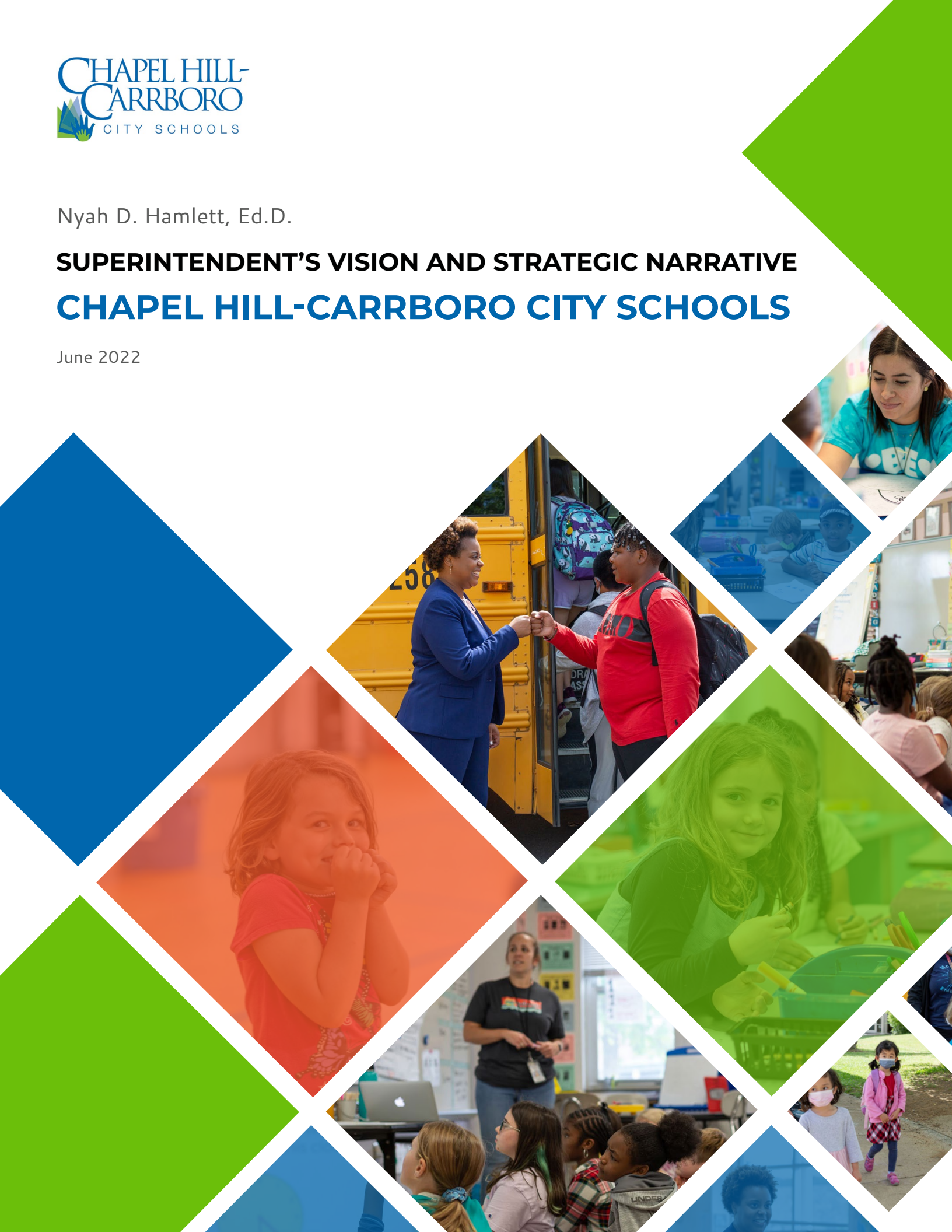


Nyah D. Hamlett, Ed.D.

# SUPERINTENDENT'S VISION AND STRATEGIC NARRATIVE CHAPEL HILL-CARRBORO CITY SCHOOLS

June 2022



Superintendent

**Nyah D. Hamlett, Ed.D.**

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## DEAR CHCCS STAFF, STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

We began our journey together in January 2021, a year into the pandemic, but before COVID-19 vaccinations were available. At that time, not one of us knew what lay ahead. So often during those early days I had to remind myself of **my faith and dedication to leading without fear**. But our school and district leaders, our staff, parents and extraordinary students, guided by science and a community steeped in innovative public health, created a powerful bedrock of caution, courage and acceptance.

