



Just for Parents

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Florida Students Make National and International Progress

As another year comes to a close, I want to thank Florida's teachers for their continued efforts to prepare students for success in their studies and in life. Recent data shows students are making greater learning gains and the achievement gap between student groups is narrowing.

In November, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores revealed Florida was among the top scoring states in the nation in 4th grade reading and the only state to have narrowed the achievement gap between White and African American students at both grades 4 and 8 in both reading and mathematics.

Florida's federal graduation rate also rose this year to a new level with 75.6 percent of students graduating from high school within four years. Florida's federal graduation rate has increased more than five percentage points since 2010-11.

Last week we announced that a record number of Florida high schools and combination schools earned an "A" this year, with 240 schools making the highest grade. The increase in the number of "A" schools came about even as the grading formula became more rigorous.

Florida could not have achieved such results without the thousands of dedicated teachers and parents who support and inspire our students. On behalf of the Florida Department of Education, I wish you a safe and happy holiday season.

Pam Stewart, Commissioner of Education

Updates

New Port Richey Grandfather Wins Parental Involvement Video Contest

To recognize November as Parental Involvement in Education month, the department hosted a video contest asking parents to show how students thrive when parents are engaged in their education. More than 40 Florida families submitted videos online and six finalist videos were posted on the department's Facebook page for voting.

The winning video featured Matt VanStratt, a New Port Richey grandfather who volunteers in his granddaughter's classroom and regularly mentors other students. To watch the contest-winning video, visit [Parental Involvement Video Contest Winner](#).

Stay Involved Through the Winter Break



Just because school is out for a couple weeks doesn't mean learning has to stop. Keep your kids learning with

educational tools and activities during the winter break.

Play games: Even board games and jigsaw puzzles involve mathematics, reading and problem-solving. Playing board games with your family can help children [focus and follow rules](#).

Take a walk: A simple walk around the block can hold all kinds of new discoveries. Talk about the different types of birds you see, the weather, why the leaves fall off the trees – the possibilities are endless. Visit the [Get Outdoors Florida!](#) website for some great outdoor activity tips.

Get creative: Get kids involved in cooking meals or making decorations. Both activities help kids learn new math skills such as measurement, as well as teaching them how to [read and follow directions](#).

Events

2014 Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!

January 13-17, 2014

With the support of the Florida Lottery, the Florida Department of Education's Just Read, Florida! Office promotes this weeklong recognition to help students strengthen their literacy skills and become better prepared for academic success.

With this year's theme, "Reading Accelerates Success," students are encouraged to read every day while making a connection between literacy and career options in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Want more information on how you can incorporate Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! activities in your home? Visit our [Volunteer/Parent Toolkit](#) webpage.

Five Tips to Keep Kids Learning During the Holidays

1. Model good reading habits by reading to or alongside your child, parents set the stage for children to become better readers.
2. Encourage your child to read new and challenging books, articles and magazines.
3. Establish a daily reading routine.
4. Encourage reading, writing and discussions among family members.
5. Be positive when talking with

Read Daily: Ask your child to read to you from the newspaper, a magazine or excerpts from their favorite book, and let your child see you reading. For more literacy tips, check out the newsletter's sidebar.

Volunteer or donate: Help your child to do a good deed by discussing what you can do and then doing it together. You may volunteer at a food pantry, plant a tree or pick up litter in a public place. Want to volunteer? To find opportunities near you, visit the [Volunteer Florida](#) website.

Prepare Kids to Go Back to School

Being out of school for a few weeks can throw off your family's schedule. Here are a few tips to help get them back on track.

Wake Up Early: Start waking the kids up at their normal school time several days before they go back, even if they stayed up late the night before. They will likely have no trouble going to bed on time on days when they woke up early.

Talk About School: Keep school at the forefront of your kids' minds by talking about it each day of the holiday break. Read books off your kids' reading lists and then ask them questions about the books.

Set Goals: As part of your family's New Year's resolutions, encourage your children to set some school-related goals, such as raising a math grade or reading one more book.

your child about their reading ability and skills.

6. The love of reading begins at home. Create a "home library" for your family to access.

7. Limit TV viewing by controlling the amount of time spent watching television.

8. Play word games with your child.

9. Expose children to different kinds of books, including novels, biographies and informational texts on interesting subjects.

10. Visit your local public library and help your child get a library card of their very own.

11. Take books in the car to read, rather than watching a DVD.

12. Create a "reading nook" in your home where your child can read.

13. Comment on new words your child hears on the radio or TV.

14. Play rhyming games during a car trip.

15. Select a "word of the day" to add to your child's growing vocabulary.

16. Write out opposite words on pieces of paper and have your child match them together.

For more tips, visit [Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!](#)

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