

April  
2009

A Florida Coalition For Children Monthly Publication

# Kids Briefs

## Contents

- 1 Stimulus Dollars for Early Learning
- 1 Juvenile Crime in Florida
- 2 DCF Liability for Licensed Counselor's Actions
- 2 New Reading Technology
- 3 FCAT Writing Results
- 3 Foster Youth Leadership Academy
- 4 Sunshine State Standards for Language
- 4 DJJ Highlights Successes
- 4 Autism Task Force
- 5 Child Injury Prevention
- 5 Outstanding Middle Schools Recognized
- 6 Gubernatorial Appointments
- 6 CyberSafety Education
- 6 Exceptional Education Resource Manual
- 7 Teen Driving Safety
- 7 Trees for the Future

## STIMULUS DOLLARS FOR EARLY LEARNING

Florida's Early Learning Coalitions are in line to share \$105 million in federal economic stimulus funds over the next three years, state officials announced. The money will be distributed to the coalitions to provide additional child care opportunities for income-eligible parents and to improve the quality of child care services for children and families. The state has already received \$32 million of the money. More than three-quarters of the total funds will be directed to areas of Florida that have the greatest need, costs and demands for early learning and child care services. The funds are expected to produce an estimated 20,000 slots for children of low-income families in those areas. The state's waiting list for early learning programs currently has the names of about 58,000 children.

## JUVENILE CRIME IN FLORIDA

The number of juvenile arrests for crimes in Florida fell slightly last year, reversing the pattern among adult offenders. Florida law enforcement agencies reported a total of 118,306 juvenile arrests in 2008, down 1.6 percent from the previous year. Juveniles accounted for 10.3 percent of all arrests, a slight decline from the year before. The Uniform Crime Report statistics released by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement show that approximately three-quarters of all juvenile arrests involve boys – 74.1 percent of arrests, down minimally from 74.3 percent the previous year. The statistics indicated a decline in many violent crimes committed by juveniles, including murder, sex offenses, robbery, assault and intimidation. Among the offenses showing increases were burglary, larceny, kidnapping, extortion/blackmail and gambling. The crime report also showed a smaller number than the previous year in the number of children who were victims of domestic violence. In 2008, a total of 7,575 victims were the offender's children, down from 8,021 the previous year. Batterers' children represent about one in every 15 victims of domestic violence, according to the statistics. The FDLE crime reports, including breakdowns by the offenders' age and sex, are available online at [www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/getdoc/a324add7-5dd6-4201-9696-93bfd76bc36c/UCR-Home.aspx](http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/getdoc/a324add7-5dd6-4201-9696-93bfd76bc36c/UCR-Home.aspx).



A Florida Coalition For Children Monthly Publication

# Kids Briefs

## DCF LIABILITY FOR LICENSED COUNSELOR'S ACTIONS

The state cannot be required to pay damages to the parents of two minors who suffered from the malpractice of a substance abuse counselor, even though the counselor was improperly licensed by the state, a state appeals court ruled. However, the court was unsure enough in its findings that it referred the matter to the Florida Supreme Court for a final determination. The Department of Children and Families was sued by two sets of parents, the father of a 10-year-old boy who committed suicide because of what the court called the counselor's "professional negligence and outrageous misconduct," and the parents of a 16-year-old girl who suffered mental injuries and severe symptoms of parental alienation due to the counselor's misconduct. A jury awarded a large verdict for the parents, finding that DCF never should have licensed the counselor in the first place and then failed to act against him despite numerous complaints. The appeals court ruled that even if it is assumed that DCF was negligent in licensing the counselor and that proper handling of the license would have prevented the boy's suicide and the girl's psychological injuries, the agency owed no legal duty of care to individual members of the general public – in this case, the parents. The court acknowledged that case law is open to legitimate debate about the "general duty of care" legal doctrine, and asked the Florida Supreme Court to resolve essentially this question: Once the Legislature requires DCF to license and monitor the activities of substance abuse counselors, does the agency have a legal duty to a counselor's client when the department is negligent in issuing the license, the counselor harms a client and the client has no relationship with DCF greater than that of any other citizen? The full court opinion is available online at [www.2dca.org/opinions/Opinion\\_Pages/Opinion\\_Page\\_2009/April/April%2015,%202009/2D07-4978.pdf](http://www.2dca.org/opinions/Opinion_Pages/Opinion_Page_2009/April/April%2015,%202009/2D07-4978.pdf).

