



Clarke County School District

Better Together



Dr. Hooker's First 100 Days January 2023

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#CCSDBetterTogether

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About the Analysis

I began my service as Superintendent of the Clarke County School District on October 10, 2022. Having been away from Clarke County for six years, I established seven key objectives that guided my re-entry into the community and the district during the first 100 days. During this time, I have focused on reconnecting with former colleagues and meeting the many new members of CCSD. I have listened, asked many questions, and learned a great deal. I understand what the community needs from our schools and have identified gaps that require attention. The seven areas on which I focused were:

- Governance and Policy
- Organizational Alignment
- Instructional Services and Student Performance
- District Services and Operations
- Human Capital
- Public Relations and Community Engagement
- Finance

This analysis, presented to the Board of Education and the community, summarizes the objectives and activities that filled my first 100 days. Additionally, this analysis outlines my key findings and our 2023-24 Strategic Priorities. This will serve as a guide for my ongoing collaboration with the board, district and school staff, and the community in developing long-range plans to drive the district toward excellence in all areas.

Dear Athens-Clarke County Community,

Let me begin by extending my appreciation to you all for welcoming me back to Athens and the Clarke County School District with such enthusiasm and support. I am excited to be back and humbled that the Board of Education has entrusted me to lead our school system in pursuing excellence. I take this trust, and my responsibility to our students, staff, and community, very seriously.

Since my return to CCSD on October 10, 2022, I have had the opportunity to meet with thousands of community members through town hall sessions, one-on-one meetings, presentations, and events to hear their concerns and hopes for our school district. The one thing all of these community members shared was their passion for education and their desire to make Clarke County schools an exceptional and safe educational environment for our students. I share this passion. I have also visited every school to meet with teachers, staff, and students. I have had many conversations with building and district leaders. The focus of each of those conversations was how to move our district forward and best serve the needs of all of our children.

In this document, you will find a summary of the work completed during my first 100 days, the themes that emerged, and the Strategic Priorities that will immediately clarify and guide our work as we finish out this school year and begin planning for 2023-24.

Thank you to each and every person who shared their thoughts, dreams, hopes, fears, and stories with me. I appreciate your honesty, your time, and your collaborative spirit. We are unified by our relentless dedication to our youth, our appreciation of our past, and our belief that we can do amazing things as long as we work together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robbie P. Hooker
Superintendent
Clarke County School District



DR. HOOKER'S FIRST 100 DAYS BY THE NUMBERS

197
LEADERSHIP
CONVERSATIONS



105
PRINCIPAL
CONVERSATIONS



99
TEACHER
CONVERSATIONS



81
STUDENT
CONVERSATIONS



70
BUILDING VISITS



61
COMMUNITY MEMBER
MEETINGS



46
SCHOOL AND
COMMUNITY EVENTS




21
FACULTY
MEETINGS




6
SPECIAL EDUCATION
WALKTHROUGHS



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Entry Plan Objectives

GOVERNANCE AND POLICY

High-performing districts are led by highly effective board-superintendent governance teams. The role of the board and the role of the superintendent is clearly articulated, understood, and executed. Members of the Board of Education are equipped to envision the future of the school district and pursue transformative work through policy, whereas the superintendent is responsible for managing the daily operations of the school district. Together, they work toward a common goal of improving student outcomes.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to understand the current status of the board-superintendent team by examining current practices, culture of productivity, efficiency of business, and underlying mechanics of supporting the work together.

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT

High-performing districts are aligned and organized in a way that allows employees of the district to be successful in the goal of educating students.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to understand the current cabinet and departmental structures by examining current practices, culture of productivity, efficiency of business, and underlying mechanics of supporting the work together without unnecessary confusion or overlap.

INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

High-performing districts have reliable systems in place to ensure that high levels of learning happen every day for every student in every classroom across every school.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to learn the current organizational systems that support the core business of teaching and learning and to evaluate the effectiveness of tools that are in place to monitor student learning. I have visited every school and met with cabinet-level leaders, school leadership teams, students, teachers, parents, support personnel, and community members to listen to the voices of those who have a stake in student learning.

