



Just for Teachers

News from the Florida Department of Education
November 2009

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A Note from Sheila

Fall is absolutely my favorite time of year. I love everything about it—football games, the crisp, cool air, hot chocolate, and pumpkins are just a few of the things that make this the perfect season. My sons even think that in October, I transform into a nicer person!

It's also a wonderful time in the classroom. By now teachers better know their students and have set individual learning goals based on their students' needs. The first term is coming to a close and educators have a better view of what needs to be accomplished during the school year.

The Florida Department of Education is also setting goals as policy discussions focus on the Next Generation Strategic Plan. The plan's mission statement reminds us that we are working together to "increase the proficiency of all students within one seamless, efficient system, by providing them with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills through learning opportunities and research valued by students, parents, and communities." The complete plan can be viewed at http://www.fldoe.org/Strategic_Plan/.

I hope you find *Just for Teachers* a useful source of information. I appreciate your comments and look forward to hearing from you. Send your remarks and questions to justforteachers@fldoe.org.

• Race to the Top Fund

The \$4.35 billion *Race to the Top* (RTTT) Fund is the largest ever federal competitive investment in school reform. It will reward states for past accomplishments and create incentives for future improvements. The strategy examined in this newsletter is **turning around the lowest-performing schools**.

Turning around persistently low-performing schools is likely to require a significant overhaul of school staff, leadership, instructional program and calendar. A few examples of strategies that can contribute to school improvement include:

- Supporting community schools that offer art, reading clubs, and other academic enrichment while also engaging community, social service, and health organizations to better serve students and their families.
- Providing incentives, including bonuses, to teams of highly effective teachers and leaders to move to low-performing schools and to take on instructional leadership roles.
- Creating 9th grade academies staffed with highly effective teachers to help students transition successfully to high school, and create summer programs that prepare struggling students to be successful in gateway courses, such as algebra, and in college-preparatory Advanced Placement classes.
- Developing Lesson Study, a professional development process that centers on teachers working collaboratively on a small number of "study lessons" and involves planning, teaching, observing, and critiquing the lessons
- Launching a comprehensive literacy program. In an elementary school, purchase a new reading curriculum that focuses on improving students' oral language competence and academic vocabulary so as to improve comprehension and address the fourth-grade reading drop off. Provide an intensive two-year training program for all teachers and the principal. In a secondary school, train staff and purchase materials for a literacy program that identifies students' needs, supports literacy development across content areas, and provides interventions for struggling students.
- Creating intensive summer institutes and ongoing support for teams of principals, teachers, and counselors from low-performing schools to analyze data and develop specific action plans for improving student results.
- Developing a data-driven approach to understanding school performance and the causes of low performance; closely monitoring results of restructured schools; providing results to school staff, families and communities; and then using this information to modify approaches and expand successful approaches.

According to Nikolai Vitti, Deputy Chancellor for School Improvement and Student Achievement, the Florida Department of Education plans to use the RTTT opportunity to accelerate the improvement the state experienced in our lowest performing schools after the implementation of Differentiated Accountability. We will pay particular attention to our lowest-performing high schools and their feeder patterns by improving teacher quality and leadership while also actively reaching out to parents to increase involvement.



Race to the Top Survey – We Need Your Input

What do you think should be considered for Florida’s Race to the Top application? This is your chance to let your voice be heard. Visit <https://vovici.com/wsb.dll/s/336fg40b91> and complete the brief survey. Your thoughts are both needed and appreciated!

U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellows

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently announced that 13 teachers were selected as Teaching Ambassador Fellows for 2009-2010. Three fellows will become full-time U.S. Department of Education employees for one year. Ten will participate part-time while remaining in their classrooms throughout the school year.

“Enlisting the support of teachers and other educators is crucial to the success of the national movement to reform American education,” said Duncan. “I look forward to working with this year’s fellows as partners as we discuss how to recognize and reward teachers, professional advancement, high standards and other key issues.”

Florida is pleased that two of the part-time Ambassador Fellows are Florida educators. Adewale Alonge is an agriscience and science teacher at the Homestead Middle School in Miami. Jasmine Ulmer is a teacher for gifted students in grades 1-4 at Lake Butler Elementary in Union County. Adewale and Jasmine want to hear teachers’ insights about national education initiatives and want to take the opportunity they’ve been given to highlight voices and perspectives within the education community. They look forward to sharing those perspectives with as many people as possible.