## NEW READING TECHNOLOGY

The Governor, Department of Education and AT&T unveiled a new statewide reading assessment system aimed at bolstering the





A Florida Coalition For Children Monthly Publication


# Kids Briefs

reading success of all Florida students. The new tool will allow teachers to quickly identify students' reading strengths and weaknesses using web-based technology. Using a \$525,000 grant from the AT&T Foundation, the department will provide laptop computers to kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms around the state to test the new technology. Using the laptops, teachers will conduct reading assessments in which students participate in a series of real-time exercises to evaluate their reading abilities while teachers log their performance. The system processes the results and gives the teacher immediate feedback to help target instruction. The announcement is part of the state's larger pilot system known as the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading, or FAIR, which will provide teachers at all grade levels with screening, progress monitoring and diagnostic information to help guide reading instruction.

## FCAT WRITING RESULTS

A greater percentage of Florida students are writing at or above grade level than ever before, according to results from the 2009 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) announced by the Department of Education. However, while the results showed improvements in grades 4 and 8, they also showed a slight decline among 10<sup>th</sup> graders compared to last year. The new results showed that the percent of students scored at or above grade level on the essay exam increased to 85 percent for grade 4 and 90 percent for grade 8, while declining slightly to 77 percent for grade 10. Reports by school or district and for the entire state are available online at <http://fcat.fldoe.org/fwinfopg.asp>.

## FOSTER YOUTH LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



One hundred Florida foster children will learn about leadership while having fun at the state's first-ever leadership camp, thanks to the efforts of the state's football star-turned-Rhodes scholar. The Department of Children & Families announced that it and the state Department of Military Affairs have joined with the Myron L. Rolle Foundation to host 50 boys and 50 girls from Florida's foster care system at the academy in June. The children, from ages 12 to 14, will



A Florida Coalition For Children Monthly Publication


# Kids Briefs

participate in wellness and leadership activities led by Myron Rolle, a recent Florida State University graduate and football star who will begin his studies in Oxford, England, as a Rhodes scholar this fall. The leadership academy will be free for the children who attend the event at Camp Blanding in Starke.

## SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS FOR LANGUAGE

Proposed revisions to the Sunshine State Standards for language arts are now available for public comment through an online review website hosted by the University of South Florida. The Department of Education is seeking public comment in order to ensure that the standards are clear, concise and accurate. Through June 26, interested citizens can review the standards, rate each of the benchmarks and provide feedback to the writers. In addition, the department will hold to public hearings on the student performance standards for language arts, June 9 in Sanford and June 11 in Tallahassee. The website for public comment is available at <http://etc.usf.edu/flstandards/index.html> or <http://tools.fcit.usf.edu/lasreview/>.

## DJJ HIGHLIGHTS SUCCESSES



Hoping to begin reversing several years of negative attention following the death of a teenager at a boot camp, the Department of Juvenile Justice staged DJJ Youth Success Week. During the week, DJJ leadership highlighted success stories of youth in the department's care, including a Gadsden County girl who turned her life around and was recently named Miss North Florida USA 2010. The department held events in cities across the state while trumpeting successes including Florida's lowest juvenile arrest rate on record, a 93 percent success rate with at-risk youth who attend prevention programs by keeping them out of the juvenile justice system, and a significant decline in the number of youth who are assigned to residential commitment programs for treatment. DJJ Secretary Frank Peterman noted, "The best way to reduce juvenile crime is to prevent it, and keep kids from entering the juvenile justice system in the first place."



A Florida Coalition For Children Monthly Publication

# Kids Briefs


## AUTISM TASK FORCE

With World Autism Awareness Day as his backdrop, Governor Charlie Crist signed an executive order extending the existence of Florida's Task Force on Autism Spectrum Disorders until 2011. The Governor was joined at a signing ceremony by task force Co-Chairman Dan Marino, an NFL Hall of Fame quarterback and the father of a son with autism. The executive order directs the task force to prepare a second annual report to the Governor no later than March 20, 2010, to follow up on the 2009 annual report already submitted. Without the extension, the task force would have gone out of existence on June 30. The Governor also pointed out that as of April 1, legislation enacted last year now requires group health insurance policies to cover screening and therapies for autism.

