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Kids Briefs

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VPK READINESS RESULTS

More than 140,000 Florida kindergarteners are better prepared to succeed in the classroom as a result of the state's voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) program, according to the state Department of Education and the Agency for Workforce Innovation, which administers the program. According to a report on 2007-08 VPK readiness rates, 54 percent of students who completed Florida's VPK program last year demonstrated overall classroom readiness, compared to 42 percent readiness among students who did not attend VPK. The develop the readiness rates, VPK providers are rated on how well their students performed in the three key early learning areas of alphabet recognition, sound recognition and classroom readiness. Details on the performance of specific providers are available online at

<https://vpk.fldoe.org/InfoPages/ReportCriteria.aspx>.

DCF SOUTH FLORIDA LEADERSHIP

A veteran fighter on behalf of foster children is the new regional director in South Florida for the Department of Children and Families. DCF Secretary George Sheldon appointed Jacquetta (Jacqui) B. Colyer as the new boss in the agency's Southern Region, which serves Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. Colyer will oversee the programs and operations in a culturally diverse area of about 2.4 million. Colyer is a veteran of more than a quarter-century in social services, and before joining DCF she helped improve outcomes and opportunities for foster care children by improving adoptions and permanency initiatives for Our Kids, Inc. According to the DCF announcement, Colyer helped that agency develop innovative programs and strategies to reduce the number of children removed from their homes by implementing intensive diversion and prevention programs. Colyer also previously helped develop literacy programs. She served as a member of the Our Kids board and has extensive knowledge of the community-based care approach to child welfare adopted throughout the state.



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CHILDREN'S WEEK

Community events across the state will highlight Children's Week festivities, culminating in Tallahassee with activities at the Capitol, including the yearly "Hanging of the Hands" on March 29 and Children's Capitol for a Day on March 31. The event is held during the legislative session each year to bring a sharp focus to children's issues. The week also includes a meeting of the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet, which is chaired by Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp. More information on the week's events, in both local communities and Tallahassee, is available online at www.childrensweek.org.

TEEN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Attorney General Bill McCollum joined the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the family of a dating violence victim to promote National Teen Dating Violence Prevention Week. The group teamed up to sponsor a class presentation to Tallahassee high school students in memory of Tiffany Barwick, an Ocala teen who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend. The girl's parents spoke about the benefits of a 2008 state law that provides the same rights and remedies to victims of dating violence that are available to victims of domestic violence. According to the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, teen dating violence affects as many as 30 percent of teenagers, with most of the violence committed against girls. Barwick was 19 when she and a 22-year-old male friend were shot to death in 2007, about a month after she broke up with her 21-year-old former boyfriend.

MINORITIES IN JUVENILE SYSTEM



The state Department of Juvenile Justice hosted a community forum and training session in the Miami area to explore the issue of how minorities are over-represented in Florida's juvenile justice system. The training session was aimed toward government agencies, including schools, prosecutors, public defenders, police, judges and probation officers. The community forum focused on parents, clergy, youth and others with a vested interest in communities with high numbers of juvenile delinquency referrals. Juvenile Justice Secretary



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Frank Peterman noted that if the state cannot find solutions to the over-representation problem, “we will continue to spend millions on youth in the juvenile justice system and millions more as they move into the adult correctional system.” The department is conducting training and community forums in the seven Florida counties that have the highest number of juvenile arrests: Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Orange and Duval.

IMMUNIZATION SUMMIT CANCELED

The state’s budget problems claimed another victim when the state Department of Health was forced to cancel its 2009 Immunization Summit, which had been scheduled for early May in Tampa. The theme of the event was to have been “Immunizations Across the Lifespan,” and the Bureau of Immunization urged interested parties to continue working to protect Florida’s infants, children, adolescents and adults against diseases that can be prevented by vaccines. The bureau held out hope that summit can be rescheduled, and said it would post any updated information on its web page at www.ImmunizeFlorida.org.

CHILDREN’S CABINET ANNUAL REPORT

The Children and Youth Cabinet, created by Governor Charlie Crist to place a greater emphasis on policy issues related to Florida’s children, issued its 2008 Annual Report. The report provides an update on the panel’s activities and includes a strategic plan to guide the communications activities of the Children’s Cabinet. The report includes three recommendations: legislative funding to provide more staff for the panel; legislative funding to implement a data and information sharing system; and improvements to the KidCare program that would enable the state to maximize its federal funding allocation. A copy of the annual report is available online at www.flgov.com/pdfs/ChildAdvocacy/finalcycannualreport2008.pdf.