DISTRICT SERVICES AND OPERATIONS

High-performing districts understand that the core business of student learning is made possible only through the efficiency and effectiveness of all accompanying district services and operations in the school district.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to understand and evaluate the current systems and processes that support our transportation, school nutrition, health services, technology, public safety, counseling, and other critical services and to consider the ability and readiness of cabinet-level leadership and the organization as a whole for scale and growth in the coming years.

Entry Plan Objectives (Continued)

HUMAN CAPITAL

High-performing districts are committed to supporting hardworking and dedicated employees at every level of the organization in order to improve employee retention, protect institutional knowledge, and create an organization to which new employees are drawn.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to reach out to both certified and classified employees at every level to hear their concerns and needs and to help shape the important work of envisioning the school system we want as we move forward.

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

High-performing school districts are committed to being a contributing member of the community with a focus on building strong, mutually beneficial relationships that further the objectives of the district while ensuring the sustained health and prosperity of the community.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to reach out to business, civic, faith-based, and community leaders, elected officials, and higher education partners to begin the important work of envisioning the future of our school system and its role as a catalyst for growth in our community. I also met with staff in the Division of Student and Family Supports and the Public Relations and Communications Department in order to better understand their scope of work, goals, objectives, and challenges.

FINANCE

High-performing districts are committed to being good stewards of public funds and ensuring that those funds are spent in a manner that is prudent and effective in providing a high-quality education to all students.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to understand the operating budget as well as grants and other sources of funding on which our instructional and support programs rely.



Governance and Policy

High-performing districts are led by highly effective board-superintendent governance teams. The role of the Board of Education and the role of the superintendent is clearly articulated, understood, and executed. Members of the board are equipped to envision the future of the school district and pursue transformative work through policy, whereas the superintendent is responsible for managing the daily operations of the school district. Together, they work toward a common goal of improving student outcomes.

During the first 100 days, my first objective was to understand the current status of the board-superintendent team by examining current practices, culture of productivity, efficiency of business, and underlying mechanics of supporting the work together.



Themes That Emerged:

- There is a strong desire among board members for a collaborative, professional, productive, and visionary board-superintendent team.
- The community aspires to have a high-functioning and highly effective board.
- All parties are working hard to emerge from the ongoing Cognia review as a stronger, more effective team.
- We need to ensure that we have an agreed upon framework for governance and well-defined responsibilities for the Board of Education and the superintendent.
- School leaders and district leaders both desire increased clarity regarding local autonomy and systemic expectations.
- It is important that we have clear channels of communication for constituents and many opportunities for community stakeholders to participate in shaping the future of the district.
- We have the opportunity to stabilize our systems for teaching and learning, along with operations, through sound policy development and review, based not on personal preferences or agendas, but on what is best for the sustained health and growth of our district.

Governance and Policy (Continued)



Actions Taken:

- Scheduled regular one-on-one meetings with each board member to hear their concerns, needs, and vision for the district while keeping them apprised of events or situations of which they needed to be aware.
- Completed the revision process for the majority of board policies to bring them up to date.
- Worked to clarify the communication process and plan to provide effective, ongoing, and timely communication between the superintendent, the board leadership, and members of the board and provide documents and information with adequate time for board members to review in order to prepare for meetings.
- Worked with the board to develop the superintendent's goals and evaluation process.
- Actively participated in Cognia responses, reviews, and virtual visits to understand the work that has been done and the work that remains to be done in order to develop a highly effective board-superintendent governance team.



Organizational Alignment

High-performing districts are aligned and organized in a way that allows employees of the district to be successful in the goal of educating students.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to understand the current cabinet and departmental structures by examining current practices, culture of productivity, efficiency of business, and underlying mechanics of supporting the work together without unnecessary confusion or overlap.

