

# Excitement of Graduation

*May 2015*

Once again, it is the time of year when graduating seniors in Whitfield County and across the nation prepare to walk across the stage with anticipation as they receive their high school diplomas. In three short weeks, Whitfield County teachers, parents, friends, and family members will gather at the Trade Center to join nearly 900 Whitfield County Seniors as they celebrate this major milestone. This wonderful accomplishment is cause for celebration and, sometimes, a touch of sadness as students and parents realize that new graduates are about to leave the familiarity of high school, teachers, and friends to face the next part of their lives.

This is naturally an exciting and emotional moment for graduates, parents, and families as it is for teachers, principals, and even superintendents. I have been in the Whitfield County School System long enough to remember when some of these soon-to-be graduates started kindergarten. As an elementary principal, I saw many of their parents leaving their (sometimes reluctant) child in the hands of a stranger; a kindergarten teacher trying to encourage the parents, telling them it was OK to leave, that their child would be fine. More often it seemed the parents were more reluctant to leave their child who was running eagerly into the classroom hunting for his name on a desk. I watched many parents hurry to their car with the hope that no one saw them wipe a tear from their eye. Like graduation, they realized their child's entry into kindergarten marked the beginning of a journey toward independence. We have all watched together as these students grew from energetic five-year-olds to sensational young adults.

When the long-awaited graduation day arrives and I get the honor of handing diplomas to new graduates, I will see a full range of emotions in their faces. Some students are all smiles and give the impression they are so ready to be finished with school so they can go out and make their mark on the world. Some literally dance across the stage as if they have been looking forward to this day since they first stepped into a schoolhouse as a curious young child. Other students will have a solemn look on their faces as if they can't quite believe this day has arrived and wonder what comes next.

For a few students, their bottom lip may quiver and a little water may well up in their eyes as it dawns on them that they are no longer children. They are adults! It's as if they suddenly realize they are leaving behind all they have known and loved, their comfort zone, and become apprehensive about what may lie ahead. Many are still unsure exactly what they want to do with their lives and the weight of considering such important decisions lays heavily on their young shoulders.

For all graduates, the ceremony is proof of success. They can be proud knowing their diploma represents the education they have worked so hard to earn. Their diploma shows they have the ability to stick to commitments and overcome obstacles.

As superintendent, I experience a feeling of satisfaction in the knowledge that our teachers have been preparing these seniors for their graduation since the first day that they entered our schools. For thirteen years from prekindergarten through their senior year, parents and teachers have stressed the importance of obtaining that high school diploma to ensure a better financial future for the graduate. At last, they will attain that goal.

Along with my joy for them, I can't wait to see them take the next steps in their lives. Many will go on to college or technical schools for training. Still others will enter the work force and begin their careers. Whatever pathway they choose, I know their teachers have prepared them well. I am sure their future and ours will be brighter because of the contributions our graduates will make to the world. I look forward to seeing them thrive and will be listening for news of their many accomplishments as they continue to learn and become the next generation of leaders.