

SUMTER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
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Press Release

From: Colleen Strickland

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Subject: Preliminary 2015 School Grades

The 2015 preliminary school grades are in and the Sumter school district is one of only twenty-two “A” districts in the state. We are pleased to announce the district is ranked 17th in Florida according to a preliminary press release by the Department of Education. Bushnell Elementary, Lake Panasoffkee Elementary and The Villages Charter maintained “A” ratings while South Sumter Middle and South Sumter High maintained “B” ratings. “Congratulations are in order for our students, staff and parents. While we always strive to get better, we have made significant progress over the years in the face of more challenging standards and continue to provide a quality education for ALL students. We are on the right track in preparing our students to compete in a global economy,” said Superintendent Richard A. Shirley.

While it may seem natural to compare the 2014-15 grades to grades from the previous year, Commissioner Pam Stewart cautioned that the two do not allow for true apples-to-apples comparison. The 2014-2015 school year was the first year the controversial Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) were administered, so grades from that year are considered a new starting point, with new expectations and a new school grading model. For that reason, the grades released throughout the state do not include learning gains. Those will be included in the school grades beginning with the results for the 2015-16 school year, which will be released this summer. In fact because it was so new, all penalties associated with low performance have been waived by the Department of Education and the Florida Legislature. With two schools making “D”s last year, even with all of the changes in the test administration and the new grading model Wildwood Middle High went from a “D” last year to a “C” this year. Unfortunately, Wildwood Elementary stayed the same even though math scores had an increase of 8 points. Sumter Alternatives serves students zoned for other schools on a short term basis and therefore in some areas has limited data with lower performance resulting in the lowest score in the district. In the past 12 years, the state of Florida has raised expectations for school performance seven times.

After this baseline year where new cut scores are established, the stakes for school grades become high again, affecting promotion of students, evaluation of teachers and administrators and school finances. Schools ranked as an “A,” or who improve a letter grade receive extra money from the state. Schools that have consistently failing grades can face severe consequences including staff removal and school closure. Traditionally, each time the State of Florida has changed its standards, school grades have fallen. More information on school accountability and school grades can be found at: <http://schoolgrades.fldoe.org/>.