

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**GOVERNOR BUSH FOCUSES ON READING INITIATIVE WITH  
TEXTBOOK PUBLISHERS AND ANNOUNCES *READING FIRST* GRANTS**  
~~\$24.5 million Awarded to Florida Schools for Initial Reading First Grants~~

**NAPLES**-- Governor Jeb Bush today attended the American Association of Publishers School Division Annual meeting in Naples. He spoke to representatives from major instructional materials publishing companies and highlighted his statewide Just Read, Florida! initiative. Governor Bush commended the leadership of the five publishers who have committed resources statewide to provide development and professional training to Florida educators.

“Our goal of this reading initiative is that every child in Florida be able to read at or above their grade level by 2012,” said Governor Bush. “But this awesome task cannot be accomplished by our schools alone. “Our businesses, families and community organizations must all be involved if we hope to dramatically improve the reading proficiency of Florida’s students.”

The following publishing companies: Harcourt School Publishers, Houghton Mifflin Company, MacMillan/McGraw-Hill, Scott Foresman , and SRA/McGraw Hill have all committed to provide up to 100 hours of free professional development to Florida’s K-5 teachers on the building blocks of reading.

**Just Read, Florida!** prioritizes reading in Florida’s public schools and among all the community groups and volunteer organizations that support them. It is based on the latest reading research that includes emphasis on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

In addition, Governor Bush announced the first recipients of the *Reading First* grants. Twelve *Reading First* applications were awarded \$24.5 million to hire reading coaches, provide professional development, perform assessments and improve classroom libraries for grades K-3 in schools with low-performing students. The funding is available for six years, starting in the 2003-2004 school year (*see attached list for awardees and funding totals for Year 1*). These initial *Reading First* grants will serve 4,500 teachers and impact approximately 155,115 students in 208 schools in 21 districts.

“The response to **Just Read, Florida!** has been overwhelming and exciting. As I have traveled to schools and visited with teachers and students across the state, it is clear they know that being a successful reader is the first building block to lifelong learning,” said Governor Bush. “Through the reading coaches and *Reading First* grants, these schools will have the expertise and support they need to help students become successful and independent readers.”

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Twenty-nine applications were received for *Reading First* grants, the applications were reviewed by officials from the Department of Education, the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University, Project Central at the University of Central Florida and university professors. Each approved application passed a rigorous criteria of receiving at least 80 percent of the possible points in 12 evaluation categories in addition to a dozen fixed requirements. The grants provide resources to districts to hire reading coaches, provide professional development, and improve classroom libraries for grades K-3 schools with low-performing students. Coaches will serve as a stable resource for professional development, progress monitoring, and student data analysis leading to improvements in reading instruction and achievement.

The purpose of the *Reading First* grant is to assist Florida districts and schools to implement proven methods of scientifically based reading instruction in classrooms in order to prevent reading difficulties in grades K-3. This competitive sub-grant process ensures that Florida school districts meet the eligibility criteria prescribed by the *Reading First* federal legislation and Florida's state grant application.

The following school districts were awarded *Reading First* grants:

Broward County School District - \$3,539,400  
Duval County School District - \$2,108,900  
Jefferson County School District - \$126,900  
Leon County School District - \$810,000  
Pinellas County School District - \$3,556,600  
Polk County School District - \$4,204,300  
St. Lucie County School District - \$1,653,000  
Sarasota County School District - \$424,500  
Volusia County School District - \$1,220,000  
Northeast Florida Education Consortium \$1,385,800  
(Columbia, Monroe, Nassau, and Putnam school districts)  
Heartland Consortium - \$1,767,000  
(DeSoto, Glades, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee school districts)  
Southwest Florida Workforce Development Board- \$3,715,300  
(Charlotte, Collier, and Lee school districts)

“These school districts have set the standard for making reading a priority,” said Education Commissioner Jim Horne. “They have worked very hard to meet the requirements of Reading First grant so that children in these counties can benefit from reading coaches and improved classroom libraries.”

School districts not awarded a Reading First funding in this initial competition have an opportunity to resubmit their application in April for funding beginning summer 2003. Over \$12 million will be available to districts in April.

Florida received \$45.6 million federal *Reading First* funds, which will total over \$300 million in six years, to help reach Governor Bush's goal that every child read at or above grade level by 2012. For more information, visit [www.justreadflorida.com](http://www.justreadflorida.com) <<http://www.justreadflorida.com>>.

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