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HCS Leadership Announcements for the 2026-2027 School Year

Hamilton County Schools (HCS) announces changes to district leadership for the 2026-2027 school year. The newly announced leadership roles include school principals, directors within Exceptional Education, Safety and Security, and School Choice.

“We are proud to recognize these outstanding leaders as they step into new roles across Hamilton County Schools,” said Superintendent Dr. Justin Robertson. “Leaders are critical to the success of our district. Each of these individuals is uniquely suited to best support our students, staff, and school communities, along with the leadership and vision needed to serve with purpose. I look forward to seeing the impact they will have on our community.”

Chattanooga School for the Arts & Sciences



Dr. Christin Carlisle, *CSAS Principal*

Since spring 2026, Dr. Christin Carlisle has served as Interim Principal at Chattanooga School for the Arts & Sciences for the upper school. Today, Dr. Carlisle has been named CSAS Upper’s new principal.

Dr. Carlisle brings more than a decade of teaching and leadership experience across Hamilton County Schools. She previously served as assistant principal at CSAS Upper, Soddy Daisy High School, and Hunter

Middle School. Her leadership has contributed to significant student achievement, including CSAS Upper earning Reward School designation and Level 5 TVAAS growth in 2023–2024.

A graduate of the HCS Aspiring Principal LEAD Cohort 5, Dr. Carlisle is dedicated to continuous growth and student-centered leadership. She is recognized for her commitment to mentoring educators, supporting novice teacher retention, and fostering strong partnerships with families and the community.

Dr. Carlisle expressed her gratitude for continuing to serve the school, “For 40 years, CSAS has cultivated lifelong scholars. I am both excited and humbled to continue serving our students, staff, families, and community as Upper School Principal. Together, we will carry forward our legacy of excellence through the Paideia philosophy- ensuring every student demonstrates character, leadership, academic excellence, service, and seminar.”

East Lake Academy



Dr. Francisco Carrillo, *East Lake Academy Principal*

Dr. Francisco Carrillo will be the new principal of East Lake Academy. A results-driven school leader with experience in instructional leadership, school operations, and academic support, Dr. Carrillo’s record of building collaborative teams, strengthening instructional practice, and advancing student outcomes will continue East Lake’s forward progress.

Dr. Carrillo most recently served as interim principal of The Howard High School after serving as assistant principal from 2021 to 2026. In his leadership roles at Howard, he supported English learners, science, math, and English language arts departments while aligning

school-wide priorities to district goals. He also helped lead data-driven intervention strategies that contributed to significant gains in graduation rates, student growth, and school accountability outcomes.

Prior to his school administration experience, Dr. Carrillo served as a K-12 district math content lead and math instructional coach, partnering with principals, instructional coaches, and teachers to strengthen curriculum implementation and improve classroom instruction across grade levels. His background in both school leadership and instructional coaching positions him to support East Lake Academy with a focus on academic excellence, student belonging, family engagement, and continuous improvement.

Dr. Carrillo holds a Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership K-12, an Education Specialist degree in Instructional Leadership K-12, and an Instructional Leadership License from Carson-Newman University. He also holds advanced degrees in elementary and early childhood education.

“I am honored to join the East Lake Academy family,” remarked Dr. Carrillo. “My commitment is simple: every student will know they are seen, supported, and capable of more than they imagine. We will build something great, together.”

Hixson High School



Dr. LeAngela Rogers, *Hixson High School Principal*

Dr. LeAngela Rogers has been named the new Principal of Hixson High School. Dr. Rogers brings a record of academic leadership and an extensive educational background to this role, including a master's and doctorate degree in educational leadership. Her career includes work as a



teacher, instructional coach, athletic director, assistant principal, principal of Hixson Middle School, and most recently, principal of Central High School.

During her 12 years as principal of Hixson Middle School, Dr. Rogers led the school to become the district's first STEM-designated middle school and spearheaded an innovative partnership with Northside Neighborhood House to implement the Community Schools Model, strengthening student support and deepening community engagement. Building on that success at Central High School, she has continued to lead with innovation and purpose, introducing the district's first hydroponics lab and establishing the first Community School in the Harrison Bay area—an initiative closely aligned with her passion for expanding resources and opportunities for students and families. Across both schools, Dr. Rogers has remained deeply committed to serving the whole child, fostering school cultures where every student feels supported, included, and positioned for success.

“Chattanooga Central has become a part of who I am, and I will always be grateful for the way this community embraced and trusted me to lead,” said Dr. Rogers regarding the transition. “Although it is difficult to leave, I am excited to begin this next chapter at Hixson High School—returning home to the community that has had a significant impact on the person I am today. I am excited to return to the Hixson community with renewed passion, commitment, and drive while embracing a culture where students thrive, and an environment where teachers feel supported and valued alongside our families and community stakeholders.”

