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## NEWS RELEASE

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### Okaloosa County School District Celebrates Project SEARCH Graduates

For the third consecutive year, five Okaloosa County School District students graduated from the Project SEARCH High School Transition Program. This groundbreaking initiative equips young adults with disabilities with essential job skills and workforce training. The graduation ceremony occurred on Friday, May 23, at the Hilton Garden Inn on Okaloosa Island. In a heartfelt ceremony, each graduate shared their journey and growth, filling the room with pride and emotion—not just from families and mentors but also from past Project SEARCH graduates who returned to support their peers. One graduate took the stage, sharing how the program helped launch their career. Today, all of them are thriving in the workforce, a powerful testament to the program's lasting impact.

Designed for students ages 18-21 who have completed their high school credits and deferred their diploma, Project SEARCH fosters career exploration and on-the-job training through a business-led collaboration with community partners. Superintendent Marcus Chambers praised the program's continued success: "Project SEARCH is life-changing for these students, offering them the skills and confidence to thrive in the workforce. The dedication of our educators and community partners reflects our commitment to inclusivity and student success." The partnership between OCSD and Innisfree Hotels highlights the importance of community engagement in supporting students' career pathways. This year's graduates represent Baker School, Crestview High School, Laurel Hill School, and Silver Sands School. ESE Director Kathy Ard shared, "It's inspiring to see the profound impact this program has—not just on our students but also on the staff who support them. As they step into their careers, they do so with a new level of confidence and capability, ready for success."

Project SEARCH accepts applications from August through the end of March during the applicant's senior year. The process includes an interview and assessment, with final selections made by the end of April for the following school year. Applicants must defer their diploma to participate in the program. To learn more about Project SEARCH, visit [www.projectsearch.us](http://www.projectsearch.us).



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