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Sulphur Springs Elementary wins top state reading award

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TAMPA — Sulphur Springs Elementary School was named Florida's Elementary Reading Leadership Team of the Year after improving from an F grade in 2008 to a B in 2009.

Principal Christi Buell and the school district's elementary reading supervisor, Glenda Brown, made the surprise announcement during the school's morning show before Friday classes.

Only one school in Florida is recognized with the annual award from Just Read! Florida.

The eight members of Sulphur Springs's reading team — Emily Deitzer, Laura Johnson, Donna Calderoni, Sharon Stewart, Cathy Tirpak, Julie Sekulits, and Lynn Rogers — gathered in the media room where the morning show was filmed. They broke out in cheers and hugs when Brown announced the award over the air.

"We believe we have a really good model here," said principal Buell. "These teachers are the lead teachers."

Sulphur Springs's success is a fairly recent phenomenon. Before earning a B for the state's annual school report card, Sulphur Springs was named an F school two years in a row.

It's located in one of Tampa's worst neighborhood for crime. More students at Sulphur Springs Elementary are on reduced school lunch than any other school in the district, Buell said.

"I think that it's really important in a school like this to celebrate," Buell said. "You have to celebrate any successes, even the small ones."

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Sulphur Springs wasn't the only school winning accolades from Just Read! Florida.

Alonso High School reading teacher Larissa McCoy was named the state's reading teacher of the year.

McCoy was surprised with the award, balloons and gifts in her classroom on Friday morning.

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