

# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OKALOOSA COUNTY

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
**MARCUS D. CHAMBERS**

ATTORNEY TO THE BOARD  
**C. JEFFREY McINNIS, Esq.**



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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
February 4, 2026

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### **Superintendent Marcus Chambers Reflects on a Strong First Semester Across Okaloosa County Schools**

As we reflect on the first semester of the 2025 school year, I am incredibly proud of the progress taking place across the Okaloosa County School District. Guided by our district pillars: Academic Excellence, Continuous Learning, Student Focused, Safer Schools, Modern Innovation, and Community Engagement, the first semester demonstrated what is possible when students, staff, families, and community partners work together with a shared commitment to success. While there is much to celebrate, we must also confront the realities facing public education today.

Declining enrollment, constrained budgets, and housing challenges have required us to make difficult but necessary decisions to ensure the long-term strength of our school system. These choices are never easy, as they affect not just facilities and finances, but the people and communities at the heart of our schools. Throughout this process, we have remained committed to open, ongoing communication with our staff and families, providing opportunities for dialogue, questions, and feedback through meetings and outreach, even as final decisions must follow formal School Board action. Even so, our commitment remains unwavering to do what is best for students, support our educators, and preserve the quality and excellence our community expects.

### **Academic Excellence Remains at the Heart of Our Work**

Academic excellence continues to define Okaloosa County schools. In 2025, the Florida Department of Education once again awarded the district an “A” rating, marking eleven consecutive years earning the state’s highest distinction. Okaloosa County is one of only three districts in Florida to earn an A rating every year since school grades were first issued in 2014, reflecting a sustained culture of high expectations and continuous improvement. This progress is further demonstrated by a 9-point gain in middle school acceleration and a 6-point increase in college and career acceleration, key indicators of student readiness measured through participation and success in advanced coursework, industry certifications, and college credit opportunities. Districtwide school grades also improved, with the number of schools earning an A increasing from 15 to 19, while schools earning a B decreased from 17 to 15 and C schools from 5 to 3. Several campuses posted notable gains, and multiple schools finished just one point shy of an A, while many others have maintained consistent A ratings for the past three years. This success is a direct result of the hard work and unwavering dedication of our teachers, support staff, administrators, and principals across the district.

I am proud to announce a significant increase in our graduation rate for the 2024–2025 school year, rising to 91 percent, up from 88 percent the previous year. This improvement reflects Okaloosa’s continued upward trend in graduation outcomes and highlights the district’s ongoing commitment to supporting students on their path to earning a high school diploma. The district’s growth is the result of a continued focus on student support systems, diverse academic pathways, and engagement strategies designed to keep students on track for graduation.

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Further highlighting academic opportunity and rigor, the Okaloosa County School District is proud to announce that Choctawhatchee High School, Fort Walton Beach High School, and Niceville High School have been named to the 2025 College Board AP School Honor Roll, a prestigious national recognition honoring schools that expand access to Advanced Placement coursework while supporting student success. Choctawhatchee High School earned Gold-level recognition, while Fort Walton Beach High School and Niceville High School each earned Silver-level recognition, reflecting strong AP participation, performance, and college readiness outcomes. In addition, nine OCSD schools were named 2024–2025 Schools of Excellence, placing them in the top 20 percent statewide. The district's commitment to early learning also remains strong, with all nine OCSD VPK classrooms earning outstanding designations from the state, ensuring our youngest learners are building a solid foundation for long-term academic success.

### **Student-Focused Success in Academics, Arts, and Athletics**

We remain student-focused in every decision we make, and this semester, our students excelled well beyond the classroom. Choctawhatchee High School's football team advanced to the FHSAA 4A Final Four, while every OCSD high school band earned Straight Superior ratings at the Florida Bandmasters Association Music Performance Assessment, making Okaloosa the only district among neighboring counties to achieve this distinction.

Students across the district also earned recognition in visual arts, speech and debate, and civic engagement, including the historic selection of the first Okaloosa County student, and the first student from the state of Florida, to represent Florida at the National Civics Bee in Washington, D.C. This milestone achievement highlights not only individual excellence but also the strength of Okaloosa County's academic and civic programs. Together, these accomplishments reflect the well-rounded, student-focused educational experience we are committed to providing every learner.

### **Continuous Learning Through Workforce and Career Pathways**

Preparing students for life beyond high school remains a top priority. During the first semester, the Okaloosa County School District was awarded \$210,778 through the Workforce Development Capitalization Incentive Grant Program (Workforce CAP) by the Florida Department of Education. This funding will directly support Welding Technology at Crestview High School and Applied Cybersecurity at Destin High School, expanding access to high-wage, high-demand career pathways. This investment reflects the exceptional work of our Career and Technical Education team and our commitment to continuous learning through workforce education. With expanded training opportunities, upgraded equipment, and increased access to industry certifications, more students will graduate prepared to thrive in today's economy.

Okaloosa Technical College continues to provide high-quality occupational skills training through pathways such as Applied Cyber Security, Building Trades, Practical Nursing, and Master Automotive Service Technology, among many others, at its south campus. In the near future, OTC's north campus will expand offerings to include in-demand programs such as Advanced Manufacturing & Production Technology, Welding Technology, Plumbing, Automotive, and Computer Systems & Information Technology. This expansion represents a significant investment in Okaloosa County's future workforce and reinforces the district's commitment to providing students with diverse, career-ready pathways beyond high school.

