



FROM THE COMMISSIONER'S DESK

May 2026

Teachers,

As we close out the 2025-26 school year, I want to recognize the incredible partnership that continues to drive Florida's success: teachers and parents working together to put students first. Florida's educators remain among the very best in the nation, and families across our state continue to play an essential role in supporting student learning and achievement.

This year, we saw firsthand what is possible when classrooms stay focused, families stay engaged and instruction remains grounded in academic rigor and strong support for every student. Together, we are ensuring Florida's students have the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive in safe, supportive learning environments.

Thank you for your dedication, your partnership and your unwavering commitment to the success of Florida's students.

Sincerely,
Anastasios Kamoutsas



END OF YEAR LETTER

2027 TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

I am thrilled to celebrate the 2027 Teacher of the Year Finalists, who were announced a few weeks ago. The finalists were chosen from more than 170,000 public school teachers. The winner will serve for one year as the Christa McAuliffe Ambassador for Education and will represent the Florida Department of Education and teachers throughout the state.

[Nicole Leon, Florida Charter School Alliance](#)

Nicole Leon is a sixth-grade literature teacher at True North Classical Academy, a charter school which is part of the Florida Charter School Alliance. Ms. Leon focuses not only on academic rigor but also on the development of character.

[Laurel Blackburn, School District of Lee County](#)

Laurel Blackburn serves as a regional math coach in Lee County, supporting 22 different schools. Ms. Blackburn has become a driving force for instructional excellence and a lifeline for early career teachers across the district.

[Sarah Twardy, Nassau County School District](#)

Sarah Twardy is the lead U.S. History and Government teacher at Fernandina Beach High School in Nassau County. Ms. Twardy's impact is reflected in student achievement, most notably through her role in delivering instruction that led to a 92% pass rate on the U.S. History End-of-Course exam, the highest in the school's history.

[Kyndall Brown, School District of Osceola County](#)

Kyndall Brown is an agriculture teacher at Harmony Middle School in Osceola County who brings innovation, leadership, and real-world relevance to her classroom. She designed and implemented a rigorous, standards-based agriscience curriculum for grades 6-8, impacting more than 200 students each year.

[Bree O'Donnell, Walton County School District](#)

Bree O'Donnell is a dedicated fourth-grade math and science teacher at Dune Lakes Elementary School in Walton County. She has been recognized not only for her excellence in the classroom but also for her strong leadership within her school and district.



COMMISSIONER'S SUMMIT

Each year, the Florida Department of Education hosts the Commissioner's Summit, which brings together Florida College System presidents, State University System presidents, and school district superintendents. This year's Summit focused on increasing campus safety and security.

Since 2018, Florida has implemented the most comprehensive and robust school safety measures in the nation. Under Governor DeSantis' leadership, Florida has invested more than \$3 billion to protect students, educators, and staff on campuses across the state.

At this year's Summit, Governor DeSantis signed House Bill 757 into law, expanding school safety measures at Florida's state colleges and universities. This legislation builds on the strong foundation Florida has set for school safety by extending critical protections via the Chris Hixson, Coach Aaron Feis and Coach Scott Beigel Guardian Program to state colleges and universities. The bill also ensures colleges and universities implement threat management teams, establish active assailant response plans, and conduct annual security risk assessments.

School safety requires constant vigilance, continued innovation, and an unwavering commitment to improvement.

HOUSE BILL 757

BILL SIGNINGS

On May 1, Governor Ron DeSantis signed Senate Bill (SB) 1296 and House Bill (HB) 1279 in Lee County. These bills put students first by removing barriers, rewarding excellence, and increasing transparency, while supporting teachers by ensuring teachers earn the right to serve as the collective bargaining representative through the trust and participation of educators.

- SB 1296 ensures teacher unions have the support of the teachers they are supposed to represent and fast-tracks salary increases which some unions have stalled.
- HB 1279 allows districts to provide immediate pay incentives to high-performing teachers who choose to teach in persistently low-performing schools without the burden of collective bargaining.

SENATE BILL 1296 AND HOUSE BILL 1279

RESILIENCY

As summer approaches, families, educators, and communities are encouraged to stay connected with the latest Resiliency Florida resources and supports. From professional learning opportunities to family-focused tools and student support resources, Resiliency Florida continues working to strengthen safe, supportive learning environments across the state.



Be sure to sign up for updates to receive important announcements, new resources and upcoming opportunities throughout the summer and into the new school year. Together, we can continue supporting the well-being and success of Florida's students, educators, and families.

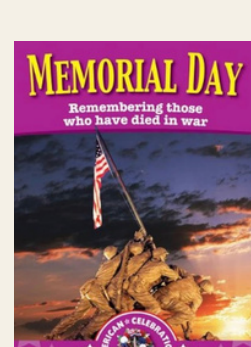
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SUGGESTED READING

Literacy skills developed during formative years are essential for students to succeed both academically and in life, and reading comprehension develops as students engage with interesting and meaningful books. Teachers and parents are encouraged to recommend this book to students.

Memorial Day **By Lynn Hamilton**

Memorial Day by Lynn Hamilton is a nonfiction text that explains the meaning and history of the holiday in the United States. The book describes how Americans honor soldiers who died while serving in the military. It explains the origins of the holiday after the Civil War as well as common traditions, including parades, ceremonies and decorating graves with flags and flowers. The book also teaches the importance of remembrance, patriotism and respect for those who sacrificed their lives for the country.



Recommended for grades 3-5.