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September 12, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: District School Superintendents

FROM: Dr. Frances Haithcock, Chancellor of Public Schools

SUBJECT: Department of Education's "Next Generation" Initiative: *Bright Beginnings*

Florida has made substantial progress in meeting its goal that all children should be performing at or above grade level in reading and mathematics by the end of third grade. On the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), the percent of third graders reading at or above grade level increased from 57-percent in 2001 to 72-percent in 2008 and in mathematics, from 52-percent to 76-percent. However, in 2008:

- 28% of our third graders were not reading on grade level and 24% were not performing on grade level in mathematics
- 44% of our third grade African American students and 34% of Hispanic students were not reading on grade level and 39% of African American students and 27% of Hispanic students were not performing on grade level in mathematics.

To meet the goal of 100% literacy and numeracy, we must strengthen our foundational programs in reading and mathematics provided to children during their "first five years of formal schooling;" beginning with Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) through third grade. In order to focus on these "first five years of formal schooling," the Department has created a "Next Generation" initiative called *Bright Beginnings* with the following objectives:

- Florida's standards, instruction, and assessments must be more rigorous.
- Standards, instruction, and assessment must be better aligned.
- Diagnostic data on each child's progress must be used by teachers to adjust/differentiate their instruction.
- Children must be provided effective interventions if they are not making adequate progress so that their learning can be accelerated and thereby "catch-up" and "keep up" with their peers.
- Teachers must have information about each child's prior learning/accomplishments so that transitions from grade-to-grade occur smoothly.

- Acceleration must be for **ALL** students. Children who are performing above grade-level must be provided with enhanced instruction so that their rate of learning can continue.
- Activities to implement the above must take place at the classroom, school, and district levels.
- Parents must be partners in this initiative and receive frequent information about their child's progress.

As described in the attachment, the *Bright Beginnings* initiative builds upon the "lessons learned" from response to instruction/intervention models, such as *Reading First*, that provide high quality initial instruction and appropriate interventions for struggling students. *Bright Beginnings* includes the development of:

- *Bright Beginnings* web site (www.brightbeginningsfl.org)
- Model Lesson Plans for VPK
- Model K-3 Math Lesson Plans (available in January 2009)
- K-3 Reading Assessments (available statewide in 2009-10)
- VPK Reading Assessments (available statewide in 2010-11)
- VPK – 3 Math Assessments (development scheduled for 2010-11)

It is important to implement this initiative as a main district goal. Please share this information with your staff. We look forward to working closely with you to ensure the continued success of Florida's youngest students.

FH/sgg

Attachments

- c: Assistant Superintendents for Curriculum and Instruction
 Elementary Education Supervisors
 Reading Supervisors
 Mathematics Supervisors
 Prekindergarten Contacts