



# Florida's Charter Schools

## Governor Crist Announces New Math and Science Initiative

### FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY AWARDED GRANT FOR MATH AND SCIENCE CENTER

Governor Charlie Crist has announced the formation of a bold initiative designed to increase math and science achievement in Florida schools. This new initiative creates the Florida Center for Research in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and the establishment of the Office for Math and Science in the Department of Education. As part of Governor Crist's announcement, he honored Florida State University as the award recipient to oversee the new research center.

"The time is right for increasing our expectations for students in both math and science," said Governor Crist. "Florida is no longer competing only with other states, but in a global arena. We must equip students with knowledge and skills so they can successfully compete with their peers – both nationally and internationally. We are pleased that Florida State University will lead us in this important endeavor."

Joining him at the press conference were Congressman Allen Boyd, State Board of Education member Donna Callaway, Education Commissioner Jeanine Blomberg, Florida State University President T.K. Wetherell, Florida State University College of Education Associate Professor Laura Hassler Lang, Space Florida President Steve Kohler, K-12 Public Schools Chancellor Cheri Pierson Yecke and State University System Chancellor Mark Rosenberg.

"Florida State University offered a proposal with concrete objectives and demonstrated an understanding that, while academic research is important, the application of research findings in our schools is a key component of success," said Commissioner Blomberg. "This center will become a national leader in research and outreach. Governor Crist's assessment is correct – we have to act quickly to ensure that Florida's students are to remain competitive globally."

Funded by the Florida Legislature with a \$2 million grant, the Florida Center for Research in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics will conduct research and use these research-based findings to support the Office for Math and Science in the Department of Education. The center will be led by Sir Harold Kroto, co-recipient of the 1996 Nobel Prize in Chemistry and an ardent advocate for K-12 science education worldwide. Florida State University will hire three to six nationally and internationally renowned math and science faculty members. The grant was awarded to Florida State University following a competitive bid process.

"We are honored to be selected for Florida's new math and science education research center. Preparing the future workforce has been a strong and expanding focus of the university's academic and research programs and its K-12 outreach initiatives," said President Wetherell.

*(see Math and Science Initiative—page 2)*

## Jeanine Blomberg Named Interim Education Commissioner

By unanimous vote, the State Board of Education appointed Jeanine Blomberg as Interim Commissioner of Education effective March 1, 2007. John L. Winn retired as Commissioner on February 28.

Commissioner Blomberg, 62, began her career at the Department of Education in 1976. Currently, Blomberg formally served as the Chief of Staff for the Department. During her career, Blomberg has served as the Deputy Commissioner for Accountability, Research and Measurement and the Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Operations. She has extensive experience in education policy, analysis and research, and is a recognized authority on public education funding and business management practices. Blomberg has a long and distinguished record of working effectively with Florida's education community. Blomberg holds a bachelor's degree in business and is a certified public manager.

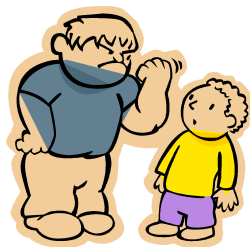
## School Choice Parent Advisory Council

In an effort to become more responsive to the issues and concerns of parents and communities as they relate to school choice initiatives in Florida, the Florida Department of Education Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice is forming a statewide parental choice advisory council. While Florida continues to lead the nation in school choice options, there is still much work to be done. In order to have a well-represented statewide group, the Department is seeking assistance from school districts to gather nominations for parents to serve on this council. We are looking for parents that are actively involved in the local schools and communities, and who would be willing to serve on this statewide forum to openly discuss issues as they relate to education and school choice. If you have any questions, please contact Cyndi Holleman at (850) 245-0502 or e-mail her at [Cyndi.Holleman@fldoe.org](mailto:Cyndi.Holleman@fldoe.org).

## Florida's Second Annual Bullying Prevention Conference

APRIL 17-18, 2007  
WYNDHAM ORLANDO RESORT

Florida's Second Annual Bullying Prevention Conference, sponsored by the Florida Department of Education, Office of Safe Schools, Safe and Drug-Free Schools, will be held April 17-18 to raise awareness and provide prevention information and tools about bullying.



Prevention specialists, school guidance counselors, teachers, principals, Safe and Drug-Free Schools Coordinators, school health educators, school psychologists/social workers, School Resource Officers (SROs)/law enforcement, staff development directors, etc., are encouraged to attend. To register, visit [www.gnahec.org](http://www.gnahec.org).

## 2007 Just Read, Florida! K-12 Leadership Conference

AUGUST 5 - 8, 2007  
ROSEN SHINGLE CREEK RESORT  
ORLANDO, FLA.

This year's conference offers a variety of opportunities for educators and administrators. More than 300 concurrent

sessions will be geared toward providing essential information to school leadership in the area of reading and literacy. There will be numerous sessions presented by fellow principals, reading coaches, and district leaders, giving you the opportunity to hear about the great literacy initiatives taking place in schools throughout our state. Go to [www.justreadflorida.com/conference](http://www.justreadflorida.com/conference) to learn more or register today!



## MATH AND SCIENCE INITIATIVE

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"This research center team of renowned scientists, researchers and educators will have a common goal to improve teaching and learning in science, mathematics and technology and prepare students for higher education and rewarding careers in the 21st century."

