



# Just for Parents

This issue of *Just for Parents* focuses on strengthening family bonds during winter break through enriching activities. Also featured are a handful of New Year's traditions practiced by people of other countries. Engaging in some of these traditions is not only fun but also a good way to teach children about diversity and inclusion. Enjoy this special time with your loved ones and best wishes for a great new year.

*Sincerely,*

*Pam Stewart, Commissioner of Education*

## Make the Most of Winter Break!

Winter break is a great time to reconnect and center yourselves as a family. For many, it's a welcome break from homework, extracurricular activities, and busy schedules. Children today need "downtime" just as much as adults do. Here are a few fun, but enriching activities the whole family can take part in over winter break.

- **Gather around the dinner table** - The long nights of winter almost beg us to come together for warmth and companionship. Eating together is particularly special. Research shows that dinner conversation is the richest most powerful language experience of your child's life, even better than reading to children, in terms of building vocabulary. Telling stories around the table for family members old and young alike sparks curiosity and imagination. Telling stories about family history gives children a sense of place.



- **Volunteer** - This time of year is perfect for teaching children to give back to their community through volunteering. Food pantries and soup kitchens frequently need help. Visit [The United Way](#), [Salvation Army](#) and [VolunteerMatch](#) websites or call your local chapters to find volunteer opportunities near you. Consider volunteering together as a family.
- **Work on a project together** - Multi-step projects like building a birdhouse, creating mosaic stepping stones, or completing a jigsaw puzzle bring families together. Creative, educational projects like these can be enjoyed together by all ages.
- **Take a family field trip** - Visit fun places near your home, like a museum, zoo, or even a local historical landmark or factory.
- **Take an electronic field trip** - Electronic field trips give children a close-up view of fascinating places in the United States and around the world. Websites for the [National Parks Foundation](#) and the [Smithsonian Institution](#) include visually exhilarating, as well as educational, electronic field trips. Visit these together to share impressions.
- **PLAY!** - Turn on the radio and dance. Take walks, play Frisbee, or roller-skate. Get out of the house and get moving!



The Bureau of Family & Community Outreach offers the following services and programs to parents and guardians:

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**Bureau of Family & Community Outreach**

**(850) 245-0847**

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## New Year's Done Differently

For hundreds of years, people around the globe have cultivated traditions to bid the old year farewell and welcome in the new. Here in the South, our own tradition of eating black-eyed peas and greens for good luck is believed to have made its way to the United States in the 1730s. The peas, since they swell when cooked, are believed to symbolize prosperity; the greens, to symbolize money.

A fun way to share the cultures of the world with your child, while reinforcing the "inclusion" message, is to actually participate in some of these New Year traditions.



**Spain:** Twelve grapes are eaten at midnight on New Year's Eve; each grape guarantees a month of happiness.

**Japan:** A rope of straw is hung across the front of the house to ward off evil spirits and bring happiness and good luck.

**South Africa:** At midnight, church bells are rung and shots are fired to announce the onset of festivities.

**Thailand:** During the Buddhists' New Year, Songkran, people throw water at each other to symbolize purifying the soul and to serve as an offering for plentiful rain and prosperity in the days to come. Another Thailand tradition is for residents to tie strings around each other's wrists to show respect. A person may have as many as 25 or 30 strings on one wrist, each from a different person.

**Georgia (country):** The first person to come through the front door after midnight is believed to bring fortune for the following year.

**Philippines:** Eating fruits that are round is believed to bring good fortune.

**China:** People join in a huge parade led by a silk dragon, the Chinese symbol of strength. According to legend, the dragon hibernates most of the year, so people throw firecrackers to keep the dragon awake.

**Switzerland:** Dollops of whipped cream, symbolizing the richness of the year to come, are dropped on the floors (and allowed to remain there!)

## What's Next for Students Assessments?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will be fully implemented by school year 2014-2015. The student assessments, which are aligned to these new standards, will be ready at this time as well. By 2014-15, expect to see the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) transitioned to the CCSS assessment process for the subjects of English language arts and mathematics.

To stay abreast of the assessment development process, subscribe to receive email updates from the developers of these assessments—the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Visit [CCSS Assessments Listserv Subscription](#)