Jasmine and Adewale look forward to hearing your thoughts. You can contact them at alongej@dadeschools.net or Jasmine.Ulmer@ed.gov.

Escambia County’s Hallmark Elementary: From an “F” to an “A”

“No excuses! Success is the only option.” So writes Dr. Sheree Cagle on Hallmark Elementary School’s Web site. This mission statement has been practiced daily since Dr. Cagle’s arrival at the school in 2005. The school received a grade of an “F” that year and remained at an “F” or “D” level for the next three years. According to Judy LaBounty, Elementary Resource teacher, the dedication of the highly trained teachers, the staff, and the students is what led to Hallmark’s “A” in 2009. “It took time, patience, a drive to succeed and a staff willing to go above and beyond to gain the knowledge and professional development necessary to take our children to the next level. It certainly didn’t happen overnight.” Hallmark currently has more students who are proficient in reading and math than ever in the history of the school.

Hallmark’s journey from an “F” to an “A” is an inspiring example of how a low performing school can dramatically turn around. Congratulations to Dr. Cagle, to the teachers and staff, and especially to the hard working Hallmark students on a job well-done.



• Curriculum Corner

Curriculum Corner is a new addition to the *Just for Teachers* newsletter highlighting the Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction and its content area specialists. The Bureau includes the offices of Healthy Schools, Humanities (Language Arts, Fine Arts, Social Studies and Gifted), Instructional Materials, Library Media Services, and Mathematics & Science. The Bureau's primary focus has been the implementation of Florida's Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. This month we are introducing Patty Ceci, Social Studies Curriculum Specialist. Patty began her new role with the Department in May.

Patty is an experienced high school social studies teacher having taught geography, American history, world history, and American government at Lincoln High School in Tallahassee. Most recently, she has served as an Instructional Materials Specialist with the Department. In addition, she brings valuable experience from the private sector having worked in technology sales and account management.

In her free time Patty's passion is still social studies and she enjoys any type of political, historical, economic, or geographic discussion! An avid reader, she is currently reading "Gertrude Bell, Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations" by Georgina Powell. She also loves to cook and garden.

Patty began working on two projects initially, including writing of the social studies course descriptions based on the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) and working with the Test Development Center on the 9-12 American History end of course exam. Her next projects include writing of the NGSSS glossary for social studies and writing of the social studies specifications for the state-adopted instructional materials.

Patty presented at the Florida Council for the Social Studies annual meeting on the "State of the State in Social Studies Education." A primary focus area for her will be the crisis we are facing in adolescent literacy. She would really like support from high school world history teachers since 9-12 World History is the most failed course in social studies. District social studies supervisors have a copy of her presentation or you may contact Patty directly for a copy.

For all of your Social Studies' answers, contact Patty at patty.ceci@fldoe.org or by phone at 850.245.0903.

*Florida DOE Social Studies Specialist **Patty Ceci** is pictured with Monroe County social studies teachers of the year Marianne Esposito, Melissa Quintana, and Eric Nelson at the Social Studies Annual Conference held in September.*



• News from Across the State

Thoughts from an Educator

One of my most enjoyable tasks is reading letters and essays from Florida teachers. Beginning this month, I would like to share these writings with you; each month an essay, poem, memoir or story will appear under “Thoughts from an Educator.” Please send your writing to justforteachers@fldoe.org.

This month’s essay comes from Arthur David Diamond, Westland Hialeah Senior High School Science Department Chair (Miami/Dade). Thank you, Arthur, for sharing your story.

My Favorite Teacher

It was the spring of 1973 when I started working on a grounds-keeping crew for the University of Florida. At that time I was assigned to the P. K. Yonge Laboratory School; raking leaves, marking the athletic field, and doing whatever it was that made the long balmy Gainesville days pass into memory.

I remember a young teacher, so kind with her students, so patient. As I worked beneath the trees outside her classroom, I watched as she instructed them, captivating them into learning. There was no air conditioning then, and her classroom windows were wide open revealing her every lesson, allowing the learning to flow out into the day like a song on the wind. Several times she would spy me there, and once offered me a drink of water and a few words of encouragement on a particularly hot afternoon. Imagine; I was an engineering major trimming the grass to pay for my tuition.

For that year, I looked forward to my duties at the school. I loved to watch as this teacher engaged all her students in learning, letting them interact and not minding that the classroom was not quiet. I would complete my assigned jobs, but try to stay in earshot of her classroom so that I could capture her every word. It was at that time I decided to change my major and become a teacher.

For many years after I graduated, I thought about this teacher, trying to emulate her in my own classroom. I walked around just as she did and many times, during my own lectures would find myself being swept back to that shady spot beneath the trees. I was told by coworkers turned lifelong friends that the teacher I so wanted to be like became the principal of the school, so I took time out of my teaching career to become an administrator. However, it was always the classroom that I longed for, and even with exemplary ratings I stunned my colleagues when I returned to “my children” and the challenge of the science lab.

I am entering my last year of DROP. As I leaf through the pages of my career--the photos, letters and cards, I still remember the teacher that motivated me, the grounds-keeper, to become someone special. When I was honored at the Teacher of the Year Breakfast, I thought about how much this timeless person changed my life. I do not know her name, I never did, and I am sure she does not know mine, but I feel certain she will remember me through this story. It is to her that I wish to say thank you for pointing me in my life’s direction, and showing me a career which has been rewarding and full. Out of all the countless children she must have taught, I too would like the opportunity to tell her that she was my favorite teacher.

Hispanic Heritage Month Events

Three outstanding Hispanic educators were honored by Governor Crist during a reception at the Governor's mansion October 13th. The Excellence in Education Award was given to these teachers for their contributions to education in Florida; each received an award check for \$1,500. The winners are pictured below.

Also pictured below are the two groups of students who were recognized for their outstanding podcasts. The podcast contest was open to all 4th through 12th grade students. The teachers of the winning groups were awarded a software package to be used in their classroom.



Left - Lhisa Almasky, Park Vista High School, with Commissioner Smith and Sheila Veatch, Liaison (Palm Beach County)



Right – Governor Crist and Renee Belvis, Dunedin Highland Middle (Pinellas County)



Left – Governor Crist and Maria Cabrera, Sea Gate Elementary (Collier County)

Right - Caitlyn Dunning, Kayla McCann and Maribe Munoz with their teacher Ms. Beth Woods and principal Ms. Jane Ashman (Marion County)



Below – Jessica Clark, Rachel Jennings, and Spencer Puentes with their teacher Mrs. Cindy Gray (Nassau County)



Marion County Schools Capture International Student Video Awards

Television production students in nine Marion County public schools recently won 33 awards in this year's International Student Media Festival. The annual competition, sponsored by the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, judges entries in Podcast, Live Action, Animation, Sequential Skills, Interactive Skills, Website, Photographic Essay and Single Photograph categories based on the use of on-screen talent, use of technology, quality, appropriateness and artistic/technical merit.

The Marion County public schools winning awards include:

- **Belleview High School** – one award in the Live Action category for *Best Defense*;
- **Dr. N.H. Jones Elementary** – four awards in the Live Action category, including a “Judges Favorite” for *Marion Therapeutic Riding Association*;
- **Dunnellon Middle School** – nine awards in the Live Action category, including “Best of Festival” for *Tallahassee Surprise* and five “Judges Favorite” winners;
- **Forest High School** – one award in the Live Action category for *Endurance*, a “Best of Festival” winner;
- **Harbour View Elementary** – two awards in the Live Action category for *Continents and Oceans* and *Responsibility*;
- **Howard Middle School** – five awards, including two in the Photographic Essay category, one in the Single Photograph category for *Dog's Eye View*, a “Judges Favorite,” and one each in the Sequential Skills and Live Action categories;
- **Lake Weir High School** – one award in the Live Action category for *Kick in the Budget*;
- **Osceola Middle School** – 11 awards, including seven in the Live Action category and four “Judges Favorite” winners in the Animation Category;
- **Vanguard High School** – one award in the Live Action category for *Foreclosure*.

For information about the International Student Media Festival, including a list of winners and participants, visit www.ismf.net.

Keep up with what your teaching colleagues are doing across the state by visiting <http://www.fldoe.org/JustForTeachers/jft-news.asp>. Would you like your events and photos included? Send them to justforteachers@fldoe.org.

• **Opportunities for You and Your Students**

Samsung's Four Seasons of Hope Essay Contest

It's your chance to improve your education experience. Students, teachers, and parents are encouraged to nominate their favorite Florida school with a simple essay. Enter your essay for a chance to win part of the \$1 million in prizes for your school. For full details visit http://www.fourseasonsofhope.com/us/4seasons_hope/education.jsp

International Education Week: Teaching Tips

International Education Week (IEW) is an opportunity to celebrate the benefits of international education and exchange worldwide. The dates for this year's IEW are November 16-20 and the theme is "Creating a Vision for a Better Future." During this year's IEW, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Education Network in coordination with the U.S. Department of Education will provide an opportunity for teachers across the Asia-Pacific region to exchange teaching tips for teacher professional development. For complete details visit [http://hrd.apec.org/index.php/International Education Week: Teaching Tips](http://hrd.apec.org/index.php/International_Education_Week_Teaching_Tips).

Nominate Students for Children's Week "Kids Only" Town Hall Meeting

The Children's Week "Kids Only" Town Hall Meeting provides a forum for students from across the state to pose poignant questions to the *Florida Children and Youth Cabinet* - www.flgov.com/youth_cabinet - about the status of important children's issues in Florida. The 20-member Cabinet chaired by Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp, is comprised of government officials, policy makers, and children's developmental and advocacy experts. The Cabinet will hear the viewpoints and questions from a twelve member Student Panel, which will be selected from a statewide pool of applicants.

The event is free, open to the public and takes place on Tuesday, April 13 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Tallahassee City Hall during the Children's Week "Children's Capital for a Day". The event will be filmed for statewide broadcast on *The Florida Channel*. To view a video of last year's town hall meeting, featuring a special appearance by Governor Charlie Crist, please visit www.childrensweek.org/townhallmeeting

To nominate a middle or high school student to participate on the 12-member student panel, please download Student Panel Application and send your completed applications to info@childrensweek.org applications should be postmarked for Monday, February 1, 2010. For more information about Children's Week and other civic education events and activities in your community, please visit our website at www.childrensweek.org or contact Statewide Coordinator Jason Zaborske at 850-251-7274 or e-mail info@childrensweek.org.

• Where's Megan?

Megan Allen, Florida's intrepid Teacher of the Year, was recently sighted at St. Leo College where she encouraged future teachers and generally wowed the audience. To read all about Megan's St. Leo presentation visit:

<http://www.saintleo.edu/SaintLeo/Templates/Inner.aspx?pid=4002&view=ViewArticle&articleId=17545>.

You can follow Megan's teacher of the year journey at www.redheadedteacher.com.

• Teacher Discounts



New! Aveda Offers Free Manicures to Teachers

Put your tired hands to rest with a FREE Stress Relieving Manicure during the month of November. Offer is good at any one of our four locations: Aveda Institute Orlando, Aveda Institute South Florida, Aveda Institute St. Petersburg and Aveda Institute Tallahassee. Call **877.283.3235** and use the discount code AIMAN to schedule an appointment. Remember, you must show your school ID Badge at time of checkout. To learn more about The Aveda Institutes visit <http://www.avedaflorida.com/ai/index.php>.

Amelia Island Thanks Teachers

Amelia Island Plantation wants to thank our Florida teachers by offering them a \$129* rate in a resort-view room with 50% off recreation - including Golf, Tennis, On-property Nature Tours, Bicycle Rentals and Youth Programs! Upgrade to a deluxe ocean-view room at no extra charge if available. To make a reservation, call 888.261.6162 and reference promo code "TEACH."

For more information on our resort, visit www.aipfl.com.

Wet 'n Wild Orlando Extended Until December 31, 2009!

Teacher and Staff Appreciation - In thanks to you, for all that you do, *Wet 'n Wild* would like you to enjoy SPLASHtacular savings. Receive a one day admission for up to 6 people \$20.09 each, almost \$25.00 savings off of the regular admission. [Coupon for the SPLASHtacular Savings](#) (PDF, 105KB). (Orlando)

For a complete list of current discounts visit <http://www.fldoe.org/justforteachers/discounts.asp>

