



## Florida Students Make National and International Progress

~ Teachers Key to Florida's Recent Improvements ~

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.

This 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 school professionals who call our state home. On behalf of the Florida Department of Education, I wish you a safe and happy holiday break.

**Pam Stewart, Commissioner of Education**

### Teacher Opportunities

#### Toshiba's ExploraVision Competition Open to K-12 Science Classrooms

ExploraVision, a competition sponsored by Toshiba, goes beyond the typical student science competition asking students to explore what it will take to bring their idea to reality. The contest requires sponsoring teachers to lead students as they work in groups of two to four, simulating real research and development.

Each teacher will guide his or her students as they pick a current technology, research it, envision what it might look like in 20 years, and describe the development steps, pros and cons, and obstacles. Past winners have envisioned technologies ranging from a hand-held food allergen detector to a new device to help people who have lost limbs regain movement in real time.

For additional contest details, visit [ExploraVision Competition](#).

#### 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. The video was submitted by Matt's daughter, Chasco Elementary School educator Kristin Parmenter. To watch the contest-winning video, visit [Parental Involvement Video Contest Winner](#).

### Educator Discounts

LEGOLAND® Florida offers free admission with a Florida Teacher Pass for current Florida K-12 teachers.

To receive your free Florida Teacher Pass, bring your most recent paystub, Florida photo ID and valid professional or temporary teaching certificate to the ticketing windows at the entrance to LEGOLAND® Florida. You must be present to receive your annual pass ID, as your photo is included on the ID card. For more information, visit [LEGOLAND Florida Teacher Pass](#).

### 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 classroom? Visit our [School/Educator Toolkit](#) webpage.

### Student Contests

#### National Center for State Courts' 2014 Essay Contest

The National Center for State Courts is hosting an essay contest on the importance of civics education. Students in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade are encouraged to submit an essay answering the question "What is civics education and why is it important?"

To learn more about the contest, visit [2014 Essay Contest](#).