
Not even by the labor required to plant it.

In the end, the fruit tells the story.

As I reflect on the past several months, I find myself filled with gratitude, not because every challenge has been solved, nor because every goal has been reached, but because the fruit of collective effort is beginning to appear throughout Clayton County Public Schools.

In public education, it is easy to become consumed by the next challenge. There is always another concern demanding attention, another problem requiring resolution, another opportunity waiting to be pursued. Yet every now and then, it is important to pause and recognize evidence of progress. Not because the work is finished, but because evidence reminds us that disciplined effort, shared purpose, and collective sacrifice still matter.

For the first time in several years, our district is preparing a balanced budget that does not require the use of fund balance expenditures to sustain operations. That accomplishment may never receive the applause of a graduation ceremony or the excitement of a ribbon cutting, but it speaks volumes about stewardship. Strong organizations understand that tomorrow should not be sacrificed to survive today.

What makes this achievement even more significant is that it required nearly **\$10 million in strategic belt-tightening efforts** across the organization. Difficult decisions were made. Priorities were examined. Wants were separated from needs. Anyone can spend money when resources are plentiful. Leadership is revealed when resources become constrained and people still find a way to protect the mission. The budget before us reflects restraint, discipline, and a commitment to leaving this district stronger than we found it. A budget is more than numbers on paper; it is a declaration of values. Where resources flow reveals what matters most.

The evidence extends beyond finance.

This year, Clayton County Public Schools secured a significant investment through the United Way of Greater Atlanta to continue strengthening literacy efforts throughout our community. Literacy remains the cornerstone upon which nearly every future opportunity is built. Reading is more than an academic skill; it is the master key that unlocks nearly every door a child will encounter throughout life.

Perhaps no statistic better illustrates the power of focused effort than the story unfolding in our elementary schools. Historically, fewer than one hundred students exited the Early Intervention Program in a given year. This year, approximately **720 students successfully exited EIP services.**

Pause and consider what that means.

That is not simply a larger number.

That is hundreds of children moving from dependence to confidence. It is hundreds of children crossing a bridge that many feared they might never cross. It is evidence that intervention can become acceleration. It is proof that when classroom teachers, interventionists, principals, support staff, families, and students work together around a common purpose, outcomes can change dramatically.

Too often, educational conversations focus on who enters intervention. We should celebrate those who leave it. Every student who exits represents a child who now stands on stronger academic footing than before. Every exit represents a family receiving renewed hope. Every exit represents an educator refusing to allow struggle to become destiny.



LEADERSHIP LENS

Dr. Douglas Hendrix Sr.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools

The Harvest and the Horizon

June 1, 2026

Our academic accomplishments continue to provide reasons for pride. Clayton County Public Schools achieved an all-time high graduation rate of 86.3 percent, while students with disabilities reached a historic graduation rate of 75.7 percent. Elementary schools increased content mastery by 10.9 points, while middle and high schools increased by 8.9 points. Seven district high schools were recognized for distinguished performance after achieving a remarkable **51 percent increase in students earning scores of three and higher on Advanced Placement examinations**. These accomplishments do not happen by accident. They are the product of thousands of decisions made correctly every day by students, educators, families, and leaders committed to excellence.

At the same time, The Arena at Southlake continues to emerge as a center of opportunity rather than simply a facility. Partnerships are growing. Workforce experiences are expanding. Entrepreneurship opportunities are increasing. Students are being exposed to possibilities that stretch beyond classroom walls. What once existed primarily as vision is increasingly becoming reality.

Another source of encouragement has been the work of our Cross-Functional Teams. These groups bring together parents, students, teachers, school leaders, district staff, and community stakeholders to address challenges related to instruction, literacy, transportation, communication, safety, leadership development, student support, and organizational effectiveness. Their work represents something larger than problem-solving. It reflects a growing belief that children benefit most when adults stop working around one another and begin working with one another.

In many respects, that may be the greatest point of pride of all.

Coherence is no longer simply a concept discussed in meetings. It is becoming visible in practice. It can be seen when departments collaborate instead of compete. It can be seen when governance and administration respect their distinct responsibilities. It can be seen when schools, families, and community partners pull in the same direction. It can be seen when adults place mission above personality and purpose above preference.

Recently, thousands of graduates crossed stages at The Arena at Southlake while families celebrated years of sacrifice, perseverance, and achievement. Watching those students receive their diplomas served as a reminder that every success in education is the product of many hands. A graduation ceremony may last a few hours, but it represents years of investment by teachers, bus drivers, custodians, counselors, principals, district staff, families, volunteers, community partners, and countless others whose names may never appear in a program.

That is the harvest.
The horizon, however, still calls us forward.

The progress we celebrate today should never become permission for complacency tomorrow. Instead, it should strengthen our resolve. The children entrusted to us deserve adults who continue thinking clearly, collaborating honestly, and solving problems courageously. They deserve adults who are more interested in solutions than recognition, more interested in service than spotlight, and more interested in building than dividing.

To our teachers, staff members, principals, Board members, students, parents, faith-based partners, business partners, volunteers, and community stakeholders, thank you. These accomplishments belong to all of us. They reflect what can happen when a community chooses purpose over distraction and service over self-interest.

The fruit is beginning to show.
Now let us continue tending the tree, as we continue **Building a Better Tomorrow, Today**.

Respectfully,
Doug

Douglas Hendrix Sr., Ed.D.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools