

2025 Application for the Inspiration Award for Principals, Coaches, ADs, and Community Supporters

Name

Rodney Gipson

Email address

rodney.gipson@dalton.k12.ga.us

Cell number

423-457-2929

High School with which you are associated.

Dalton High School

What do you do for this school?

I teach Music Technology

Nominated by Ryan Richards

Rodney is a retired marine and a double amputee due to diabetes. He comes to work everyday with a smile on his face and works hard to offer kids opportunities to learn and grow in his classroom.

To the GHSA Awards Committee,

It is a tremendous honor to be considered for the GHSA Inspiration Award. While I am not one who enjoys talking about myself, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to share my story and the journey that has shaped both my life and my teaching career.

I have had the privilege of teaching for twenty-three years—first as a middle school choral director and later as a high school music technology educator. Before entering education, I proudly served my country as a member of the United States Marine Corps. Although I had no regrets about my service, I always knew that my calling was to teach. When the time came to reenlist, I chose instead to pursue a degree in education, determined to make a lasting difference in young people's lives.

My career was thriving until I faced a life-changing diagnosis: osteomyelitis in my feet and legs. Despite every effort to control the infection, the disease became septic and threatened my life. To survive, doctors had to amputate my left leg below the knee. I fought hard through rehabilitation and returned to the classroom stronger and more determined than ever.

Six years later, the same illness struck again—this time even more severe. I spent an extended period in the ICU, and there were moments when survival itself seemed uncertain. In the darkest moments, I struggled to find purpose. But through faith, the unwavering support of my family and friends, and a deep love for my students, I found my reason to keep going.

Every school year, when I meet my students for the first time, I share my story with them—not to gain sympathy, but to show them that strength is born through perseverance. I tell them that *they* are the reason I get up every morning, put on my prosthetics, and make my way to the classroom. Teaching the young minds of tomorrow continues to give my life meaning and direction.

Over the years, I've been humbled to receive recognition from students who have named me as their inspiration through the "Graduates of Distinction" honor. Those acknowledgments mean more to me than any award, because they remind me that my purpose—to uplift, to encourage, and to inspire—is being fulfilled.

It is my hope and prayer that my journey of struggle, faith, and resilience has inspired my students to never give up, no matter what challenges they face. I may have lost my legs, but I gained a renewed perspective on life, service, and the power of education.

Thank you for considering my story for the GHSA Inspiration Award. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to continue doing what I love most—teaching, inspiring, and learning from my students every day.

With gratitude,

Rodney Gipson

Music Technology Educator

Dalton High School

Dalton, Georgia

November 11, 2025

Re: **Rodney Gipson**: Letter of Reference

To Whom It May Concern:

It is a true honor to write this letter of recommendation for Mr. Rodney Gipson, a man whose life and work speak powerfully to the meaning of dedication, courage, and love for others.

For more than 20 years, Mr. Gipson has inspired students through the art of music—teaching not only melodies and rhythms, but life lessons about perseverance, respect, and believing in oneself. His classroom is a place of belonging, where students are seen, heard, and valued. Many view him as a father figure, a steady presence who challenges and supports them in equal measure.

Mr. Gipson's commitment to his students extends far beyond the school day. He can often be found DJing at games and school events, bringing energy and community wherever he goes. He has also taken students on college tours and educational trips, broadening their vision of what's possible and reminding them that their dreams matter.

A *U.S. Marine Corps Veteran*, Mr. Gipson carries that same discipline and strength into every area of his life. Despite living with renal failure and being a double amputee, he continues to show up—giving his best, encouraging others, and proving daily that no obstacle can stop a determined heart.

Rodney Gipson is more than an educator; he is a role model, a servant leader, and a living testament to resilience and purpose. His influence reaches far beyond the classroom, leaving a lasting mark on everyone privileged to know him.

With great respect and admiration,

Ivy Shelton