Hamilton County Schools is dedicated to upholding Central High School's commitment to community involvement. The selection of a new principal will involve multiple steps to ensure a seamless transition under the guidance of an experienced leader. Families and staff will soon receive a survey to gather feedback as the search begins. HCS will work to announce a new leader in May.

The Howard School



Charhonda Gardner, *The Howard School Principal*

Charhonda Gardner will serve as the new Executive Principal of The Howard School. A proud member of the Class of 1992 and a nearly 30-year veteran educator, Gardner brings a proven record of advancing student achievement, supporting educators, and leading meaningful school improvement. In this executive leadership role, she will carry forward The Howard School's historic legacy

while helping to shape its next chapter of excellence and opportunity for students.

She currently serves as assistant principal at Ooltewah High School, where she has helped strengthen instructional practices, increase academic rigor, and support teacher growth, and graduated from the Principal LEAD Program. Previously, as assistant principal at Brainerd High School, she played a key role in raising graduation rates, reducing chronic absenteeism, and improving teacher satisfaction. Gardner also served as math content lead for Hamilton County, leading districtwide mathematics initiatives that resulted in Level 5 TVAAS growth.

Gardner brings a strong commitment to academic growth, collaborative leadership, and creating opportunities for students.

"I am grateful for the privilege of serving as executive principal of The Howard School," shared Gardner. "Each day, I will show up believing in our students' brilliance and standing beside them as they grow. Together with our families, staff, and community, I dedicate my work to their hopes, their dreams, and their future years, trusting that what we build together will change lives."

District Office



Rachel Gordon, *Director of Compliance for Children with Exceptionalities*

Rachel Gordon has been appointed as the new Director of Compliance for Children with Exceptionalities for Hamilton County Schools, where she will oversee district-wide adherence to federal and state special education requirements. She will monitor programs, policies, and services while also supporting schools through the coordination of staffing, reporting systems, and due process procedures.

Gordon's background includes over twenty years of experience in education, having served as an exceptional education teacher, system-wide behavior liaison, elementary team lead, and, most recently, as exceptional education director of behavior support.

In her role, she has guided districtwide initiatives aimed at strengthening instructional quality, increasing student engagement, and helping school leaders use data more effectively to guide decisions.

Her professional approach centers on collaboration and innovation, with expertise in IDEA compliance, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), restorative practices, and therapeutic crisis intervention. Her work has consistently emphasized inclusive environments where students are supported academically and behaviorally.

"I am excited to take on this role and partner with our schools to support strong systems and a shared commitment to student success," said Gordon. "I look forward to using my experience in the district and dedication to supporting all students to ensure every child in Hamilton County can thrive."



Gail Huffstutler, *Director of Exceptional Education School Support*

Gail Huffstutler has been named the new Director of Exceptional Education School Support. This role will supervise and streamline processes and support between schools and the district to build systems of support for Exceptional Education students. Huffstutler's focus will include school partnerships for ensuring access to high-quality instruction, strengthening individualized transition planning, improving graduation outcomes, and expanding student access to opportunities such as work-based learning and CTE.

Having served in roles such as classroom teacher, literacy coach, assistant principal, and principal, Huffstutler has over two decades of experience. Since 2018, she has led Wolftever Creek Elementary School as principal, after previously serving five years in the same role at East Ridge Elementary School.

Her leadership has consistently centered on student empowerment, school improvement, and developing strong instructional cultures that support both staff and students.

Regarding her transition to the Exceptional Education team, Huffstutler stated, "It's an honor to step into a position where I can work more closely with schools and families to support students with exceptionalities and help ensure they have every opportunity to succeed. I'm excited for what's ahead and proud to continue this work in service of the Hamilton County community."

Hamilton County Schools is dedicated to upholding Wolftever Creek Elementary School's commitment to achievement. The selection of a

new principal will involve multiple steps to ensure a seamless transition under the guidance of an experienced leader. Families and staff received a survey to gather feedback for the search. HCS will work to announce a new leader in May.



Jennifer Newberg, *Director of Exceptional Education School Support*

Jennifer Newberg has been announced as the Director of Exceptional Education School Support. With more than 20 years of experience in exceptional education, Newberg's background in student support, school collaboration, individualized education planning, and transition services will continue to support students to success.

Newberg has most recently served as director of access, compliance, and student support, providing district-level support to schools, families, and stakeholders. Prior to this role, she served as the exceptional education lead for K-5 access, transition, and school support, where she worked closely with schools on scheduling, transitions, and individualized supports for students and staff.

Newberg began her career with HCS in 2004 as an exceptional education teacher at East Side Elementary, where she supported students through small-group instruction, inclusion, and assessment. She later served at Allen Elementary and Middle Valley Elementary, continuing her work in exceptional education through the development of skills-based IEPs, collaboration with teachers and school teams, and data-driven instructional support.

