



Featured: HOOKER'S HOME: Clarke County School District Superintendent Dr. Robbie P. Hooker sits on a bench outside of the Clarke Central High School Ceremonial Entrance on Nov. 1, 2022. Hooker has dedicated his career to educating students, but as he returned to the CCSD after a six-year absence, he's not done yet. "When it comes to me, physically, it's taxing (with) the long hours, but it's worth it because you're working for the kids. You want them to have (it) better than you had," Hooker said. Photo by Aza Khan

WHO IS DR. ROBBIE P. HOOKER?

CCSD Superintendent Dr. Robbie P. Hooker has worn many hats throughout his career, including stints as BHL Principal (2003-2008), CCHS Principal (2008-2016) and Superintendent positions outside the county (2016-2022). But now, Hooker has come back to the CCSD on Oct. 6, 2022 with an eye for supporting students and staff.

STORY BY CADENCE SCHAPKER
News Editor

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Why did you return to the Clarke County School District?

I lived here for 22 years, and as a teaching administrator with 15 years of experience, I got tired of hearing what people would say (on) social media (about) how bad (Athens-Clarke) County is. I knew (it) had the potential to be better than what people (thought) it (was). The challenge (is) to prove people wrong, that the students can learn, that the community does care about what's happening with our students and things that are happening. This is not an individual trying to change Clarke County, it's an individual working together with stakeholders in the community.

In your time away from the CCSD, what have you learned from working under other districts and with other leaders and teachers?

One of the things that I've learned is about systems and processes. If you wanna get things right, systems and processes at the district level must be (organized) in order for the districts (and) schools to be successful. The second thing I learned is that the district office is there to support and serve principals, (teachers and faculty) and to make sure they have resources.

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DR. ROBBIE HOOKER

CCSD Superintendent

How are you expecting your leadership to differ from former CCSD Superintendent Dr. Xernona Thomas?

First of all, we have to give Dr. Thomas credit for serving during one of the most difficult times in our country during the pandemic. (It) takes strong leadership to do that and she did it with her whole heart. Our difference (is) in leadership. I'm hands on. I'm a visible person. I love to be in classrooms. I remember names pretty good. I like listening to people, but I also like to see empowering people. If you empower people to do the work, they'll do it better. (If you) let them know that you support them, especially from the district office, (they'll do better). Work like this can't be done by one person, it has to be a team.

What are your goals for your first 100 days as superintendent?

I'm doing one-on-one meetings with each (Clarke County School District Board of Education) member, all principals and Cabinet members. I call them, "Listening and Learning" sessions. I had a meeting this morning with one board member and we got to deal with teacher burnout. We got to look at teacher caseloads. We got to deal with disciplinary issues. The (Code of Conduct) was used as Restorative Justice, (which) doesn't take the place of discipline. We want it, but there's got to be some consequences for some of the egregious behaviors that are happening in our schools. Kids need to be held accountable.

How are you planning to support new teachers?

(We) may not always have the answer, but (we need to be) allowing (teachers) to bring their concerns and to listen to their concerns. Not only will they see me, but they will see people from Instructional Services, from other district offices who are saying, "We're here to help you. What can we do?" Forty percent of our teaching force – and maybe even larger – has zero to four years of experience, and the amount of money that we invest (into teachers) probably comes out to be \$75,000 to \$80,000. If you invest that much money into a person, it's important that you go out and to ensure that they're going to be successful.



STACEY SCOTT

Athens Community Career Academy
Special Education Instructor and CCHS girls
varsity volleyball head coach

How would you describe Dr. Hooker's personality?

He's a social man. He always gave the disclaimer that he had an open door policy and a lot of leaders say that, but he truly does. It's beyond the physical – you walk in through the threshold of the door – he will stop what he's doing and listen.

What memory do you feel encapsulates Dr. Hooker?

I remember distinctively at (a) Senior Picnic, he got a pickup basketball game started. I like that he doesn't shy away from young people. He wants to kind of get in there, know your business and try to help in some kind of way (to) make a connection. (He) encourages his staff to do the same thing.

"You want a superintendent who has connections and networks across the state because then they're not going at it alone. They're talking to their peers and what might benefit somebody else is going to benefit us. I think that's part of what makes him lovely."

-- DR. SUMMER SMITH,
CCHS Associate Principal



Did you see Dr. Hooker's priorities differ in between athletics and academics at all?

It was pretty consistent. I know his priority was always academics, but he was okay with saying that sports (are) also a priority because (there are) so many other great characteristics that a student can gain in those type of environments. He was always very encouraging to the athletic staff.

As a CCSD educator and coach, how do you hope to be supported?