Themes That Emerged:

- There are opportunities for realignment that will allow our district to break down silos and improve communication across departments in order to serve students and staff and provide services in a more efficient and effective manner.
- We have lost institutional knowledge and processes over the last several years, which has created confusion and inconsistency.



Actions Taken:

- Met collectively and individually with all building administrators and district office staff in order to gauge their workload, identify areas in which they need additional support, review departmental strategic plans, and discuss current and anticipated vacancies and support needs.
- Began evaluation of the current operational effectiveness of cabinet members.
- Scheduled a Cabinet Retreat and Peer City Visit for February 2023 to begin building the runway for the 2023-24 school year.
- Reviewed the communication and decision-making processes of department heads and cabinet members and identified areas in which those processes could be improved and streamlined.
- Began creation and organization of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for each department and took action to ensure consistency and completion of tasks and obligations.
- Completed book study with cabinet, using *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, to build trust and accountability so that we can move forward as a strong and cohesive leadership team.

Instructional Services and Student Performance

High-performing districts have reliable systems in place to ensure that high levels of learning happen every day for every student in every classroom across every school.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to learn the current organizational systems that support the core business of teaching and learning and to evaluate the effectiveness of tools that are in place to monitor student learning. I have visited every school and met with cabinet-level leaders, school leadership teams, students, teachers, parents, support personnel, and community members to listen to the voices of those who have a stake in student learning.

Themes That Emerged:

- Parents are concerned about the amount of time their children spend using technology in the classroom.
- Parents and teachers are concerned about the amount of time spent on assessment rather than instruction.
- Teachers need protected time devoted to quality professional development, collaborative planning, and personal reflection.
- All communities of interest are concerned about schools that are underperforming in core subjects such as reading, writing, and math.
- All communities of interest are invested in making sure that district offerings and opportunities are consistent across all schools and student populations.



Instructional Services and Student Performance (Continued)

Actions Taken:

- Conducted an extensive review of each school's CCRPI score and determined immediate areas of concern and opportunities for short-term improvement.
- Identified underperforming schools and personnel.
- Identified four key areas of focus when reviewing classroom instruction, based on *The Opportunity Myth*, a report published by The New Teacher Project:
 - Evidence of grade-appropriate assignments
 - Access to strong instruction that ensures students do the work and thinking
 - Deep engagement in what students are learning
 - Teachers who have high expectations for students and believe they can meet grade-level standards
- Conducted informal observations with cabinet members focused on the four key areas listed above.
- Assessed professional development activities and practices throughout the district.
- Studied the Gifted, Exceptional Student Education (ESE), and English Learner (EL) offerings and support, reviewed the effectiveness of each program, and identified opportunities for improvement.
- Conducted Special Education walkthroughs.
- Created an English Learner Task Force to identify best practices, opportunities for improvement, and establish criteria, processes, and SOPs to meet the unique needs of this student and family population.
- Began evaluation of the district's strategies for students who need instructional support and/or non-traditional educational offerings.
- Initiated conversations with Athens Technical College on how to improve our partnership and meet workforce demands through our programming at the Athens Community Career Academy.
- Began an objective and critical review with the cabinet of all instructional materials and programs the district currently uses.
- Initiated a student-shadowing program for district staff.
- Set a goal of 100 new mentors for our most vulnerable students and provided release time each week for all district staff who sign up to mentor.

District Services and Operations

High-performing districts understand that the core business of student learning is made possible only through the efficiency and effectiveness of all accompanying district services and operations in the school district.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to understand and evaluate the current systems and processes that support our transportation, school nutrition, health services, technology, public safety, counseling, and other critical services and to consider the ability and readiness of cabinet-level leadership and the organization as a whole for scale and growth in the coming years.

Themes That Emerged:

- We continue to face challenges hiring and retaining transportation personnel.
- All communities of interest are concerned about school safety and escalation of violence within the community.
- The district's registration process is in need of redesign to better serve our families and remove obstacles to entry.
- We continue to face challenges with serving our students and families most effectively.