The purpose of this booklet is to convey **my vision and the strategic narrative for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools**. It's partly a reflection on what we've already accomplished, and, in alignment with our brand new Strategic Plan 2027, partly a look ahead to all of the important goals for our future. By the time you're finished reading this, you'll have a good sense of our path forward, the possibilities and dreams hoped for, results we want to achieve and the risks we'll take along the way. Yes, I said take risks ... "risk" will no longer be a four-letter word here in CHCCS as we strive to foster a culture where it is safe to take risks, make mistakes and fail forward as long as we learn from them. When a member of our community fails, we will extend grace and support, or "coach you up" while also holding ourselves and others accountable to the goals that we set out to accomplish.

During my first few weeks as your superintendent, I held numerous virtual introductions and meetings, which felt substantive and often rich, because of the kinds of questions you asked and how you responded to my story, both personal and professional. In October of 2021, I was honored to speak at Binkley Baptist Church's Rally for Public Education, and for the first time in a community venue, I shared my family and origin story and the reasons why I believe that high-quality education is a social justice issue. My grandfather made sure I knew the value of education from the time that I was born until the day that he died. The gifts and lessons I inherited from my grandparents, my parents and others in my family inform my life every day, and from them and teachers and mentors through the years, I came to believe **educators are responsible for opening the doors of access and opportunity for every student, particularly those in greatest need**.

I often share how inspiring it is to provide and witness real and raw leadership from the classroom, to the bus stop, to the cafeteria and to the Board room. These extraordinary times have called for authentic and courageous leadership within every one of our schools and in the halls of Lincoln Center (our Central Office). **Public education teachers and support staff have always been frontline workers – they are responsible for not only educating children, but feeding them, counseling them, inspiring them, monitoring their physical and mental wellness, and so much more!** We recognize yet sometimes must be reminded – we must get to know each one of our students in order to define and nurture success!

A phrase we are using more often, and you'll continue to hear, is **the priority of elevating and expanding a CHCCS Culture of Care**. The reculturing of our district includes the strong equity work already underway, as well as so much taking shape now. When we focus on safety and wellness for all, we are also closing opportunity gaps as we focus on providing safe spaces in our school buildings, providing wider access to mental health professionals and exploring ways to decrease the academic pressure cooker for our students. Our students can still achieve at the highest levels without forfeiting their general wellbeing, and the more rapidly we can engrain that in our district culture, the more readily our young people will find school as a source of their highest aspirations.

Additionally, an ongoing and critical need is to **show our staff how much we value them**, especially in all they've been asked to contribute in time and energy during the past two years. We are consistently seeking new strategies for employee wellness, work/life balance, professional growth and market-leading compensation. We will strive to make good on our commitment to rewarding employees for their invaluable contributions and enhance our standing as a first-choice destination for current and future generations of highly motivated and top-quality staff.

Perhaps most importantly, our vision is motivated, even propelled by **a sense of urgency to amplify and heed student voices, who provide us a wellspring of ideas, singular perspectives and diverse concerns**. Students realize they have my ear, as well as the ears of other school and district leaders. I want ALL of our students to know I am listening, and our community should know that our students are watching and waiting for us to shift the culture and serve them well, with skill, wisdom and love.

Together, we will ensure that every student has the academic and social-emotional support that they need to generate ideas, solve real world problems, achieve new levels of wellness and perhaps even change the world.

It's an honor and a privilege to serve as your superintendent.



Sincerely,

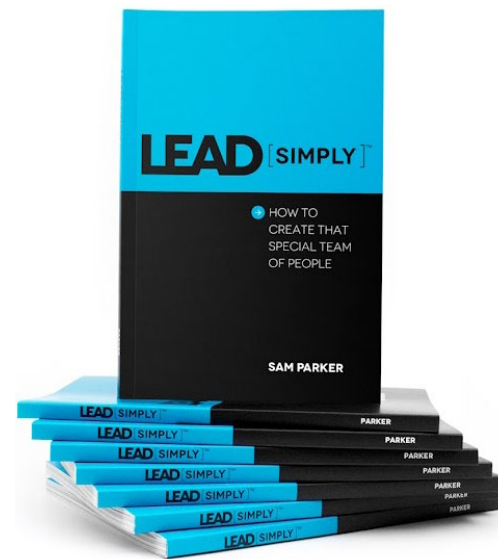
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I often speak about the relevance and inspiration I've gained from Sam Parker's Lead Simply, a transformative manual to building strong leaders around three principles:



It doesn't get more basic than that, does it? Yet those three words guide me as I remember how important it is to model vulnerability, authenticity, integrity, transparency and abiding commitment to anti-racist leadership and equity. To connect is an imperative that runs deep – I thrive by building connections, and I've seen so many of our leaders, teachers and students who thrive in that same way. And involve! By choosing to amplify student and educator voice in our decision making processes, my leadership team and I are enlightened by so much wisdom and generosity, every time we really listen to their voices.