Newberg holds a bachelor's degree, Master of Education, and Education Specialist degree from the University of Tennessee at

Chattanooga. Her experience across school and district roles positions her to lead this work with a focus on access, collaboration, student-centered planning, and support for schools and families.

Newberg commented on her continued service, “I am excited to continue to serve as a director in the exceptional department and look forward to supporting students, families, and educators while helping create meaningful opportunities for every learner to succeed.”



Dr. Danielle Leffler, *Director of Behavioral Supports for Children with Exceptionalities*

Dr. Danielle Leffler has joined HCS as the new Director of Behavioral Supports for Children with Exceptionalities. Dr. Leffler will lead the district’s vision for behavioral supports for students with exceptionalities by guiding Tier I–III behavioral systems, strengthening MTSS-aligned practices, and ensuring effective training, data use, and intervention supports for staff to reduce barriers to learning and improve student

outcomes.

Dr. Leffler brings extensive expertise in behavioral support, special education, trauma-informed practices, and instructional leadership to this role. Her career spans a wide range of educational settings, with experience as a special education teacher, inclusion specialist, kindergarten teacher, and behavior and life skills specialist.

In her most recent role as behavior and life skills specialist for Cleveland City Schools, Dr. Leffler led the award-winning Trauma and Behavior Team and Program, where she collaborated with educators, families, and community partners to develop effective behavioral supports for students across Pre-K through 12th grade.

"I am honored to step into this role and build upon the strong foundation already established across our schools," Leffler said. "I am committed to strengthening behavioral supports through systems that integrate regulation, meet students where they are, and strengthen access to instruction. My focus is on supporting school teams with practical, sustainable practices that promote consistency, collaboration, and student success."



Dr. Fannie Moore, *Director of Access School Choice*

Fannie Moore will serve as the Director of Access and School Choice for Hamilton County Schools. Dr. Moore's years of experience in education, background in school leadership, oversight of charter schools, instructional coaching, curriculum implementation, and stakeholder engagement position her to continue leading access and choice in the district.

Dr. Moore most recently served as charter school coordinator, where she worked with the director of access and school choice to authorize and support nine local charter schools. In this role, she collaborated with district department leads to support compliance with federal and state requirements, provided school-specific feedback through formal observations and interviews, and worked with leaders from the Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee State Board, and Tennessee Charter School Commission to update local authorizer policies and procedures.

Prior to this role, Dr. Moore served as an associate principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, principal designee, and classroom teacher. Across these roles, she has focused on data-driven instruction,



school culture, teacher support, family communication, and mission-driven school improvement.

Dr. Moore recently completed her doctorate at Trevecca Nazarene University. She also holds an Education Specialist degree in school leadership and principal licensure from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, a Master of Arts in Teaching from the University of Charleston, and a Bachelor of Arts in educational studies and psychology from Emory University.

“I’m excited to begin work as the Director of School Access and Choice,” said Dr. Moore. “Having worked in the office for two years, I am eager to continue the work that Hamilton County has done to ensure that all students have the opportunities to pursue their educational goals. While I know that all of our schools give students the skills they need for college or the workforce, HCS’s choice options include unique academic curricula, theme-based programs, and individualized learning communities to further support our students. I am eager to continue to support choice schools and am keen to see our students flourish in these settings. Our community will benefit greatly from these graduates’ contributions.”



Mike Griffith, *Director of School Safety and Security*

Mike Griffith will serve as the new Director of School Safety and Security. His career spans more than 30 years in public safety, including a 25-year career with the City of Chattanooga Police Department, where he served in patrol, as a field training officer, and sergeant. Griffith has served Hamilton County Schools in a variety of school safety roles, including student safety officer,



coordinator of student safety, and, since fall 2025, interim director of school safety and security.

Griffith is certified in school threat assessments, crisis response, and active shooter training. He has strong experience in school-based safety planning, de-escalation, and incident response. He has been recognized for his leadership and service with multiple awards, including Supervisor of the Year.

“I’m excited to continue serving Hamilton County Schools in this new role,” Mike Griffith said. “Safety has been my life’s work, and I’m looking forward to building on the strong relationships I’ve made and helping to make sure every school is a safe, supportive place to learn.”

Hamilton County Schools is proud to welcome these leaders into their new roles as the district continues its commitment to strong schools, student support, and meaningful opportunities for every learner.

“Schools and departments need strong leaders to continue moving our work forward,” said Deputy Superintendent Dr. Zac Brown. “These leaders have experience, dedication, and a clear commitment to serving students, families, and staff. I am confident their work will help strengthen systems of support across Hamilton County Schools and continue moving our district forward.”