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From: "DOEPressOffice" <DOEPressOffice@FLDOE.org>

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Subject: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RECOGNIZES THE TOP READING SCHOOL DISTRICTS ...

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**CONTACT:** DOE PRESS OFFICE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2009

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RECOGNIZES THE TOP READING SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN THE STATE*~ Thirteen school districts were honored during special What's Working in Reading program ~*

TALLAHASSEE – As part of Florida's ongoing Celebrate Literacy! week, 13 school districts were recognized last night by the Department of Education for being in the top 25 percent of all *Reading First* districts in the state. These districts produced exceptional reading results in 2008, increasing the percentage of students reading at or above grade level and successfully reducing the percentage of students with serious reading difficulties. The 13 school districts recognized were Bradford, Charlotte, Collier, DeSoto, Dixie, Escambia, Holmes, Lee, Marion, Okeechobee, Orange, Palm Beach and Taylor.

“As we celebrate Florida's first ever Literacy Week it's important that we both acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of all educators to instill a love of reading in our children,” said Commissioner of Education, Dr. Eric J. Smith. “These districts in particular have gone above and beyond to make literacy a priority for their students and they should be commended for such dedication.”

Florida *Reading First* serves 570 schools within 45 districts. *Reading First* schools are given a variety of resources and training through the federal *Reading First* program to help them achieve two goals: 1) increase the percentage of students reading at or above grade level; and 2) reduce the percentage of students with serious reading difficulties. *Reading First* grants assists Florida school districts implement proven methods of reading instruction to prevent reading difficulties in grades K-3.

The recognition event occurred last night during the Department's *What's Working in Reading* workshop. The *What's Working* series is an innovative program that provides a forum for education policy makers (such as district school superintendents; community college, state college, and state university system presidents; legislators and legislative staff; business stakeholders; State Board of Education members; and Department staff), to discuss current education trends and new methods for achieving greater academic success in Florida's teaching institutions.

“The districts recognized during What's Working in Reading are shining examples of what is possible when you combine solid reading instruction with dedicated teachers,” said Chancellor of Public Schools Dr. Frances Haithcock. “I'm truly proud of their efforts to improve the reading abilities of their students and I look forward to honoring even more districts next year.”

For more information about Florida's top *Reading First* Districts, visit http://www.fldoe.org/news/pdf/Data_Sheet_Reading_First_2009.pdf. For more information about the *What's Working* series, visit www.fldoe.org/whatworks.

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