

## A message from Florida's Teacher of the Year

September 28, 2016

I am so happy to introduce you to Jessica Solano, a math teacher from Highlands Grove Elementary School in Polk County, as the 2017 Florida Department of Education/Macy's Teacher of the Year. I hope you enjoy learning a little bit about Jessica from her message below.

Exhilarating. Awestruck. Humbled. Moved. As powerful as words can be, none can describe the incredible honor that I feel in having been selected as the 2017 Florida Teacher of the Year! I have been inspired by so many phenomenal educators throughout my career, so to be in a position where I can help make a difference in instructional practices across the state is truly a dream come true.

I have been in the teaching profession for eight years and in that time I've worked in elementary schools across Polk County. I have had numerous opportunities to grow through compelling circumstances with my students. From the very first time I opened the door of my first grade classroom to the last hug as I wished my third graders a relaxing summer, I have felt that students are in desperate need for teachers who have a passion to see their students achieve through engaging and unique lessons. Students from all types of backgrounds and home lives feel empowered in a classroom where they are expected to take ownership over their learning. I have seen true learning occur when students are allowed to struggle through a new concept and put in the work, just as we do as adults, by putting together what we observe and what we already know then use it to learn from mistakes until we reach success.

Through a growth mindset, my students understand that learning demands a struggle. My students dismiss the excuse that they may not be a "math person" and instead translate their thoughts into ones that focus on how they can grow their abilities. What seems like such a simple change, the changing of one's thoughts, has a profound impact, both inside and outside of the classroom. I've seen students with learning disabilities achieve nearly perfect scores on the FSA. I've seen students who thought they would never keep up with the "smart" kids take the lead in class discussions and become a source of reference for their peers. I've seen students who have struggled with being "perfect" understand that true mastery only happens when mistakes are made. The weight that is lifted off of their shoulders when they understand that working towards a goal is so much more rewarding than keeping up the facade of perfection is an incredible experience to witness.

Authentic, lasting learning truly is achievable for ALL of our students when we lay the foundation of a growth mindset in our classrooms. By believing there are no limitations, just challenges to be used as building blocks, students will be able to meet and even surpass their goals year after year. I hope that this year, you too are able to have the ever-fulfilling experience of seeing the shackles of a fixed mindset be broken by a student's belief that success is within reach.

Yours in education,  
Jessica Solano

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## Featured Tweet



## Survey

### Reminder - Ask the Commissioner

We want to hear from you. Please submit a question you would like answered by Commissioner Stewart or other Florida Department of Education leaders. Please complete the short survey below in order to submit your question.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JFTAsktheCommissioner>

## Hot Topics in Tallahassee

### 2017 Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!

Visit the Just Read, Florida! website for the latest information on the ninth annual statewide *2017 Celebrate Literacy Week, Florida!* events and contest. This year's theme is *Literacy Changes Our World* with a focus on civics and literacy. Schools interested in submitting a literacy-civics service project should begin planning as soon as possible. This is a great opportunity for your school to win up to \$1,000 in support of literacy. Contest details are available on the CLW website at <http://fldoe.org/academics/standards/just-read-fl/celebrate-literacy-week/>.

Deadline for postmarked contest submissions is December 12, 2016.