



LEADERSHIP LENS

Dr. Douglas Hendrix Sr.

Interim Superintendent/CEO of Schools

I Wish You Had My Eyes

August 03, 2026

I have often found myself wishing I could lend someone my eyes. Not forever—just long enough to see what I see.

Leadership has taught me that the hardest thing to share is not information. Information can be printed on a page, displayed on a screen, or summarized in a report. Vision is altogether different. Vision asks people to believe in something that has not yet fully revealed itself. One person looks at an acorn and notices only how small it is. Another imagines an oak whose branches will one day shelter generations. The seed has not changed. Only the eyes looking at it have. Perhaps that has always been the quiet burden of leadership, to believe before there is enough evidence for everyone else to believe alongside you.

Clayton County has always been a place of extraordinary promise. Long before neighborhoods spread across former farmland and our schools became one of Georgia's largest public school systems, families came here believing that education could become the bridge carrying their children farther than they themselves had traveled. They built schools because they believed knowledge could unlock doors that hard work alone could not. They built churches because they understood that communities require both hope and accountability. They built neighborhoods because they wanted children to grow where possibility felt larger than limitation. They planted seeds whose harvest they knew they might never personally enjoy.

That promise still lives here. It has simply traveled through difficult seasons.

Like many communities across our nation, Clayton County has experienced profound demographic and socioeconomic change. Families arrived bringing remarkable resilience while also carrying burdens that no child should ever have to shoulder alone. Industries changed. Neighborhoods evolved. Schools increasingly became places where students arrived carrying far more than backpacks. Some carried hunger. Others carried grief. Some carried uncertainty, interrupted dreams, unstable housing, or responsibilities well beyond their years. None of those burdens appeared on a report card, yet every one of them quietly shaped what happened after the first bell rang.

Communities seldom lose hope all at once. Hope is rarely stolen in broad daylight. It disappears a little at a time.

Demagoguery, despair, and disinvestment haunt communities of persistent economic hardship like shadows that lengthen at dusk, feeding on hopelessness while quietly stealing tomorrow one promise at a time. A community does not collapse because of the first lie or the first inequity. It collapses the way a magnificent house falls to termites. From the street, everything appears sound. The paint is fresh. The porch still welcomes visitors. The windows still catch the morning light. Yet beneath the surface, unseen things begin their patient work. Misinformation slowly chews through trust. Inequity weakens the supports. Division widens every crack. Those who once felt welcomed gradually begin to wonder whether they still belong. By the time the walls begin to groan, the damage appears sudden, but it never was. It had simply been ignored for far too long.

I know that story.

Many of you know that story.

But it is not the story I came to tell.

Because somewhere along the way, something remarkable began to happen.

Then came all of you.

You did not arrive with fanfare or headlines. You came carrying lesson plans, lunch trays, bus keys, laptops, master schedules, clipboards, mops, and open hands. You came with hearts determined not to take from this community but to give yourselves to it. You chose children over convenience, service over recognition, and hope over cynicism. You may never think of yourselves as heroes, but history has always been quietly rewritten by ordinary people who chose extraordinary faithfulness.



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This year is not simply the beginning of another school year.

I believe it is the beginning of a movement.

Movements are often misunderstood because people imagine they begin with speeches or slogans. They do not. They begin when enough people decide that the future deserves greater loyalty than the past. They begin when teachers refuse to believe that a child's ZIP code determines a child's destiny. They begin when bus drivers recognize they are transporting dreams instead of passengers. They begin when cafeteria workers understand they are nourishing both bodies and minds. They begin when principals choose courage over convenience, when support staff embrace the dignity of unseen work, when parents decide to trust again, when pastors open sanctuary doors, and when business leaders recognize that investing in children is the surest investment they will ever make.

That is the movement I see.

That is why I so often find myself thinking, I wish you had my eyes.