### **Modern Innovation in Operations and Communication**

This semester also reflected our commitment to modern innovation. Transportation services successfully transitioned to the Transfinder routing system, which aims to improve efficiency and reliability, while Thrillshare was fully implemented districtwide to strengthen communication with families. These advancements enhance service delivery while keeping parents informed and engaged.

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The district also continues to invest in classrooms by providing interactive instructional tools, such as Cleartouch Displays, Apple TVs, and one-to-one student devices, which help redefine the classroom experience and support innovative teaching and learning.

## Safer Schools Through Facilities and Infrastructure Improvements

Providing safe, modern, and well-maintained learning environments remains a priority. Thanks to voter support for the half-cent sales tax, we completed several major facility projects, including full-campus roofing at Edwins Elementary School, Phase I roofing at Elliott Point, a 10-classroom addition at Baker School, and renovations to the former cafeteria and media center at Edwins Elementary. Parking lot improvements and expansion are ongoing at Crestview High School, while demolition of the former cafeterias at Plew Elementary School and Ruckel Middle School is underway.

The district is also excited about continued construction progress at Pineview School in Crestview and the 30-classroom expansion at Destin Elementary School. In addition, ongoing maintenance projects addressing roofing, HVAC systems, paving, and campus safety continue across the district.

## Honoring Excellence and Lasting Legacies

We also took time to honor those who have made a lasting impact on our students and schools. The dedication of the Dr. Ginny Morgan Cafetorium at Ruckel Middle School recognized an extraordinary educator whose guiding question, *“What is best for students?”* continues to shape our district. We celebrated excellence among our employees and leaders, recognizing our Educational Support Professional of the Year, Principals and Assistant Principals of the Year, and administrators receiving state and national honors for their leadership and service.

## Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships

Community engagement remains one of our greatest strengths. Partnerships with organizations such as Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation and many others allow us to support classrooms, provide scholarships and grants, and meet the needs of hundreds of students and families. One highlight was the transformation of a Choctawhatchee High School classroom into a state-of-the-art aerospace lab, made possible through a \$50,000 Florida Power & Light grant in partnership with the Okaloosa Public Schools Foundation. The redesigned space now includes cutting-edge STEM technology, including a flight simulator, providing students with immersive, real-world learning experiences and direct pathways to high-skill, high-demand careers.

As part of its annual holiday outreach, the Okaloosa County School District provided Thanksgiving meals to 200 families, with an additional six families supported through Children in Crisis, ensuring students and families had the resources they needed during the holiday season. The initiative was made possible through a valued partnership with Publix of Niceville and the generous support of community sponsors, raising more than \$13,000 in donations from Jacobs Titan, Legacy Vacations, Inc., Eglin Federal Credit Union, Florida Power & Light,

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Okaloosa Gas, and Forest Heights Baptist Church. This year's initiative included a special surprise, thanks to Response Force 1, as participating families also received a brand-new Chromebook.

In addition, through the strong partnership between the Okaloosa County School District and the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, combined with the generosity of our community and the Target Heroes & Helpers Grant, the district was able to provide holiday gifts to more than 250 Okaloosa students, further demonstrating the power of collaboration and community support in meeting the needs of our students.

Alongside those already mentioned, we are grateful for the generosity and engagement of our partners, including Bit Wizards, Talking Parents, Step One Automotive, Cox Communications, Telaforce, a Titan Technologies Company, A2Z, Acentria Insurance, NTA Life, Bay Area Awards, and Okaloosa Teachers Federal Credit Union. Their ongoing support is vital to helping us recognize excellence, such as at the Teacher of the Year Banquet, and to advancing initiatives that enrich learning, foster student success, and strengthen our entire community.

### **Serving Those Who Serve...Our Military Commitment**

We remain steadfast in serving those who serve. Okaloosa County School District continues as one of only five Purple Star Districts in Florida, with all 38 schools renewing their Purple Star designation and Okaloosa Technical College earning recognition as a Purple Star Collegiate Campus. This distinction reflects our unwavering commitment to military-connected students and families.

### **Looking Ahead**

As we look ahead, we will continue to actively engage families, educators, business leaders, and community partners in meaningful, transparent conversations focused on growth and capacity planning, academic and career pathways, student wellness, transportation solutions, and workforce and student recruitment. Community voice and collaboration are not simply valued; they are essential to our long-term success. As we face challenges, both now and in the future, we remain committed to working together. These partnerships will help guide thoughtful, student-centered decisions as we plan for the future, including preparations for the opening of Pineview School in Crestview in August 2026 and the 30-classroom expansion at Destin Elementary School, ensuring our facilities, programs, and supports are aligned to meet the evolving needs of our students and the communities we proudly serve. We are dedicated to creating a future where every student has the tools, opportunities, and guidance to achieve their fullest potential, and where our schools continue to inspire learning, growth, and excellence in every corner of our community.



(Superintendent Marcus Chambers)

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