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EARLY LEARNING COALITION APPOINTMENTS

Governor Charlie Crist appointed or reappointed individuals to 16 early learning coalitions around the state. Named by the Governor were:

Early Learning Coalition of the Big Bend Region, Inc.: Rodney Reams of Tallahassee, managing member of Reams and Reams Certified Public Accountants; **Early Learning Coalition of Charlotte, Desoto, Highlands, and Hardee Counties:** Darlene Phipers of Lake Placid, vice president of Happiness Farms Inc.; **Early Learning Coalition of Duval, Inc.:** Howard Korman of Jacksonville, chief executive officer of Jacksonville Greyhound Racing; **Early Learning Coalition of Florida's Gateway, Inc.:** David Mullis of Live Oak, a retiree; **Early Learning Coalition of Hillsborough County, Inc.:** Angelette Aviles of Tampa, vice president of America's Marketing and Graphics; **Early Learning Coalition of Marion County:** Ayesha Fuhr of Ocala, vice president of DECCA; **Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc.:** Gerald Schwartz of Miami Beach, partner with Beloff and Schwartz; **Early Learning Coalition of Okaloosa and Walton Counties:** Elizabeth "Beth" Brant of Baker, an environmental engineer with Polyengineering Inc.; **Early Learning Coalition of Orange County:** Linda Landman Gonzalez of Orlando, vice president of community relations and governmental affairs for the Orlando Magic; **Early Learning Coalition of Palm Beach County, Inc.:** Christina Worley of Palm Beach, managing member of Castle Wealth Management; **Early Learning Coalition of Pasco and Hernando Counties, Inc.:** James Cook of Odessa, owner of Component General Inc.; **Early Learning Coalition of Polk County:** James "Jim" Rhodes of Lakeland, retired vice president of human relations and compliance for Publix Supermarkets; **Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County:** Chris Kofler of Sarasota, president of Unisource Group; **Early Learning Coalition of Southwest Florida:** Donice Dawson of Naples, vice president of American Momentum; **Early Learning Coalition of St. Lucie County, Inc.:** Michelle Miller-Morris, 42, of Fort Pierce, owner of Miller Insurance Inc.; **Early Learning Coalition of Volusia and Flagler Counties:** Andrew Dance of Palm Coast, principal with Andrew S. Dance and Associates, and Ann Williams of Port Orange, vice president of BW Gaskets Inc.






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OTHER GUBERNATORIAL APPOINTMENTS

Governor Crist made the following appointments to other boards and councils around the state: **Children's Services Council of St. Lucie County:** Patricia M. Alley of Fort Pierce, executive vice president of Riverside National Bank; **Children's Services Council of Broward County:** Samuel F. Morrison of Fort Lauderdale, retired director of the Broward County Library; **Children's Board of Hillsborough County:** John G. Evon III of Apollo Beach, sales manager with Ward Oil Company; Valerie H. Goddard of Tampa, president and chief executive officer of Child Care Solutions Unlimited; Christopher E. Brown of Brandon, an attorney with the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office; Robert "Pete" Edwards of Tampa, a retiree, and Susan P. Schneider of Tampa, a school psychologist with Hillsborough County Public Schools; **Children's Services Council of Martin County:** Anthony D. George Jr. of Stuart, owner of Anthony D. George Jr. P.A.; Elmira R. Gainey of Stuart, a Realtor with Coldwell Banker; John M. Lass of Palm City, president and chief executive officer of YMCA of the Treasure Coast; Robert P. Ranieri of Palm City, president of JJRR Inc., and Judith J. Weber of Stuart, president of Nina Haven Charitable Foundation.

DJJ CHAPLAINS HELP AT-RISK KIDS



The Department of Juvenile Justice launched what it called a "groundbreaking" initiative to connect local faith representatives with at-risk youth and their families, in order to help bridge the youths' transition out of the juvenile justice system and into a better future. The Volunteer Chaplaincy Program, run through the department's Faith and Community Network, includes all faiths and is voluntary for the children and parents. The intent of the program is to ensure that every juvenile and family has access to a chaplain, who can offer pastoral care and counseling during times of crisis and support the success of the juveniles as they exit the system. The director of the department's Faith and Community Partnerships said the goal is to "put hope in a parent's heart and a sense of purpose in a child's life."



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NEW CMS PROVIDER LISTING

Children's Medical Services has created a new online Provider Management Site containing a listing of health care providers specially qualified to meet the unique needs of children with special health care needs. The site allows parents and other members of the public to search for a specific CMS-approved provider by name or find a listing of CMS-approved providers available by specialty and by county. Health care providers will be able to submit electronic applications to participate in the listing, and existing CMS-approved providers will be given access to the system as they come up for renewal. The new website is available at www.cmskidsproviders.com.