District Services and Operations (Continued)

Actions Taken:

- Established a District Safety and Crisis Team to focus on preparedness, response, and communications.
- Met with key figures in our community's public safety arena to begin building partnerships to better address issues such as safety concerns, food insecurities, attendance issues, health care deserts, mental health support, and more. These individuals included District Attorney Deborah Gonzalez, Sheriff John Q. Williams, Police Chief Jerry Saulters, City Manager Blaine Williams, and others.
- Met with state representatives Spencer Frye and Houston Gaines to discuss the need for funding in key areas.
- Established a Gangs and Violence Task Force comprised of district personnel and community public safety partners to address gang-related violence using a three-pronged approach, recommended in a report published by the U.S. Justice Department Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention:
 - Prevention
 - Intervention
 - Suppression
- Officially opened Clarke Middle Health Center in partnership with Augusta University and the University of Georgia.
- Established an English Learners Task Force to review our strengths and weaknesses in serving non-English and limited English proficiency students and their families.
- Began work to improve graduation rates for all students.
- Began planning for renovations to Clarke Middle School.



Human Capital

High-performing districts are committed to supporting hardworking and dedicated employees at every level of the organization in order to improve employee retention, protect institutional knowledge, and create an organization to which new employees are drawn.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to reach out to both certified and classified employees at every level to hear their concerns and needs and to help shape the important work of envisioning the school system we want as we move forward.

Themes That Emerged:

- We continue to struggle with attracting and retaining both certified and classified personnel.
- It is imperative that we build strong partnerships within the community in order to provide support for our personnel in the form of affordable housing.



Actions Taken:

- Issued retention bonuses for all employees.
- Raised starting hourly pay for key classified personnel, including bus drivers.
- Conducted a listening tour by attending faculty meetings with all schools in the district to hear feedback on how we can better support personnel.
- Began building partnerships through meeting with many potential community partners such as the Foundation for Excellence in Public Education, Athens-Clarke County city manager, mayor and commissioners, Envision Athens, Habitat for Humanity, and state and federal legislators to build coalitions to strengthen our support services for current and potential district personnel.
- Reinvigorated Teacher of the Year and Support Person of the Year recognition to show authentic appreciation of excellence in teaching and service.
- Reinvigorated Employee of the Month recognition with commitment to personally participate in visits to schools or departments to acknowledge these honorees.

Public Relations and Community Engagement

High-performing school districts are committed to being a contributing member of the community with a focus on building strong, mutually beneficial relationships that further the objectives of the district while ensuring the sustained health and prosperity of the community.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to reach out to business, civic, faith-based, and community leaders, elected officials, and higher education partners to begin the important work of envisioning the future of our school system and its role as a catalyst for growth in our community. I also met with staff in the Division of Student and Family Supports and the Public Relations and Communications Department in order to better understand their scope of work, goals, objectives, and challenges.

Themes That Emerged:

- CCSD has been the center of much controversy over the last four years that eroded public trust.
- During that same period, the public lost confidence in CCSD's ability to communicate effectively and with transparency.
- COVID further isolated the district from the rest of the community due to extended closure.
- While we have many programs in place for family engagement and community engagement, there is a need to streamline activities in order to avoid overlap.



Public Relations and Community Engagement (Continued)

Actions Taken:

- Became an active member of the Rotary Club of Athens and have asked community-facing cabinet members to do the same.
- Held six town hall meetings, attended by a total of 294 people, at the following locations:
 - Clarke Central High School
 - Cedar Shoals High School
 - Nellie B. Community Center
 - Rock Springs Community Center
 - New Grove Baptist Church
 - Pinewood Estates Community Library
- Spoke to many members of the business community through presentations to the Athens-Clarke County Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club of Athens, and LEAD Athens.
- Conducted a Business Town Hall in conjunction with the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Participated in a number of CCSD-sponsored events to raise the profile of the district. Those events included community and family days, Family University, Special Olympics, and the CCSD Transition Fair for special-education population students and their families.
- Participated in a number of community events on behalf of CCSD, including UGA's MLK Freedom Breakfast, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce's Eggs & Issues, Athens-Area Chamber of Commerce's Pancakes and Policy, Athens Area Human Relations Council Awards, Leap for Literacy event, and UGA Women's Basketball Education Day.
- Met with members of the media (public and student) to do interviews to share our vision and display our commitment to accessibility and transparency. Those opportunities have included interviews with the *Odyssey* magazine at Clarke Central High School and the Cedar Shoals High School magazine *Blueprints*, as well as a number of radio interviews.
- Members of my leadership team participated in the Fall 2022 Crisis in Black Education meeting.

