“One Dark Horse at a Time” — 50 Years of Clinton City Schools (1975–2025)

For half a century, *Clinton City Schools* has stood as a community cornerstone in Clinton — a place where classrooms, athletics, civic pride, and traditions have intertwined to educate generations of “Dark Horses.” From preserving heritage to expanding opportunities, the district’s story is one of resilience, changing demographics, and a constant drive toward excellence. clinton.k12.nc.us

1970s–1980s: Foundations, Transitions, and Preserving Legacy



Image courtesy of the Sampson Independent

In the mid-1970s, the Clinton schools system continued its post-desegregation growth while grappling with the legacy of earlier eras. Sampson High School — a historic institution that had served African American students and played a central role in community life — faced closure in 1969 when it merged into Clinton High School, a transition that left lasting memories for aldermen, alumni, and families. sampsonalumni.org

Decades later, in 2024, community members and former students honored this legacy with a historical marker commemorating Sampson High School’s century-long impact on local education during a ceremony on McKoy Street. Clinton NC

1990s–2000s: Athletic Tradition and Growth

Clinton High School's **Dark Horses athletic programs** became statewide names during the 1990s and early 2000s. The football team — under coaches who embedded discipline and community pride — captured multiple **NCHSAA 2A football state championships**, with titles in *1990, 1996, 1997, 2001 and 2005* — achievements that fueled school spirit and a culture of excellence.

These successes weren't just athletic feats; they fostered community cohesion and recognition, building a proud identity for students and alumni alike.



Image courtesy of the Sampson Independent

2000s–2010s: Facilities, Futures, and Recognition

In 2008, a **new Clinton High School campus opened its doors**, ushering in a reconfiguration of the district's instructional spaces and signaling a significant investment in facilities to support modern learning standards. [wral.com]


Image courtesy of WRAL

Athletics Continued to Shine

- In the **2016 girls golf season**, Clinton High standout *Amy Wooten* won the **NCHSAA 1A/2A individual golf championship**, dominating the field and bringing statewide attention to CHS student-athletes.
- The **Lady Dark Horses basketball team** captured an **NCHSAA 2A women's title** in the 2016–17 season — one of the most celebrated milestones in CHS girls athletics.



Image courtesy of the Fayetteville Observer



Image courtesy of HighSchoolOT.com

2020s: Progress, Performance, and Promise

The early 2020s were marked by both challenges and opportunity. **COVID-19** disrupted traditional school life, prompting shifts to remote and hybrid learning and nuanced community responses. Yet, students and staff adapted with resilience.

By **2022–2025**, the district was navigating widespread improvement efforts:

- **Academic Growth:** Recent state report cards showed *modest but measurable academic gains* in reading and math across several grade levels — a sign of forward momentum even amid statewide testing challenges. District leaders emphasized growth and broader measures of student success beyond raw test scores. Clinton NC
- **Program Expansion:** CCS launched initiatives such as the **Dark Horse Fellows**, supporting new teachers with forgivable loan programs aimed at building home-grown instructional talent. EdNC



Image courtesy of the Sampson Independent

- **Board Recognition:** In 2025, Carol Worley, a longtime board member, became the first in county history to receive the **N.C. School Boards Association's Raleigh Dingman Award** — a prestigious statewide honor for governance leadership.


Image courtesy of the Sampson Independent

Facility Improvements and Innovation

Clinton City Schools completed a districtwide Energy Savings project in 2023 aimed at cutting utility costs and modernizing aging building systems across multiple campuses by leveraging the Guaranteed Energy Savings Performance Contract option available to schools in North Carolina.

The project included a broad retrofit to higher-efficiency LED lighting—replacing older lamps and fixtures across district facilities as well as replacement of end of life HVAC systems in multiple buildings. A solar photovoltaic (PV) system was installed at Sunset Avenue Elementary School. This installation was the first solar PV system in North Carolina funded through a guaranteed energy savings performance contract in North Carolina.



Athletic Achievement and Recognition

Athletics continues to be a vibrant part of CCS identity:

- **Football Legacy:** The Dark Horses' state championships in the 1990s and early 2000s remain defining moments in Clinton's sports lore.
- **State Titles Beyond Football:** Clinton added **boys soccer state championship honors** in *2024*, further diversifying its athletic excellence.



Image courtesy of the Sampson Independent

- **Community Leadership:** In 2025, CHS dedicated its upgraded athletic complex to *Dale Johnson* — a beloved alumnus and supporter whose lifelong contributions enriched CHS athletics and community culture.



Image courtesy of the Sampson Independent

Looking Forward: Vision, Diversity, and Inclusion

Today, Clinton City Schools is a **PK–12 district serving roughly 3,000 students across five campuses**, reflecting a richly diverse student body and a strong commitment to inclusive education.

New Initiatives and Strategic Goals

- **Facilities:** The district is actively planning for improved facilities, including a potential new **PreK–2 campus**, modernizing spaces to support early learning.
- **Academic Supports:** Programs such as **AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination)** are being adopted districtwide to strengthen college and career readiness and close opportunity gaps.
- **Community and Culture:** Recognitions like *Teacher of the Year* honors, board acknowledgments, and broad district celebrations remind residents that **school success is about people first** — students, educators, families, and supporters sharing in progress.

A Legacy in Motion

From honoring the legacy of Sampson High School to capturing state championships, celebrating academic gains, and building a future anchored in inclusivity and growth, **Clinton City Schools' story is one of ongoing transformation.** It's the story of a community that believes in the power of education *one Dark Horse at a time* — where tradition fuels aspiration, and every generation builds on the achievements of the last.