

# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OKALOOSA COUNTY

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
MARCUS D. CHAMBERS

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C. JEFFREY McINNIS, Esq.



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May 7, 2020

Dear Parents and Graduating Senior,

I am writing to you today with information on how we plan to honor graduating senior with hopes of providing an uplifting conclusion to what has been a very challenging school year. High school graduations are one of the most important, emotional and validating events in our lives. They are a part of the American fabric, with each school weaving its own unique history and compelling traditions. In Okaloosa County, graduation ceremonies at Baker, Crestview, Choctaw, Fort Walton, Laurel Hill, Niceville, Richbourg and Silver Sands serve not only to mark the recognition of accomplishments and the closing of a chapter, but also as galvanizing community events that bring all of us closer together.

At a time when seniors should be preparing for graduation and making final, lasting memories in the classrooms, concert halls and athletic fields of their school, the COVID-19 crisis has them at home, perhaps secluded, and possibly uncertain about what the near future holds for their college or work plans.

For that reason, it's never been more important to get the graduation ceremony right.

Getting it right means listening to what our seniors and senior parents want. Over 1600 of you responded to our graduation survey and your choice is clear: you want a graduation event on school campuses this summer, even if it means limited, spaced seating. Your principal and I are committed to making this happen in a safe way.

Here's what we're planning to do to honor our seniors:

We've set aside the period of **July 14-18** as the time to recognize seniors who have fulfilled graduation requirements in their stadiums, gymnasiums or auditoriums across the county with a true walk-across-the-stage ceremony. We can't be certain what social distancing guidelines will be in effect at that time, so our plans will be flexible enough to hold a series of smaller events honoring groups of students at a time or adjust to a larger event if social gathering guidelines permit. Either way, we're committed to creating a safe, memorable environment for our graduating seniors. The ceremonies will be streamed to ensure that family and friends who can't attend will be able to see them live.

In addition to the July ceremonies, schools will also be scheduling a time at the end of May for seniors to be individually filmed in cap and gown with the Principal. This footage, will be used to create a complete, professionally made graduation video for each school that would serve as an "insurance policy" should our July plans fall through due to COVID-19. But, make no mistake, we will be prepared and fully intend to hold graduation ceremonies in July.

Your school's principal will be in contact with you shortly with more specific information. For now, please mark your calendars for our July ceremonies and be prepared to don your cap and gown for your May video shoot. We are all looking forward to making this one of the most memorable graduations ever in Okaloosa County.

Respectfully,

Marcus D. Chambers  
Superintendent of Schools

ADMINISTRATION COMPLEX-120 LOWERY PLACE S.E.-FORT WALTON BEACH, FLORIDA 32548  
TELEPHONE (850) 833-3100 FAX (850) 833-3436

CARVER HILL ADMINISTRATION COMPLEX-461 W. SCHOOL AVENUE-CRESTVIEW, FLORIDA 32536  
TELEPHONE (850) 689-7117 FAX (850) 689-7121