"The creation of such a center is a farsighted initiative for the state of Florida, especially at this time when science and technology are so important to socio-economic and sustainability issues. It is vital that at this time when not enough young people are opting for mathematics and the sciences, new approaches to education are vital," said Kroto. "The Florida Center for Research in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics will bring together a cohort of young and imaginative people committed to new approaches in education, especially as the amazing new communication technologies such as the Internet offer totally new ways of making educational material available."

The Office for Math and Science will oversee the development and implementation of new world-class math and science standards, develop and deliver professional development, and coordinate all state and federally funded programs in these subject areas. The Center will support the Department of Education's efforts to increase the rigor and relevance of secondary programs to increase the number of students who graduate prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce.

"Much like the space race of the last century, we are now in an education race. Other nations, China and India in particular, want to supplant America as the global space leader. This new center will ensure a workforce proficient in math and science, allowing us to maintain our lead," said Space Florida President Steve Kohler. For more information please contact:

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## Student Spotlight

### A STUDENT FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF "AT RISK" CHARTER SCHOOLS

#### SIATech of Jacksonville First Scholarship Recipient

We are pleased to announce that **Alison Bacon** was awarded a full academic scholarship under the **Take Stock in Children** scholarship program. She will be attending FCCJ for the first 2 years and UNF for the last two. Alison is our schools first academic scholarship recipient.

The three executive's from Communities in Schools that interviewed Alison for the scholarship program indicated how impressed they were with her passion and courage to persevere.

Alison is currently working at Mathew Gilbert Middle School with the Team-up Program. Her primary duties are with the school yearbook staff. This position allows Alison to utilize her academic and technical skills acquired from SIATech Charter High School at Jacksonville Job Corps.

Submitted by: **Michael LaRoche**, Site Leader/Principal, SIATech @ Jacksonville Job Corps, Jacksonville, FL

## Charter school intends rounded education to start in library dome

### EMPHASIS ON THE LIBRARY BACKS THE CURRICULUM, THE PRINCIPAL SAYS.

By Deirdre Conner, The Times-Union

PALATKA - By Tuesday afternoon, drivers could see it even before rounding the bend.

Crop circles? Circus tents? Government research project?

None of the above. Just an experiment in architecture by Putnam County's only charter school.

When complete, The Children's Reading Center Charter School will be one of just two schools in Florida to use the monolithic dome design.

The idea came after Principal Geri Melosh dreamed of a school with a library at its heart to complement the literacy-based curriculum.

The only solution was a round building.

So the charter school chose an unconventional design. The campus includes five domes that will open to students in the fall. The largest will have the library in the middle of the dome with classrooms surrounding it.

"Every child who walks out of a classroom walks into the media center, which makes it physically and educationally the heart and center of the school," Melosh said.

A second dome will house the cafeteria and kindergarten rooms. Three others will house the office, the science and

technology lab, and the teacher lounge and materials room.

Workers inflated an airform Tuesday that shapes the dome and acts as its roof. Next, they will spray a urethane insulation foam and press a steel rebar frame inside it. Finally, they will use spray concrete to set the steel.

Dome buildings are renowned for their extreme resistance to hurricanes and tornadoes, 50 percent energy savings and lower construction cost.

But their appearance keeps many away.

The project's contractor himself wondered how the buildings would be received in Palatka, where residents pride themselves on their distance from metropolitan Jacksonville.

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*The first of five dome-covered buildings that will make up The Children's Reading Center Charter School in Palatka is beginning to take shape through the efforts of GMC Construction of Gainesville. BRUCE LIPSKY/The Times-Union*

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"I never thought Palatka would have anything like this," said Mark Williams, GMC Construction project manager.

In fact, he said, planners in the county's building department were open to the idea - enthusiastic, even.

The region is home to a few dome houses, including Howard Hansen's recently completed Northside dome and a planned geodesic dome complex on the Southside.

The aesthetics do take a little persuasion, dome fans admit.

"[My wife and daughter] didn't want to live with me," Hansen said. "I just went ahead and did it. Now they think it's great."

In all, the school and land together cost \$2.5 million, three-quarters of which was funded through a U.S. Department of Agriculture loan. The remainder came from local donations.

None of it came from state or local taxes, organizers point out. School districts get money from the state specifically for building new schools, but charters do not.

"It's not going to be like one of your really fancy schools like you have in the public sector. The School Board would easily spend three times that," said Melosh, who is a former superintendent.

Charter schools, which are privately run but funded on a per-student basis like public schools, come in all forms and sizes statewide, from 1,500-student complexes meant for all students to tiny storefront operations intended for dropouts.

The Reading Center will be limited to 240 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. Although it has had success with struggling students - last year's fourth-graders posted the county's second-highest math and reading scores, despite the fact that more than half had been held back before entering the school - it is open to all children.

Students there have helped in fundraising, and all seem well-versed in the virtues of the dome.

"The fifth-graders, fourth grade, third grade, even the kindergarten, they're helping," said Zack Yoxtheimer, 11, who said he doesn't care much about the school's odd shape. "I'd rather have a good education."

Lil'China Davis, 11, was anxious to get on the bus Tuesday. The route always rides by the St. Johns Avenue site.

"Usually other schools are square," she said. "This school is different. You learn a lot more here."

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***Save the Date!***  
**2007 K-12 Conference**  
**October 2-5 in Orlando.**  
***More details to come...***