## CHILD INJURY PREVENTION

With an average of 16 Florida children suffering unintentional injuries each day, the state Department of Health and Safe Kids Florida issued a warning for parents and caregivers to pay particular attention to safety hazards as the school year ends and children have more free time for outdoor activities. The department said some 444 Florida children age 14 and under died of unintentional injuries in 2007, while another 6,000 were hospitalized because of unintentional injuries. The department said many of the injuries can be prevented if parents and caregivers take the right preventive actions. The department noted that 29 of Florida's 67 counties have a Safe Kids chapter or coalition, and those counties have a lower unintentional injury rate than counties without such a presence – 9.6 injuries per 100,000 children, compared to 13.6 injuries. More information is available at the department's Office of Injury Prevention website, [www.doh.state.fl.us/injury](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/injury).

## OUTSTANDING MIDDLE SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED



Two Florida middle schools that excel in responding to the needs and interests of young adolescents were honored for their selection into the 2008-09 Schools to Watch program. The distinction recognizes the schools' commitment to academic excellence and student development. Stonewall Jackson Middle School in Orlando and



A Florida Coalition For Children Monthly Publication


# Kids Briefs

Jeaga Middle School in West Palm Beach will be showcased nationally during the annual Schools to Watch Conference in Washington in June. The schools were selected by state leaders for their academic excellence, responsiveness to the needs and interests of their students and commitment to helping all students achieve at high levels.

## GUBERNATORIAL APPOINTMENTS

Governor Charlie Crist made numerous appointments to panels involved in children's issues. The appointments include: **Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County:** Gregory Langowski of Jupiter, executive director of the Republican Party of Palm Beach County; **Children's Services Council of Okeechobee County:** Elizabeth Maxwell of Okeechobee, an attorney with Maxwell and Maxwell, P.A.; Lydia Wasson of Okeechobee, a retired nurse; Melisa Eddings of Okeechobee, deputy city clerk, and Cheryl Zrioka of Okeechobee, assistant branch manager with Seacoast National Bank; **Charter School Review Panel:** Kimberly "Kym" Elder of Nokomis, executive director and founder of Island Village Montessori Charter School; Sherry Hage of Fort Lauderdale, vice president of education for Charter Schools USA, and Dr. Tim Kitts of Lynn Haven, principal of Bay Haven Charter Academy; **Tobacco Education and Use Prevention Advisory Council:** Jeffrey Cece of Tallahassee, program analyst with the Governor's Office of Drug Control.

## CYBERSAFETY EDUCATION



The CyberSafety Education program conducted by the Florida Attorney General's Office expanded rapidly this school year, passing more than 300,000 students served less than three months after surpassing the 100,000 mark. The program is an interactive 50-minute presentation that combines real-life stories and examples to help Florida's middle and high school students identify ways they could be victimized by online predators. Last fall the Attorney General's Office joined forces with the Florida Association of School Resource Officers to help bring the CyberSafety Education program to more students. As a result, officers have completed more than 700 – up from just 250 presentations as of January.



A Florida Coalition For Children Monthly Publication

# Kids Briefs


## EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATION RESOURCE MANUAL

The state's Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services has released an update of its *Resource Manual for the Development and Evaluation of Special Programs*, providing revised rules governing special programs. The 343-page publication – designed to help parents, teachers, school administrators and others establish and improve instructional programs to meet community needs – is available online at [www.fl DOE.org/ese/pdf/1b-stats.pdf](http://www.fl DOE.org/ese/pdf/1b-stats.pdf). Hard copies can be obtained from the Department of Education, most easily by emailing [cicbiscs@fldoe.org](mailto:cicbiscs@fldoe.org).

## TEEN DRIVING SAFETY

With an eye on high school prom and graduation festivities, the Florida Highway Patrol encouraged teens and their parents to include a safe driving plan and options as part of their party planning. Armed with a gubernatorial proclamation of Teenage Safe Driving Awareness Week, the state encouraged teens and their parents to register emergency contact information online at [www.flhsmv.gov/eci](http://www.flhsmv.gov/eci), which will enable law enforcement officers to find designated contacts in case of an emergency. The Highway Patrol also reminded teens that Florida law enforcement will maintain a zero tolerance policy for drunk drivers, no matter the time of year or the driver's age.

## TREES FOR THE FUTURE



Florida officials helped a renowned youth-oriented program celebrate its centennial in the state, with Attorney General Bill McCollum joined more than 100 4-H members from across Florida at a tree planting ceremony at the Capitol. Florida 4-H is a strong youth development program, through which more than 263,000 Florida children and almost 12,000 volunteers have participated in hands-on learning activities geared toward helping youth become contributing, productive, self-directed members of society. The tree planting was part of 4-H's "Million Tree Project," which aims to plant 1 million trees across North America to improve the environment. Also participating in the event were representatives from several environmental and conservation organizations.