Finance

High-performing districts are committed to being good stewards of public funds and ensuring that those funds are spent in a manner that is prudent and effective in providing a high-quality education to all students.

During the first 100 days, my objective was to understand the operating budget as well as grants and other sources of funding on which our instructional and support programs rely.

Themes That Emerged:

- CCSD is on solid financial footing with a healthy reserve.
- CCSD has received nearly \$45 million in federal funds directly related to COVID mitigation and recovery of learning loss.
- CCSD is looking ahead to plan for a potential drop in property tax revenue.
- CCSD must also pivot to plan for unexpected budget items, including Governor Kemp's commitments to special funding, raises for state employees, and an increase to the district's portion of employee health care costs.

Actions Taken:

- Distribution of \$1,500 employee retention bonuses for all employees.
- Initiated study of positions that pay less than \$15 per hour.
- Participated in the budget process, sitting in on all of the budget review sessions held with the CCSD Chief Financial Officer and individual department heads with budget responsibilities.
- Lead the process for final spending decisions for remaining federal funds to have the greatest impact on student learning and outcomes.
- Began process of determining which services and positions currently funded by temporary federal funds can be transitioned to permanent positions.
- Met with a number of individuals to discuss partnerships to provide supplemental funding for ancillary programs and support services.



Clarke County School District Strategic Priorities 2023-24

- Stabilize CCSD around excellence in public education.
 - Foster strong parent and family relationships.
 - Embrace parents as the first teachers and families as key in learning.
 - Build reliable systems for communicating student learning progress and gaps.
 - Formalize business and civic partnerships.
 - Protect and promote a community school culture.
 - Invest in our workforce.
 - Pursue competitive salary and benefits.
 - Promote and support a positive work environment, climate, and culture with district office personnel present and supportive of the work being done in our buildings and classrooms.
 - Develop leadership capacity at all levels: district, school, teacher, student, and community.
 - Share the story of learning.
 - Ensure common messaging, strategic narrative, and attentive branding.
 - Revise five-year strategic plan.



Clarke County School District Strategic Priorities 2023-24 (Continued)

- Strengthen clear instructional standards and student learning.
 - Clarify what we teach and what students learn.
 - Ensure Tier 1 instruction for all students.
 - Clarify the most effective instructional strategies and instructional planning models.
 - Address instructional time requiring technology.
 - Clarify highest impact assessment practices.
 - Ensure that all schools, teachers, and support personnel at the building and district level are focused on:
 - Grade-appropriate assignments.
 - Access to strong instruction that ensures students do the work and thinking.
 - Deep engagement in what students are learning at all levels.
 - Teachers who have high expectations for students and believe they can meet grade-level standards.



Clarke County School District Strategic Priorities 2023-24 (Continued)

- Ensure a high-performing environment for all students.
 - Build a high-performing board-superintendent governance team as defined by Georgia School Board Association (GSBA) Standards for Effective Governance.
 - Define the role of the Board of Education and the superintendent.
 - Commit to training aligned to high-leverage governance actions.
 - Commit to agreed-upon norms and protocols that ensure the business of the board and reflect the high performance expected in the organization.
 - Increase the percentage of time spent discussing student learning and outcomes.
 - Meet the qualifications outlined by GSBA for a Board of Distinction.
 - Ensure that every student is reading at or above grade level in every grade.
 - Ensure that every school is a high-performing school among benchmark schools.
 - Ensure operations of the district are effectively contributing to student performance.