As we began the 2021–22 school year, I set three vision components for the year to carry us through a time of returning to in-person teaching and learning, as well as the development of a new strategic plan.

■ CHAPEL HILL-CARRBORO CITY SCHOOLS WILL:

- 01 Center equity in all we do.
- 02 Develop a data-driven culture, with data as a tool and not a weapon.
- 03 Use our new strategic plan to inform our collective work.



■ EQUITY, DEFINED:

I cringe, then correct those who refer to students by their circumstances rather than their potential.

CHCCS defines educational equity as eliminating the predictability of achievement based on social and cultural factors by ensuring every student receives the resources and supports needed to lead rewarding and productive lives.



# LISTENING + OBSERVING + LEARNING + TAKING ACTION

My vision and strategic narrative are informed, in part, by the past 561 days of listening, observing and learning what our community expects and deserves from its system of public education. At the beginning of my journey in Chapel Hill–Carrboro, I assessed the district’s top three issues as being:

02

Continued inequities and disparities (achievement, discipline, access and opportunity gaps facing our students and families of color, our multilingual learners, and our EC students).

01

A need for restored faith in district leadership, with clear communication and presence in our schools.

03

The ongoing and residual impact of COVID-19.

## ■ TAKING ACTION

In 561 days, I have embraced the opportunities to respond to each issue in the following overarching ways:

01

Dismantling (in some cases) and establishing systems and structures.

02

Establishing a culture of care, collaborative decision-making, clear communication, empathy, and trust.

03

Beginning to develop a roadmap to close gaps that exist (achievement, opportunity, attitude and expectation gaps).

04

Shared accountability and support between (and among) school and district leaders.

continuation

# LISTENING + OBSERVING + LEARNING + TAKING ACTION

## ■ STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Developed and implemented a process and timeline for the next CHCCS strategic plan, Strategic Plan 2027. This new plan informs the implementation of data-driven, equity-focused strategies (as a means to close access and opportunity gaps) that begin to result in growth and improved achievement for students.

- Convened a strategic planning steering committee and obtained consensus on the strategic planning process.
- Continued use of engaging communication strategies to involve community stakeholders in the success of the strategic planning.
- Established, aligned and clearly communicated key priorities among the district’s equity and engagement, school leadership, instructional services, and school support and wellness divisions.
- Developed effective systems of reciprocal transparent and honest communication with key stakeholder groups (i.e. students, educators, business community, interfaith leaders, institutions of higher education, advisory groups, parents/caregivers, community partners, etc.)
- Modeled equitable management and distribution of human and financial resources to meet instructional goals and support student and staff needs.
- Developed a Rubric of Need (a tiered system of support) for district support of schools.

## ■ CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

Established a culture of trust and shared accountability that contributes to a welcoming, affirming, high quality learning environment using an anti-racist, data-informed, student-centered approach to high expectations and support for all students and employees.

- Implemented the LeadSimply framework by: (a) modeling the behavior that I expect to see of others, (b) connecting with those that I lead, and (c) involving them as much as possible.
- Established a restorative approach to building a professional learning community that “re-cultures” the district and institutionalizes the district’s response to success and opportunities for improvement.
- Exhibited authenticity, transparency, integrity, connectivity and anti-racist relational leadership while engaging and empowering diverse stakeholder groups.
- Visited 2–3 schools per week (and spent at least 30 minutes per week doing the same in Lincoln Center and Annex offices) for brief school and classroom walkthroughs.

# LISTENING + OBSERVING + LEARNING + TAKING ACTION

## CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

- Spent approximately two half days per month in schools dedicated to serving educators and students, working alongside support staff.
- Amplified student, educator, and principal voice and used collective efficacy and empowerment among stakeholder groups (students, school administrators, certified and classified staff, community, parents, etc.) to impact student growth and achievement.
- Leveraged the expertise of school and district leaders to create solutions to problems of practice that are significant, enduring and mission-critical.



- Launched a plan to promote Chapel Hill-Carrboro CHAMPions to celebrate accomplishments of students, employees, parents/ caregivers and community members.
- Developed and sustained new engagement and advisory groups (e.g. Superintendent’s Student Equity Ambassadors, Principal Advisory Council, Superintendent’s Classified Employee Advisory Council and Latinx Action group) while nurturing relationships with existing groups (e.g. STAC- Superintendent Teacher Advisory Council; CHCAE- Chapel Hill-Carrboro Association of Educators; SNAC- Special Needs Advisory Council; GPAC- Gifted Parent Advisory Council; PTA Council, EAC – Equity Advisory Council; CFRE – Campaign for Racial Equity, etc.)



