THE GADSDEN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Educating Every Student Today, Making Gadsden Stronger Tomorrow

Elijah Key, Superintendent of Schools

35 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd Quincy, Florida 32351
Main: (850) 627-9651 or Fax: (850) 627-2760
www.GadsdenSchools.org

September 28, 2026

Dear Ms. Lawrence:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding religious activities associated with Gadsden County High School during the 2026 graduation season. I appreciate you bringing these concerns to the attention of the Gadsden County School District.

The District takes seriously its responsibility to ensure that all school-sponsored activities are conducted in accordance with the United States Constitution, applicable federal and state law and the Gadsden County School Board policies. Following receipt of your correspondence, the District has reviewed the concerns raised regarding the May 22, 2026, Graduation Ceremony and the May 17, 2026, Baccalaureate Service.

The District recognizes that public schools must respect and protect the constitutional rights of all students and families, including those who hold religious beliefs, those who practice different faiths and those who do not hold religious beliefs. Accordingly, the Gadsden County School District will take appropriate steps to ensure that, moving forward, school-sponsored ceremonies and activities are conducted in a manner consistent with these constitutional requirements.

Specifically, the District will provide clear direction to school and District administrators that:

- School-sponsored graduation ceremonies, awards ceremonies, and other official school events shall not include school-sponsored prayer, invocation, benediction or other religious exercises.
- School administrators and employees shall not select, assign, script, introduce, lead or otherwise facilitate a student, employee, clergy member, or other individual to deliver a prayer or religious invocation as part of an official school-sponsored event.
- Future planning for school-sponsored ceremonies will be reviewed to ensure that programs comply with applicable constitutional requirements.
- With respect to baccalaureate services, the District will ensure that any such privately sponsored religious activity is not presented, promoted, organized, sponsored, or conducted as an official activity of the Gadsden County School District or Gadsden County High School.

The District's objective is not to restrict the private religious expression of students, employees, parents, or community members. Rather, the District must ensure that it does not use its authority or resources to sponsor or facilitate religious exercises as part of official school activities. At the same time, the District remains committed to protecting the constitutional rights of all members of our school community, including the right to privately express religious or nonreligious viewpoints consistent with applicable law.

Cathy Johnson
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HAVANA, FL 32333
MIDWAY, FL 32343

Steve Scott
DISTRICT NO. 2
QUINCY, FL 32351
HAVANA, FL 32333

Leroy McMillian
DISTRICT NO. 3
CHATTAHOOCHEE, FL 32324
GREENSBORO, FL 32330

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The District will use this matter as an opportunity to reinforce expectations with school and District administrators so that these requirements are understood and followed consistently. Gadsden County School District will be in compliance moving forward.

Thank you again for bringing these concerns to our attention. We appreciate the opportunity to review the matter and to take appropriate steps to ensure that future District and school-sponsored activities are conducted consistent with constitutional requirements and the rights of all students and families.

Sincerely,

Elijah Key, Jr.

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