



**Okaloosa County School District**  
Best in Florida

## Okaloosa Students Are Most 'Ready to Work'

Wednesday, October 22, 2008

Okaloosa is not largest school district in the state, but it boasts the most students who have been certified as "[Ready to Work](#)." Okaloosa led the state with 715 students who have passed the work skills test, according to Chris Hart, President of Workforce, Florida. Crestview High School students led both the county and the state, earning 400 of the certifications. Other programs related to the school district brought the total to over 850.

"This is a nationally recognized credential," Mary Lou Reed, Executive Director of the [Workforce Florida Development Board for Okaloosa and Walton Counties](#), told the School Board at a recent meeting. "This builds skills and gives these students a competitive advantage. We're in a tight job market and they need every advantage they can get."

Students who receive Ready to Work certification participate in an interactive, self-paced program, followed



Superintendent Alexis Tibbetts thanks Warren May of Florida Ready to Work, as he hands her the certificate and a check for \$1000. Okaloosa had the highest number of "Ready to Work" certifications in the state.



by three exams that cover essential skill areas: Applied Math, Reading for Information and Locating Information. There are three levels of achievement on the test. A score of at least three in each area is required for bronze level certification, while a score of four in each area gives the applicant a silver level. Those who receive five in all areas receive a gold level, which demonstrates that the applicant has the communication and problem-solving skills required to perform 90% of jobs available. The assessments are developed by ACT®, a national company which produces the college admission test by the same name.

Reed praised Superintendent Alexis Tibbetts for her leadership in embracing the new program, which was launched in Okaloosa a year ago. It assures businesses that potential employees are capable of performing the tasks they will be hired for. Across Florida and across the nation, more and more businesses are requiring the credential as part of the hiring process, said Reed.

She told the story of a man who had applied for a custodial position and took the test as part of the hiring process. When the Human Resources department saw how high he scored on the test, he was placed in a supervisory position in the environmental engineering department instead.

Reed thanked Linda Sumblin,



Linda Sumblin, C.O.O. of the Okaloosa Walton Workforce Development Board, explains how the credential shows employers that a student has the skills necessary to perform most jobs. On her left is Executive Director Mary Lou Reed.



From L-R: Dr. Alexis Tibbetts, Warren May, Jeff Scroggins, Phil Wells, Lloyd Taylor, Linda Sumblin, Mary Lou Reed.



Crestview Principal Ed Coleman told the Board that this was one standardized test the students were glad to take.

### Workforce Chief Operating

Officer for Okaloosa and Walton Counties for leading the drive to involve the schools, as well as former School Board member Lloyd Taylor, the district's Ready to Work coordinator; Jeff Scroggins, Director of CHOICE/Career Technical Education for the district; and Phil Wells of Jobs Plus.

Sumblin pointed out that the number of applicants for good jobs is very high. By having the Ready to Work credential, students who apply for jobs will stand out in the field of applicants.

### Good for Business, Good for Students

Interested businesses can request a "job profile" be created for the positions they seek to fill. Sumblin will create a specific profile for the job, letting the employer know what type of score they should expect qualified applicants to achieve on the test. Companies who use the profiling tool report significant savings in the hiring process, as well as reductions in turnover.

As Crestview HS Principal Ed Coleman noted, it is not always easy to convince students to take one more standardized test, but his students recognized that this test would give their resumes a boost.

In Okaloosa, the high schools initially offered the free test to their [CHOICE](#) students, who take other national certification tests as part of their course studies. As principals and teachers recognized the value of the certification in demonstrating workplace skills, testing was extended throughout the schools and to other school-based programs. The Jobs Plus bus visited school campuses to build awareness of the certification and to allow more students to take the exam.

Schools receive \$15 in state funding for each portion of the test. If a student is certified in all three areas, their school program receives \$45.