

Just for Parents

Governor Scott's Historic K-12 Funding in "KEEP FLORIDA WORKING" Proposed Budget



With a number of exciting announcements in January, 2015 is off to a great start! This month, Governor Rick Scott began sharing his "KEEP FLORIDA WORKING" Budget proposal and it included a number of exciting education announcements. Last year, he invested a total of \$18.9 billion in K-12 education, which was the highest to that point. For the 2015-16 Fiscal Year, he is proposing to increase K-12 funding to a historic level of \$19.75 billion. This amounts to a \$239 per student increase over this school year and a \$50 increase from the previous record.

Some of the highlights include:

- \$20 million in new funding for Florida's 47 statewide technical centers.
- \$100 million for to improve facilities in charter schools across the state; this represents a \$25 million increase over the current year funding.
- \$23 million to expand Bright Futures to cover summer term courses to help students graduate and get into jobs as quickly as possible.
- \$5 million for personal learning scholarships for Florida's K-12 students with disabilities to ensure they have access to services they need to thrive.
- Elimination of the textbook taxes to put college students closer to their goal of graduating on time and realizing their dreams with less debt.

At current funding levels, Florida students rank 7th in the nation for K-12 achievement; our fourth graders are among the best readers in the world; and our students from low-income homes outperform all other states in the nation. I am confident that this investment will pay off for years to come as the students who benefit from the funding will be able to contribute greatly to Florida's economy once they enter the workforce.

I credit Governor Scott's commitment to job creation and overall economic growth for enabling us to have the additional funds to put toward education, and I am pleased to share that a recent announcement shows Florida remains on the right track. In December 2014, Florida businesses added 11,500 private-sector jobs and our statewide unemployment rate was 5.6 percent, the lowest since April 2008.

At the Department of Education, we work tirelessly to ensure Florida students receive a quality education so they have the skills they need to succeed in school and in life, and these statistics show that our commitment to education is working and make me hopeful that today's students will be qualified to pursue any career they wish.

As more details of the "KEEP FLORIDA WORKING" Budget are released, I look forward to sharing them with you.



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First Lady Ann Scott and Florida Students Celebrated Literacy in Florida Schools

First Lady Ann Scott kicked off her literacy tour in conjunction with 2015 Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! at Timber Creek High School in



Orlando on Jan. 26. The seventh annual observance of Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida! focuses on the impact literacy has in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). This year's theme was "Reading Accelerates Success."

"Reading skills are critical to success in school and in life," said Florida First Lady Ann Scott. "Reading has always been very important for me; as our girls were growing up, Rick and I made reading a part of our daily routine. Now, I am thrilled to share my passion for reading with my three young grandsons. I always look forward to CLW, and I hope that through this year's activities, I am able to inspire Florida students and families to find fun and adventure in the pages of a book."

The First Lady visited eight schools on her literacy tour:

- Timber Creek High School in Orlando
- Bay Meadows Elementary in Orlando
- Sea Gate Elementary in Naples
- Lamarque Elementary in North Port
- Westchase Elementary in Tampa
- Oak Grove Elementary in Tampa
- Audubon Elementary in Merritt Island
- Fishweir Elementary in Jacksonville

"Literacy is fundamental to lifelong success as it plays a critical role in both the classroom and the workplace," said Education Commissioner Pam Stewart. "Reading strengthens skills important to learning and broadens our knowledge of the world around us. I urge students to set aside time to read each day."

For more information about Just Read, Florida!, visit www.justreadflorida.com.

High School Graduation Rates Are At An 11-Year High

Last month, the Florida Department of Education released high school graduation rates and high school letter grades for the 2013-14 school year. The graduation rate reflects an 11-year high. Statewide, graduation rates increased to 76.1 percent, an increase of one-half a percent over last year and a rise of nearly 17 percentage points since 2003-04. Additionally, 71 percent of Florida high schools and combination high schools, a total of 368, earned top grades of an A or B, and 95 percent earned a C or higher.

The graduation rate measures the percentage of students who graduate within four years of their first enrollment in ninth grade. The rate is calculated for an adjusted cohort of students – a group of students on the same schedule to graduate – taking into account those who enter or exit the group.

It's important to note that the high school threshold for each letter grade was higher this year because State Board rule mandates that as more schools earn grades of A and B, the grading scale is adjusted upward to encourage continued improvement. Because 83 percent of high schools earned an A or B last year, the grading scale for high schools was adjusted upward for the 2013-14 school grades. Even with this higher bar, 55 schools improved their letter grade over the last year.

This news is a testament to Florida's hard-working teachers, principals, administrators and students. For more information, visit the FDOE www.fldoe.org.

January is Family Fit Lifestyle Month

January is an excellent time for families to begin establishing healthy lifestyle habits that lead to a lifelong commitment to wellness.

The best role models to teach children about living healthy are the adults in their lives.

Choosing nutritious foods and engaging in active indoor and outdoor activities is a great way to spend time with the whole family while promoting the importance of a healthier lifestyle. A family that gets fit together becomes a much healthier unit.

Children love to move, so, encourage them to play actively each day and limit the amount of screen time for the entire family. Active play for children can happen in short bursts of time and can be led by you or your child



inside, at a playground or in the yard.

Why is active play important?

Active play helps your child learn healthy habits. There are many health benefits of active play, such as:

- Active children are less likely to be overweight.
- Keeping your child active now helps lower the chance of developing chronic diseases like Type 2 diabetes.
- Activities like running and jumping rope help children learn movement skills to develop strong bones.

- Active play can also help the mind develop. Playing “pretend” lets kids be creative.
- Active children are more likely to be happy and feel good about themselves. Children feel proud after learning how to bounce a ball or ride a bike.

Discuss a family activity plan with your child’s physical education teacher.

Resources for Parents and Caregivers:

- [BAM! Body and Mind](#)
- [Be a healthy role model for children](#)
- [Healthiest Weight](#)
- [How much physical activity is needed?](#)
- [Get Outdoors Florida!](#)
- [Living Healthy in Florida](#)
- [Team Nutrition](#)

Stewart, committee to investigate standardized testing

Commissioner Pam Stewart recently announced an investigation of standardized testing in Florida’s public schools.

“At the Department of Education, we are committed to ensuring our education system has appropriate policies and procedures in place to help Florida’s students excel,” she said. “I am proud to lead these efforts, which I am confident will help us better understand students’ needs so we can better prepare them for college and careers.”

Commissioner Stewart will work closely with districts

to gather complete and accurate information on the tests being administered to meet federal, state and local requirements. Department staff will compile the information and analyze the data.

Findings will provide policy makers, district administrators, parents and teachers with information about the number of standardized tests and how each of the test results are used by the state, school boards and teachers. A primary purpose of the report is to increase transparency for parents about the use of standardized testing in Florida’s public schools.