



School District earns A rating

By Travis Gibson

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In biggest improvement, Osceola Elementary jumped from a D to an A rating.

Osceola Elementary School principal Tina Waldrop was confident during a February interview with The Record that her school's D grade for the 2017-18 school year would be higher when the new grades were released during the summer.

Turns out she was right — in a big way.

The school made an extraordinary leap when the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) revealed school and district grades Thursday morning, transforming its D rating from last year into an A for the 2018-19 school year. It's the first time since 2011 that Osceola Elementary School, a Title I school, has received an A rating.

"It's amazing," Waldrop said in a phone interview Thursday. "I am on cloud nine."

Overall, the St. Johns County School District earned an A grade for the 2018-19 school year for the 10th year in a row with 31 of its 40 schools receiving A ratings. The district was also first out of 67 districts in the state in total accountability points which covers a wide range of categories including mathematics achievement and graduation rate.

At Osceola, Waldrop said she couldn't have imagined such a big jump, but added that the A rating was a validation of the work that has been done and the commitment made by the teachers.

She credits the improvement to initiatives that included improving sagging attendance numbers, creating teams where teachers in the same grade were able to collaborate and focusing teaching efforts on the bottom 25 percent, the lowest achieving students.

"It's not frequent that you see a school in Florida that can make that big of a jump in one year," superintendent Tim Forson said.

St. Augustine High School also received an A grade for the 2018-19 school year after three-straight years of B grades.

"[St. Augustine High School] really laid out a plan to get those incremental improvements and it worked," Forson said.

South Woods Elementary School, near Hastings, also improved its grade from a C to a B last school year. The only district school to see its grade slip was The Webster School, whose rating fell from a C to a D.

"It's disappointing to see a school grade to go down," Forson said. "We know that we still have work to do to help children that are struggling academically around the county and we will work hard to make sure Webster improves."

Statewide, the FDOE called its improvements "monumental." There was a 5% increase in A-rated schools, and 77% of last year's D- or F-rated schools improved by at least one letter grade.

"It is a great day for education in Florida and today's announcement shows we are on a successful trajectory. We are resolute in our continued efforts to ensure that Florida students have the chance to receive a world-class education regardless of their circumstance," Governor Ron DeSantis said in a statement.

Looking at neighboring counties, Clay, Nassau and Flagler counties all earned A ratings, Duval and Volusia counties earned B ratings and Putnam County earned a C rating.