The biggest (thing) is being able to have a sound-board. Having a platform where I'm comfortable saying, "This isn't working," and (having) someone who will receive it, not as a critique, but as, "We can convert this concern into some action steps on how we can change things." Obviously, everything won't be fixed, but to be united, everyone (needs to be) communicating and on the same team, instead of having these little sub-agendas.

Left: HOOKER'S HOPES: Clarke County School District Superintendent Dr. Robbie P. Hooker speaks at a town hall meeting held in the E.B. Mell Auditorium on Nov. 1, 2022. At the meeting, Hooker addressed concerns from community members and spoke about his priorities for the CCSD, two of which are reforming disciplinary measures and helping underperforming students. "Punishment isn't always necessary – a good conversation with a kid or learning more about them (can help), but when we have kids that are causing 90% of the problems, we can't continue to let (them) sweep our schools," Hooker said. "Changing the trajectory of students also means access, exposure (and) building partnerships with businesses to let them see other things that are happening in the community." Photo by Aza Khan

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VALINDA MILLER

CCHS science department co-chair

Do you believe that he is true to his word and will stick with CCSD and see his plans through?

I really think (that) he's in it for the long haul. I think he's where he's always wanted to be and he has a lot invested into the community. I taught his daughter years ago, (CCHS Class of 2016 alumna) Kaitlyn (Hooker, and) I think he's always an advocate for the community.

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-- VALINDA MILLER,

CCHS science department co-chair

How would you describe Dr. Hooker's leadership style?

He does not micromanage. From when I worked with him, (from 2008 to 2016), he respected everyone's opinions on various topics, whether they had complaints or compliments, so I think he was more of a leader in which he took everything into account, so everyone had a voice.

Do you have anything to say to CCSD families who might have concerns or questions about Dr. Hooker's leadership?

I don't think that there should be (concerns). I think he's going to be no-nonsense on discipline, but still being fair but firm. I don't think that the community should be concerned that he was the only finalist, especially with (his) work at (Burney-Harris-Lyons Middle School and CCHS). We know what his track record is, instead of taking a gamble.



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CHRIS AIKEN

CCHS Associate Athletic Director and boys varsity soccer head coach

Left: MEET AND GREET: Clarke County School District Superintendent Dr. Robbie P. Hooker speaks with a community member at a meet-and-greet held in the Vernon Payne Meeting Hall at the CCSD administrative offices on Aug. 28, 2022. When Athens Community Career Academy Special Education Instructor and Clarke Central High School head girls varsity volleyball coach Stacey Scott met Hooker at a job interview in 2008, Scott was impressed by his leadership. "My mom had sat on the hiring committee for the principalship at Clarke Central, so she told me about him," Scott said. "Everything that I heard was true. They said that he was very passionate, intelligent and knowledgeable, but a no-nonsense leader. I definitely saw that firsthand." Photo by Aza Khan



Featured: PASSING THE TORCH: Clarke County School District Superintendent Dr. Robbie P. Hooker speaks with Clarke Central High School Academic Support Specialist Dr. Michele Burch in the CCHS Ceremonial Entrance on Nov. 1, 2022. Burch worked under Dr. Hooker in 2008 when he was the CCHS principal and reminisced on her experience with him as a leader. "He's so friendly and approachable," Burch said, "I saw him almost everyday, (and) I don't know how he did it. He was always checking in, always, and that just made such a difference." Photo by Aza Khan

Do you have any expectations for Dr. Robbie P. Hooker as he takes on the role of superintendent?

I think he's going to flourish in that role. I think a lot of the people who were fortunate enough to work at (CCHS) when he was the principal know how great he is as a leader and we're excited to have him here to help us keep improving the district.

What it was like to work under Dr. Hooker from 2011 to 2016?

I was always floored at his memory to know all those people so well and recall everything that they're doing with everything that he has going on in his life. But it always made me feel super important when he just stopped by my classroom and (asked) how someone in my family was doing. It just shows the power of those relationships that he was able to create with the teachers he worked with.

"He always gave the disclaimer that he had an open door policy and a lot of leaders say that, but he truly does. It's beyond the physical – you walk in through the threshold of the door – he will stop what he's doing and listen."

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Athens Community Career Academy
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DR. SUMMER SMITH

CCHS Associate Principal

What about Dr. Hooker makes him qualified to lead our district?

He's had a crazy, varied, extensive experience (in the CCSD) and he also networks. Once he meets you, he (knows) you for life, and he cultivates those relationships. He's friends with other superintendents, which is important. You want a superintendent who has connections and networks across the state because then they're not going at it alone. They're talking to their peers and what might benefit somebody else is going to benefit us. I think that's part of what makes him just lovely.