# LISTENING + OBSERVING + LEARNING + TAKING ACTION

## MICRO-POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Collaborated with the Board of Education (BOE) through a shared governance (team of 8) approach to define the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and Board in order to enhance positive working relationships and communicate more effectively with each other and the CHCCS community.

- Collaborated with the BOE and individual Board members to clearly define, and incorporate in practice, our roles and responsibilities.
- Obtained BOE approval of the agreed upon delineation of roles and responsibilities.
- Implemented an annual review of a Communication Protocol that fosters the shared governance approach.
- Collaborated with the towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro leadership, Orange County Schools’ Superintendent, Orange County Manager and County Commissioners as appropriate on matters that are pertinent to the benefit of the CHCCS community and that contribute to the greater good of the Orange County community.



As we have watched our state legislature continue to debate how our children’s futures will be paid for, it’s increasingly clear that even in a district as well-resourced as CHCCS, we must accelerate our campaign to make the case for more financial support for public education in North Carolina.



- We need more funding for highly qualified, well-trained and competent educators to be well-compensated for investing their blood, sweat and tears into the future of our towns, county, state and country.
- We need more funding to support our highly qualified, well-trained and competent school administrators.
- We need more funding to ensure equitable access to resources that will provide [deeper learning](#) for our students, in which students explore complex ideas with voice, inquisitiveness, imaginativeness and collaboration.

- We need more funding to ensure our facilities are conducive to high-quality future-ready learning environments.
- We need more funding to ensure specialized instruction for our students with disabilities.
- We need more funding to ensure that every child has resources in their school media centers that are mirrors, not just windows.
- We absolutely need more funding to support the social, emotional and mental health needs of our students and educators.



I am heartened, reassured and often enlightened by the numerous messages written by parents, students, staff members and members of our community. Thank you for taking your time to express your observations, perspectives and concerns. I am always listening.

*“The honesty, the dedication, the tireless focus on what we CAN do, the community building...it has been inspiring and humbling to watch.”*

■ **Julie Werry, CHCCS parent**

*“It makes complete sense to me that we would want to devote our attention to the limited opportunities that students of color are given in schools and the different attitudes that exist towards students of color.”*

■ **Lucy, CHCCS high school student**

*“Thank you for continuing to listen to the voices of the teachers in your schools.”*

■ **Hannah Stang, CHCCS teacher**

*“What stuck with me the most was your assurance that this is heartwork, not headwork.”*

■ **Louie, CHCCS high school student**

*“Thank you for your continued commitment to the health and safety of our community.”*

■ **Lora Klein, CHCCS parent**

*“You truly are an inspiration to us all and I hope you keep doing what you’re doing. It was healthy to know how much the school system actually cares about our research and opinions.”*

■ **Josh, CHCCS high school student**

*“Our deepest gratitude for standing for our schools, our young people, compassion and kindness!”*

■ **Katie McKenna, CHCCS parent**

*“There’s a lesson there—that the best way of going about creating great change isn’t to take on an impossible task alone, but to work with and impact as many people as possible to make it that much easier.”*

■ **Francesco, CHCCS high school student**

*“Thank you for your courageous and compassionate leadership of CHCCS students, faculty and parents.”*

■ **Amanda Stoen, CHCCS parent**

*“...it brings me a great deal of joy knowing that the [gifted] program that shaped a lot of my attitudes towards academia will be reformed for the better, so that more people are given access to those resources the program provides, and so that the kids going through it after me will hopefully be pushed to learn as much as they can, to test their limits and not feel isolated or othered.”*

■ **Aekta, CHCCS high school student**

*“[Dr. Hamlett] once again displayed her amazing leadership skills in a very honest and open message to staff about both the successes and additional challenges and burdens we all have faced. As so many have said, ‘she gets it’ and she ‘sees and wants to hear from us.’ So kudos all around.”*

■ **Brian Link, CHCCS Teacher of the Year 2021**

*“I am grateful for your leadership, your heart and your experience. I am sure it has come at a cost at times, and I honor your bravery for pushing through.”*

■ **Sara Abernethy, CHCCS parent**



## **SUPERINTENDENT'S VISION AND STRATEGIC NARRATIVE**

Visit our Strategic Plan 2027: [www.chccs.org/strategicplan](http://www.chccs.org/strategicplan)



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