COMMENT ON EARLY STEPS POLICIES

Florida's Early Steps State Office is taking public comments on proposed policies and the annual renewal application for funds under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The proposed policies and the application will be available for public review online at www.cms-kids.com/resources/es_policy/proposed_policy.htm through April 30, and a 30-day period for public comments ends April 15. Comments will be accepted from the general public, including parents of infants and toddlers with disabilities, providers of services, advocacy groups and organizations, and other stakeholders in the state. Public meetings on the policies and application have been scheduled for April 6 in Fort Lauderdale, April 7 in Orlando and April 8 in Tallahassee.

DROPOUT PREVENTION EFFORT

The chairman of the State Board of Education will serve on a national task force aimed at prevent children from dropping out of school. T. Willard Fair was selected by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) to serve on the 17-member panel, which will study and recommend innovative policy and partnership solutions to the nation's dropout problem. The study group was formed in partnership with Communities in Schools, the nation's largest dropout prevention organization, and will study the role schools, communities, families and business can play in supporting students to stay in school. The panel will issue a report at the NASBE conference in October.





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YOUTH ANTI-DRINKING VIDEO CONTEST

Florida teens as young as 14 were invited to submit videos to YouTube as part of a state-sponsored contest on why they choose not to drink alcohol this Spring Break. The state Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco launched the video contest, called “Why Not?”, asking so-called Generation Y’ers to submit entries to the popular video-sharing YouTube online network. The campaign, aimed at 14- to 20-year-olds, used no taxpayer money and relied on existing communications tools to raise awareness of teen anti-drinking measures. Youths throughout the country could submit 30-second videos, and gift cards were to be awarded to the winners, who would also get their videos posted on the Department of Business and Professional Regulation website. The prizes we made possible through partnerships with the Florida Retail Federation, Charmer Sunbelt Group and Tri-Eagle Sales.

ID CARDS FOR CHILDREN

The state’s driver’s license agency has begun a new safety initiative for children, using its mobile units to bring identification cards directly to children. The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles is bringing its Florida Licensing on Wheels units, or “FLOW mobiles,” to locations where children might gather. It launched the effort at a large car and truck show in Jacksonville. The FLOW mobiles are equipped with the technology and ability to bring services directly to customers. The vehicles are typically used to provide a convenient method to renew a driver’s license, change a license name or address or buy a specialty license plate. However, the vehicles will now offer Emergency Contact Information registration and ID cards for children age 5 and older. More information on the mobile ID card system is available at the department’s website, www.flhsmv.gov.

ACCURATE CENSUS SOUGHT

Concerned about segments of the population that historically have had “a low response rate,” including children, Governor Charlie Crist signed an executive order designed to ensure that all Floridians are properly





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counted in the 2010 Census. The stakes are large, since the Census count affects everything from Florida's number of seats in Congress to the state's share of federal funding. The executive order creates the statewide 2010 Sunshine Census Complete Count Committee, a group of 45 Floridians representing a range of community-based and faith-based organizations, local governments, media and advertising groups and businesses. A Governor's Office press release said the committee will focus on reaching historically undercounted population groups, specifically citing African-Americans, migrant workers, Hispanics, immigrants, children, Asian-Americans and young adult males.

COUNCIL ISSUES REPORT

The state's Council on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys issued its 2008 annual report, examining some of the factors it believes impact the conditions of the social status of African-American males. The report provides a foundation for further research into key issues affecting the education, health and economics of black men and boys. One of the report's recommendations is that smaller local councils be created in each Florida county to establish a network for communication, education and action. The council, which is housed in the Attorney General's Office, was created by the Legislature in 2006 to study the conditions affecting black men and boys and propose ways to ease such problems as homicide rates, disparate income levels, health issues and school performance. The annual report is available online at www.cssbmb.com.

PARTNERS IN EDUCATION CONFERENCE



As part of its efforts to involve the entire community in children's education, the state Department of Education is co-sponsoring a Florida Partners in Education Conference in Daytona Beach from April 15-17. The conference seeks all district, school and community personnel who are interested in enhancing community involvement in education. The conference will feature workshops and general sessions with nationally known speakers and top Florida educators. The department is partnering with the Florida Association of Partners



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in Education to host the event. More information and registration for the conference is available online at www.flpie.net.

KIDS DENTAL CARE

The state Department of Health joined the American and Florida dental associations to emphasize the importance of dental care for youngsters during National Children's Dental Health Month in February. Dr. Joseph Chiaro, deputy secretary of Children's Medical Services, said the need to improve children's dental care is one of the Health Department's priorities, noting that oral health can affect many other health conditions including osteoporosis, diabetes, pre-term or low-birth-weight babies, and stroke. The department recommended that children and their parents focus on the use of fluoride to strengthen teeth, sealants to protect deep pits and grooves from decay, daily oral hygiene, good diet and regular dental checkups for children.



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