When I look at our students, I do not first see report cards, test scores, or attendance records. I see lives still being written. I see physicians comforting frightened families, teachers awakening young minds, entrepreneurs creating opportunities, artists giving beauty to the world, engineers solving problems we cannot yet imagine, parents raising children with greater wisdom than they themselves inherited, and leaders whose integrity will become the foundation of stronger communities. The world has become remarkably skilled at convincing young people to become visible before they become grounded. It rewards attention before character, popularity before wisdom, and reaction before reflection. I wish every student could understand that their education is not simply preparing them to make a living. It is preparing them to become the kind of human being whose presence makes the world more honest, more compassionate, and more just.

When I look at our employees, I do not see job titles. I see people quietly shaping history. Every profession borrows from education because every profession first passes through it. The future physician, mechanic, engineer, entrepreneur, teacher, pastor, and public servant is already walking our hallways. You may never fully know the reach of your influence because the seeds you plant often bloom in seasons you will never witness. Civilizations are not transformed by speeches alone. They are transformed by ordinary people who choose excellence in ordinary places until generations begin to benefit from their faithfulness. Never underestimate the power of a kind word, a well-prepared lesson, a safe bus ride, a welcoming smile, or a classroom prepared with care. History often remembers the harvest while forgetting the hands that planted the seed.

When I look at our parents, I see the first teachers. Before a child ever learned to hold a pencil, someone held their hand. Before they learned to read a sentence, someone first read their face. Before they understood success, someone celebrated their first steps. Schools inherit treasures they did not create. That is why education has never been about choosing between home and school. Children deserve something far better. They deserve adults who trust one another enough to build the same future together. Home and school were never meant to stand on opposite sides of a river shouting instructions across the water. They were always meant to become the bridge.

When I look at our community, I see extraordinary strength that has too often been scattered. Fragmentation has a quiet way of convincing good people that separate efforts are sufficient. They are not. Children are never raised by isolated institutions. They are raised by ecosystems of relationships. Whenever neighborhoods compete instead of collaborate, whenever organizations protect territory instead of purpose, whenever personal ambition grows larger than shared responsibility, something precious is diminished. Self-interest is the kryptonite of community. It weakens without announcing itself. It convinces capable people that smaller purposes are large enough. I see something far greater waiting for Clayton County. I see churches, neighborhoods, civic organizations, and volunteers remembering that every child belongs to all of us.



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When I look at our business partners, I see far more than sponsors. I see co-authors of possibility. Every internship offered, every scholarship established, every mentor provided, and every opportunity created tells a young person something words alone never could: Your future is worth my present. Prosperous communities are not built merely because businesses succeed. They are built because successful businesses choose to invest their wisdom, their talent, and their resources in the next generation.

This is why coherence matters.

Coherence is often misunderstood because people think it is merely a strategy or a plan. It is neither. Like love, coherence is first a verb before it ever becomes a noun. Love is not measured by what is spoken in a single moment. It is revealed through thousands of ordinary acts faithfully repeated over time. Coherence works the same way. It is answering every parent's phone call because trust deserves a response. It is attending every training because shared understanding matters. It is placing children ahead of departments, collaboration ahead of competition, and purpose ahead of preference. Coherence is love organized around a mission.

Every act of coherence quietly says the same thing:

The children eat first.

That old saying did not begin in boardrooms or classrooms. It began around family tables where resources were scarce, but values were abundant. Loving parents understood that if there was only enough for some, the children would be served first because the future had to be nourished before the present could be satisfied. That principle must become our compass. When decisions become difficult, the children eat first. When priorities compete, the children eat first. When budgets tighten, the children eat first. When opinions differ, the children eat first.

One day people will ask when Clayton County Public Schools became the school system everyone hoped it could become. I do not believe anyone will know the exact day because transformation rarely announces the precise hour of its arrival. It happens much the way people fall in love. There is no clock that records the exact moment. Love grows through consistency rather than intensity. It grows through ordinary conversations, repeated kindness, shared burdens, patient forgiveness, and faithful presence. Then one morning people simply wake up and realize something beautiful has quietly become permanent.

I believe great school systems are built the very same way. Not through one remarkable initiative or one inspiring speech, but through thousands of coherent decisions made by thousands of people who choose children again...and again...and again...until one day an entire community looks around and realizes it has become what it once only hoped to be.

I wish you had my eyes.

Because if you did, you would see that this movement has already begun.

Together, we will continue building a better tomorrow, today.

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