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### PRESS RELEASE

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#### Florida Teachers Named to USA Today's 2007 All-USA Teacher Teams

**TALLAHASSEE** – Education Commissioner Jeanine Blomberg today recognized four Florida teachers named to the 2007 All-USA Teacher Teams, a teacher recognition program by USA Today. The teachers are Nancy Berry of Liza Jackson Preparatory School in Fort Walton Beach, **Jill Putney** of Tradewinds Elementary in Coconut Creek, William Yucuis of Lyman High in Longwood and Gayle Sols Zavala of Gove Elementary in Belle Glade.

"I would like to congratulate these outstanding educators on this very special distinction," said Commissioner Blomberg. "Our state is home to many talented and dedicated teachers and a distinction such as this helps to showcase the quality of instructors that Florida possesses in its classrooms."

Each October, USA Today honors 20 individuals and instructional teams as representatives of outstanding K-12 educators nationwide. The All-USA Teacher Team was selected by a panel of judges from nominees across the country. Educators were nominated by school administrators, parents, students, colleagues or family members. Teachers were then asked to describe their schools' and students' needs, and how they go about meeting those needs. All-USA Team members will receive trophies and share \$2,500 with their respective schools, with each teacher receiving \$500.

Polly Burkhart of Jewett Academy in Winter Haven and Fran Squires of Pine View School for the Gifted in Osprey, received honorable mentions.

Criteria for the All-USA Teacher Team were developed in coordination with the National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Middle School Association, National Association of Elementary School Principals, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the National Education Association.

For more information about USA Today's All-USA Teacher Teams, visit <http://www.allstars.usatoday.com>.

#### **Nancy Berry**

Liza Jackson Preparatory School  
Fort Walton Beach, Fla.  
First grade

#### **29th year full-time teaching (plus five as a principal)**

**Nominated by:** Dawn Fisher, parent of former students

**She:** Welcomes charter school kids from diverse backgrounds and learning styles to "Berryland USA: A Place Where Children Love to Learn," a classroom that's alive with hermit crabs and oysters, uncaged caterpillars, chrysalises and butterflies. \* Accepts students unconditionally and treats them as if they are smart to make learning a self-fulfilling prophecy. \* Calls on imaginary characters Georgie the Manners Elf to correct

behavior and Mikey the Eagle to encourage eye contact without nagging or embarrassment. \* Reassures kids that she made mistakes as a child to coax them to read, write, organize thoughts and make decisions at a higher level. \* Uses singing, moving, reading, experiencing, applying and writing to reach all types of learners. \* Individualizes spelling lists from words kids misspell. \* "I don't teach to a test," she says. "I teach to life. Children's lives depend on what I'm doing. It must be done positively." \* "It's not just the one or two who she needs to go the extra mile with," says assistant principal Julie Jenzen. "It's every one. There is nothing she won't do to make sure her children get everything they can from their first-grade experience."

### **Jill Putney**

Tradewinds Elementary  
Coconut Creek, Fla.

Fourth and fifth grade, looping

#### **13th year full-time teaching**

**Nominated by:** Erin Gaylor, colleague

**She:** Stresses environmental action with "Tradewinds Turtle Troopers" and "Butterfly Brigade." Students clean roads and beaches, conserve water, champion recycling. They persuaded a coastal community to go dark for sea turtles so hatchlings won't head for street-lit roads instead of the moonlit ocean and got retailers to add plastic-bag warnings of dangers to animals. \* "If you let them take the wheel, you'll be surprised where they'll go." \* Creates a Living Museum where costumed students play presidents or famous African-Americans in a school where just nine percent of students are black. \* Has her 22 students inventory their likes, dislikes, hobbies and interests and uses it to tweak her teaching for the two years she has each class: "When you find out what motivates them, that's half the battle," she says. \* Blogged for students during her Japan Fulbright trip, motivating students to stage an Asian festival upon her return. \* Brought in \$6,500 in grants over five years at Tradewinds.\* Favors hands-on learning: making pottery, studying Native Americans, shaking water-filled cylinders with rocks, clay, soil or sand to research how sediment deposits for science. "Hands-on learning is the way," she says. "If it's not hands-on, it's not happening here."

### **William Yucuis**

Lyman High  
Longwood, Fla.

Aerospace engineering, grades 9-12

#### **13th year full-time teaching**

**Nominated by:** Joan Shalls, guidance counselor

**He:** Served as an Air Force pilot and Air Force Academy instructor and was hired away from a middle-school math department in 2002 to develop Lyman's four-year magnet aerospace engineering program. \* Builds academic, teamwork and communication skills by having student groups work on aerospace problems such as building and testing paper, straw-powered, balsa wood and foam rockets, and presenting written and oral reports. \* Calmly leads a class calculating and charting the rocket-flight results, first by hand, then with a graphing calculator. "If results match perfectly, you probably ... what?" he asks. "Copied off our calculator," the class says in unison. \* Had students collaborate with computer and electrical engineering classes on a post-traumatic-stress syndrome project, which they presented internationally last year. \* "He takes the time, he gives time," says Nicole Morales, 17. "I have calculus, and I come to him when I have problems." \* Develops homegrown talent for Kennedy Space Center and aerospace firms but never pushes kids into careers, advising: "Do something you enjoy that you can be good at." That's why he's a teacher.

### **Gayle Sols Zavala**

Gove Elementary  
Belle Glade, Fla.

Special education, grades 1-6

#### **12th year full-time teaching**

**Nominated by:** Ellen Smith, colleague

**She:** Transforms special-ed students into entrepreneurs to boost academic and social skills; students have sold pickles, cared for school plants and created vases from

recycled glass jars for Mother's Day. \* Takes students from rural, agricultural Belle Glade, where about one-third of 15,233 residents live in poverty, to live theater and posh locales, such as an equestrian center and a Palm Beach-area shopping mall. \* Tailors lessons to varying ages and skills, aided by learning centers labeled with words and pictures throughout her classroom. \* Won \$10,000 in grants to create a school garden, compile a multicultural community cookbook and purchase books and a comfy classroom reading rug, among many other things. \* Includes even the most severely disabled students in activities, giving non-verbal children in plays "speaking" parts via electronic communication devices and using battery- and switch-powered props for performers with limited mobility. \* Started at Gove in 1985 as a speech pathologist. \* Finds novel ways to get disabled students into the community, often with regular-ed peers: adaptive plays, puppet shows, bowling sessions. Says principal Anne Turner: "The connection our regular-ed students have with the students with disabilities is so strong here. The message it sends is that we all should be appreciated for what we have and who we are."

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