



**Hamilton County
Department of
Education**

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July 13, 2021

Dear Hamilton County Board of Education, Staff and Community:

I've shared in many settings that my mother passed away four days before I had the opportunity to interview for the life-changing experience of becoming superintendent of Hamilton County Schools. I often reflect on many of my mother's words and fondly remember hearing her say a couple of times, weekly, "Son where are your books," and my response regularly was, "Mom, I've got all A's and B's," to which she answered, "I'm not just concerned about your grades, I'm really concerned about what you've learned!" Authentic learning was without a doubt central to what my parents believed would benefit me for the rest of my life. They were right.

Having spent the past four years serving as the Superintendent of Hamilton County Schools, it has certainly been one of the best learning journeys. Serving alongside an exceptional school board, a talented team of educational leaders across the district, philanthropic and government leaders and, most of all, a wonderful community of students, families and residents have been the best part of this work.

As a lifelong learner, I understand that transitions or seasons of change are necessary to continue cultivating your gifts to better serve others, and, after much prayer and reflection, I have determined that now is the appropriate season to pass the leadership torch as the superintendent of HCS. This is not a decision made lightly, but it is the right decision to allow the next leader to build on the work and take this great district to the next level.

I believe my mother would be so proud of what I've learned during my tenure. I learned that a community can come together and shift the trajectory of a public school system, so much so that it can become the fastest improving school system in Tennessee. We learned that we could have a 433% increase in the number of schools that received state Reward School status, the state's highest status. Specifically, if letter grades were given to schools in 2016-2017, Hamilton County would have had 5 schools that earned an "A." By 2018-2019, 32 of our schools or more than 40% of our schools, would have earned an "A." Additionally, we saw steady increases in graduation rates, a tighter curriculum focus and enhanced professional learning for our amazing teachers, staff and leaders.

I learned that we could better prepare students for post-secondary by launching Future Ready Institutes that offered career-themed academies across all traditional high school campuses to expose students to a path of promise after high school. We have also learned about "ready graduates" and increased the number of student credentials and endorsements from approximately 70 in 2016-2017 to more than 1,100 this year. This means 15 times – yes, 15 times – more credentials were earned this year in comparison to before this administration's tenure. Our students also increased their scholarship awards, as they've risen from approximately \$20 million to more than \$120 million during that same time period.

In recent months, we learned that we can band together and navigate a global pandemic and a devastating tornado. We were on campus 90% of the time last school year, which is a true testament to the HCS team and community. We didn't just navigate the pandemic, but we accelerated through it. We learned that through public and private partnerships we can provide every economically-disadvantaged child with free high-speed internet for the next decade. We are one of, if not the first community to learn how to accomplish this feat and close the digital divide. That same partnership approach will also render our community a new construction and trades vocational school next year at Garber. Additionally, we learned that we could become the national leader for digital fabrication and a nationally rated best community for music education.

There's so much more that I've learned that has played out in amazing accomplishments for our district, community and even personally, and we can all reflect on those areas with great pride and gratitude. We've built a talented team that is more than prepared to carry the mission forward. We also have amazing teachers, leaders and staff members that will continue to do extraordinary work on behalf of children. I am committed to a smooth transition for the incoming leader and look forward to helping and supporting in every way possible through my last official day of August 17, 2021.

Again, I thank you for allowing me to serve as your Lead Learner. I know my mother would be so pleased by not only the "grades" we've made over the last few years, but also what we've learned together. My prayer is that you've seen my heart and passion for children as your Superintendent of Schools and that we will take all we've learned to continue to keep the focus on ALL children thriving and experiencing a future without limits.

May God's blessings abound on our children and this great community.

With Sincere Appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Johnson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Bryan Johnson
Superintendent, Hamilton County Schools