

## Bridging the Gap

December 14, 2016

I am happy to share Jennifer Handley's story. Jenny is an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher at Williston Middle High School and Levy County's 2016 District Teacher of the Year.

Williston, Florida is home to a large migrant community and many native Spanish speakers. Teaching at Williston Middle High School has allowed me to become familiar with the ESOL population. When I received an email about the chance to visit Guatemala for three weeks this previous summer to learn Spanish and work in local schools, I immediately pounced on the opportunity. Not only have I always been mesmerized by individuals who are bilingual, I also knew improving my extremely limited Spanish skills would help "bridge the gap" with the students in my own 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. I felt that by breaking out of my comfort zone and trying to learn to speak a new language, I would show my non-English speaking students it was possible for them to do the same. I observed a lack of connection between my students, the curriculum and their peers which I believe stemmed from a lack of communication.



Upon my return from Guatemala, I have incorporated my limited use of the Spanish language into my classroom daily. Although my words are often received with an abundance of laughter, I have noticed a drastic change in the willingness of my students who are learning English to actively participate in class and engage with their peers. When they observe my effort and willingness to put myself out there and take the risk of making a mistake, they are much more likely to do the same. I have also found my students developing a passion for lifelong learning as they see me modeling this behavior in the classroom.

Please continue to share through email and Twitter.

Best,

Abbey Stewart

Teacher Liaison

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#FLORIDAMINDSET

## Featured Tweet

Mark E. Ophaug and 1 other Retweeted



**Brian Dassler** @brian\_dassler · Dec 6

Love this! No thing as a math gene - all of us can be "math people" with effective instruction and #FloridaMindset

Walt Griffin, Ed.D. @walt\_griffin

How to Integrate Growth Mindset Messages Into Every Part of Math Class | MindShift | KQED News [ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2016...](http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/2016...)

## Survey

### Teacher Recruitment and Retention Input

As a valued member of Florida's teaching profession, we need your input on the critical topic of teacher recruitment and retention. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our state's educators, more Florida students are graduating than ever before, and our state has been recognized as a national leader in education for their outstanding performance.

To maintain this status and ensure that every Florida student has the greatest chance at success in college and career, we need the most qualified teachers in every classroom.

We have developed a short survey to help us better understand how we can ensure every student is assigned an excellent teacher. Please take a few minutes to provide feedback. To participate, please click [HERE](#).

## Hot Topics in Tallahassee

### 2017 Black History Month Student and Educator Contests

The 2017 Black History Month student contests and educator awards will be centered around the theme, *"A recognition of the African-American role in shaping Florida today."*

Each February, as Florida celebrates Black History Month, many of you incorporate into your lesson plans information about the significant contributions that African Americans have made to our great state. Once again, Governor Rick Scott and First Lady Ann Scott have invited all Florida students to participate in the Black History Month art and essay contests. Students in grades K-3 have a chance to win a cash prize by submitting artwork and students in grades 4-12 can earn a **four-year Florida Prepaid Scholarship** through the essay contest.

These prizes could transform the lives of a student in your class or school, and I hope that you will encourage all of your students to take full advantage of this opportunity to enhance their appreciation for African American History *and* prepare financially for their own future education aspirations.

Additionally, students, parents, teachers and principals are invited to nominate full-time educators in elementary, middle and high schools for the Black History Month Excellence in Education Award.

**The deadline for all submissions is January 20, 2017.**

To learn more about Florida's Black History Month celebration and contests, visit [www.floridablackhistory.com](http://www.floridablackhistory.com).

## Happy Holidays

*Happy Holidays!*

The Just for Teachers Newsletter will resume in mid-January.