



LEADERSHIP LENS

Dr. Douglas Hendrix Sr.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools

Can You Feel A Brand New Day?

June 8, 2026

There is a powerful moment near the end of The Wiz when the darkness finally begins to give way. The fear that once held people captive starts to loosen its grip. The confusion that kept people wandering begins to fade. What follows is not simply a celebration. It is a realization. The song rises, and a question echoes through the air: **Can you feel a brand new day?**

It is an interesting question because the song is not asking whether every problem has disappeared. It is not asking whether the journey is complete. It is asking whether people can sense that something fundamental has changed. A brand-new day is not defined by perfection. It is defined by direction. It is the moment people stop wandering and start moving together.

As we gather this week for our Leadership Symposium under the theme "**Coherent Systems; Confident Leaders,**" I find myself returning to that question. Not because our work is complete, but because there are growing signs that Clayton County Public Schools is becoming more of what it was always intended to be.

Can you feel a brand new day?

The word organization is one we use frequently, yet rarely stop to consider. An organization is called an organization because it is supposed to be organized. That sounds simple enough, but many institutions spend years operating as collections of talented people moving in parallel rather than moving in concert. In those environments, success depends too heavily on personalities, circumstances, or individual heroics. The experience of students can vary depending upon which classroom they enter, which building they attend, or which adult happens to be standing in front of them.

Children deserve more than isolated excellence.

They deserve logical consistency.

They deserve systems where expectations connect, where communication aligns, where decisions reinforce priorities, and where adults understand that their work is linked to the work of others. That is the essence of coherence. Coherence is not sameness. It is not conformity. It is the logical connection, consistency, and harmonious relationship between the many parts of a larger whole.

A symphony offers a useful illustration. The violin does not become a trumpet. The percussion section does not become the strings. Every musician maintains a distinct role. Yet the beauty of the performance emerges because every instrument serves the same composition. Autonomy survives within unity. Individual talent flourishes within collective purpose.

The same must be true for us.

A principal should lead as a principal. A teacher should teach as a teacher. A district leader should lead as a district leader. A Board member should govern as a Board member. Each role carries unique responsibilities and perspectives. Yet every role must remain connected to the same mission. When those connections weaken, organizations begin expending enormous amounts of energy without creating equivalent progress. The oars remain in the water, but the boat begins turning in circles.

Children cannot afford circles.

They deserve direction.

Over the past year, there have been encouraging signs that direction is emerging. For the first time in several years, Clayton County Public Schools is preparing a balanced budget without relying on fund balance expenditures, and nearly \$10 million in strategic belt-tightening efforts has strengthened the district's long-term financial position. That accomplishment reflects more than financial management. It reflects discipline. It reflects stewardship. It reflects a willingness to make difficult decisions today in order to create greater possibilities tomorrow.



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The same can be said of our literacy work. Through Literacy and Justice for All and partnerships with organizations such as the United Way of Greater Atlanta, we continue to build a foundation that extends far beyond reading scores. Reading is the doorway through which nearly every future opportunity must eventually pass. This year, approximately 733 elementary students exited Early Intervention services. Historically, that number has often remained below one hundred. That shift represents more than improvement. It represents children discovering newfound confidence, educators seeing the fruit of focused instruction, and families witnessing doors that once appeared closed open.

Academic indicators across the district tell a similar story. Graduation rates have reached historic levels. Students with disabilities achieved record success. Content mastery has increased across elementary, middle, and high schools. Seven high schools earned recognition for distinguished Advanced Placement performance, while AP Scholar recognitions increased significantly. The district continues receiving recognition for literacy, mathematics, innovation, and college readiness. These accomplishments are not isolated victories. They are evidence of many people pulling in the same direction.

Perhaps that is what I find most encouraging.

Transportation is beginning to understand its connection to instruction. Instruction is strengthening its connection to literacy. Literacy is strengthening its connection to graduation. Graduation is strengthening its connection to workforce readiness. Workforce readiness is increasingly connected to the future prosperity of Clayton County. The thread runs through everything. The responsibility of leadership is to protect that thread and prevent it from fraying due to inconsistency, distraction, or competing agendas.

That is why this symposium matters.

This cannot become another event where good ideas are exchanged and then abandoned to notebooks, binders, or digital folders. The symposium must become the table from which our monthly Leadership Coherence Meetings are served. It must establish a rhythm that carries beyond this week and into the daily work of leading schools, departments, programs, and teams. If coherence is to become part of our culture, it must become part of our habits.

Confidence, after all, is often misunderstood. Many people assume confidence comes from certainty. In reality, confidence is frequently the product of consistency. People trust what they can predict. Teachers trust systems that operate predictably. Families trust schools that communicate predictably. Employees trust leaders who behave predictably. Students trust adults who respond predictably. Consistency creates confidence because consistency reduces uncertainty.

That truth places a tremendous responsibility upon every leader in this district.

We must constantly ask ourselves whether our actions align with our priorities. Whether our decisions strengthen the larger system. Whether our expectations are consistent. Whether our departments, schools, and teams are helping create experiences students can depend upon rather than experiences students must navigate around. Leadership is not ultimately measured by announcements, presentations, or intentions. Leadership is measured by what people consistently experience.

As we stand on the hills of this symposium, looking both backward and forward, I cannot help but hear that question once again.

Can you feel a brand new day?

Perhaps it can be felt in the literacy movement spreading across our schools. Perhaps it can be felt in students crossing stages and receiving diplomas. Perhaps it can be felt in teachers refining their craft, principals strengthening school cultures, district leaders removing barriers between departments, and parents choosing participation instead of observation. Perhaps it can be felt in the growing realization that our work is becoming more connected than it was before.



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The answer cannot be found in a single meeting, a single initiative, or a single accomplishment. It will be found in our collective commitment to logical consistency. It will be found in our willingness to place mission above preference, purpose above personality, and children above everything else.

A brand-new day does not arrive on its own.

It is something people build.

They build it through decisions. They build it through relationships. They build it through trust. They build it through coherent actions repeated day after day until those actions become culture.

If we continue doing that work together, our students will inherit something they deserve: a school district where excellence is not accidental, where opportunity is not dependent upon chance, and where autonomy lives comfortably within oneness.

Can you feel a brand new day?

I can.

And I believe our children can too.

With every piece of altruistic humanity we possess, regardless of our differences or what we are accustomed to, let's choose the futures of our children first, and let's walk together, invincibly committed to Building a Better Tomorrow, Today.

Respectfully,
Doug

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