



ONE GAINESVILLE: We will inspire, nurture, challenge, and prepare our students.

To: Media Outlets

From: Gainesville City School System

RE: **Gainesville High confers three honorary diplomas**

Date: May 12, 2016

(Gainesville) Since 2009, Gainesville High School has conferred honorary diplomas to individuals who support the school's mission, who enhance the quality of life for the greater community and who are not graduates of the city's high schools.

Principal Tom Smith announces three diplomas will be conferred Sunday, May 15 at a reception preceding the Class of 2016 baccalaureate service at First Baptist Church.

William L. Coates, Jr., who graduated from Andrew Jackson High in South Carolina, was president of the student government at Coker College where he earned a degree in English and religion. He earned a Master of Divinity from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and doctorate in English from the University of South Carolina. He is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Gainesville. Coates is an outstanding and popular leader of the community, hosting community-wide events of interest and challenge, active with Habitat for Humanity, integral supporter of community events and Rotarian.

Mary Ellen Murray spent the majority of her professional teaching career at GHS teaching American history and senior law. She earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Georgia and master's degree from Emory University. For 31 years, Murray taught, nurtured and nudged students to excel. Twice named Teacher of the Year and STAR teacher six times, she also received the Kiwanis Youth Service Award and the Liberty Bell Award from the local bar association. Her nominator wrote, "she bleeds red elephant red."

Jackie Wallace graduated from Winder-Barrow High and Brenau University. During a productive banking and finance career, she volunteered for United Way via committees and the annual campaigns. She left banking to become the CFO of the United Way and, in 2007, was named president and chief professional officer. As such, she helped raise, manage and grant millions of dollars for education, health and family financial stability initiatives. She also leads the Read-Learn-Succeed project encouraging reading and realizing that readiness translates into academic successes.

Principal Tom Smith said, “These are remarkable people who have shaped a vibrant community; it is our pleasure and honor to confer these honorary diplomas to those who make Gainesville an enviable place to live, learn, work and play.”

Gainesville High School became the first public high school in America to confer honorary diplomas in 2009. Through 2016, twenty-seven have been conferred.

Note: Media are welcomed to the 2:00 p.m. reception in the banquet hall @ First Baptist Church.