

STETSON UNIVERSITY

NINA B. HOLLIS INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Celebrating 25 Years!

6/1/2025



Dr. Bette Heins

A Message from the Director

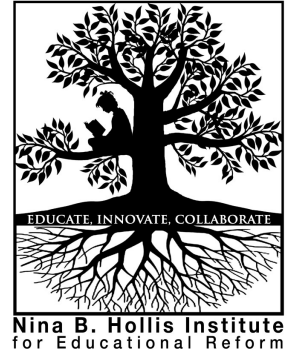
As I reflect on the 25th anniversary of the Hollis Institute for Educational Reform, I can't help but think about former President Doug Lee. Over 25 years ago, I had the distinct privilege of riding with Doug Lee to Celebration for a meeting. My conversation with Doug on the way to Celebration was a real blessing because shortly after that trip, he scheduled a meeting with Mark Hollis.

Mark was passionate about education and educational reform, and I was excited to talk with him about this shared passion. We were thrilled when Mark provided seed money to enhance our work with K-12 schools. He observed what we accomplished with this small amount of funding, and soon after created the Nina B. Hollis Institute for Educational Reform, named after his mother.

When the Institute was founded, there were three education faculty involved, Drs. Kathy Piechura-Couture, Mercedes Tichenor and me. The work we did was encouraged and supported by Doug Lee and Mark and Lynn Hollis and continued to grow in surprising and unexpected ways. We currently have eight faculty across four schools involved in the work of the Hollis Institute. The Institute was founded with the goal of significantly changing education and my specific charge was to have an educational revolution by reimaging education.

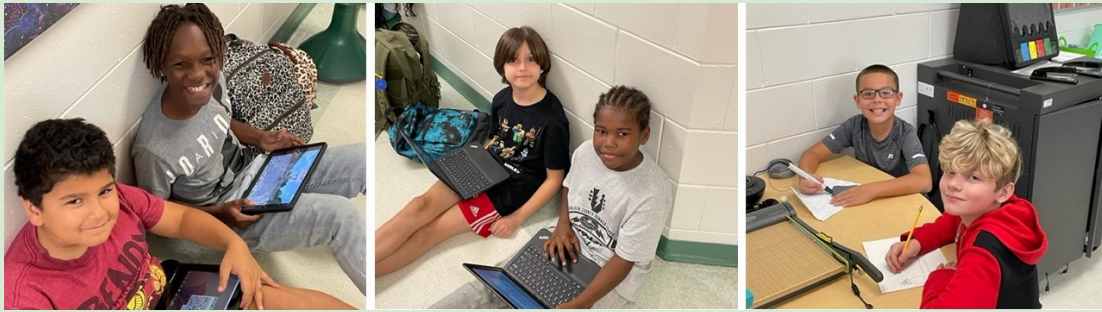
Mark was specific in that the funds provided to the Institute were to be spent on innovative initiatives that go beyond the University to revitalize education. Although we have grown significantly over the past 25 years, we have remained true to the Hollis family values and their focus on educational reform. The work at the Institute has been successful due to collaborative and cooperative partnerships, shared missions and the continued belief and support of the Hollis family.

"I think the most memorable thing Mark ever told me was he wished his mother had known me; I wish that as well. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to be the founding



Mark and Lynn Hollis

DaVinci Project After School Literacy Since 2011



One of our favorite and most recognized projects is the DaVinci Club that began at *Blue Lake Elementary in 2011 and continued over the years at Citrus Grove Elementary*. The DaVinci Club is an after-school program where students can choose books from a wide selection of literature, where students are encouraged to discuss these books with their peers, and where students can freely explore a variety of artistic pursuits based on their selected books. The DaVinci Club integrates reading and art in a way that promotes learning.

The club was designed to meet twice a week for ninety minutes and target students in fourth and fifth grade. The club has always focused on serving a diverse group of economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse students including English Language Learners. During the club time, students usually spend the first twenty-five minutes in small groups discussing their personal literature choices. Elements of fiction and non-fiction are discussed such as theme, authors' purpose, problem/solution, setting, main idea/details, and reader reaction. These discussions often prompt students to read books that their peers shared during the discussion. Throughout the program, students are encouraged to increase text levels and broaden literature choices.

The remainder of the club time is dedicated to expressing student literature choices through an array of options such as writing, drama, music, and visual arts (painting, drawing, collage, sculpture). Students write plans for their projects which includes why they want to do the project, what materials they will need, research required, and a timeline for the project. Upon completion, students evaluate their final products. Student art projects have been displayed at school as well as local art festivals, the public library, hospital, and local museums.

The DaVinci Club has successfully increased student test scores based on various measurement tools used to monitor and assess students' progress throughout the year. For example, over 70% of the students who have participated in the club have produced learning gains.

The club has received much support from university and community partners over the years. These grant funds were used to provide project materials, purchase a wide selection of literature, and hire personnel. Another key aspect of the DaVinci Club is that members are taught to give back to the community just as they have benefited from the philanthropy of others. We look forward to many more years of the DaVinci Club at Citrus Grove Elementary.

I wanted to share my daughter Gabriella's excitement. Her face lights up when talking about the club. She mentioned she loves the DaVinci Club already. She's already hoping you'll be her 5th-grade teacher because she loves your style of teaching. Thank you for creating a club in which students who have a love of reading can be expressive and imaginative. Thank you, have a great night!

Lizbet Villa (2021)



Hollis Institute – Leadership Center Since 2016 A Decade of Growth and Impact



In the summer of 2016, the Hollis Institute Leadership Center was formed as a branch of the Nina B. Hollis Institute for Educational Reform. The Center's focus was on building the capacity of school leaders to make a difference in the lives of the students they served in an increasingly complex education environment.

Starting with a \$10,000 Hollis Grant, the Center's first project was the development of a pilot curriculum and series of training opportunities for local school district leaders focused on closing the achievement gap through a culture change process and a Restorative Practices framework.

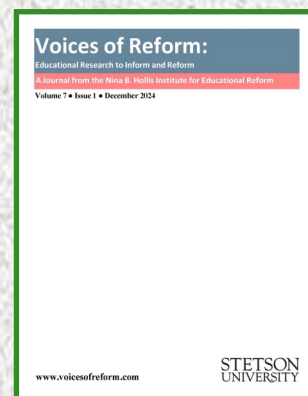
Ten years later, the Leadership Center is a self-funded and self-sustaining enterprise working with hundreds of education leaders and thousands of teachers across Florida that has generated more than \$600,000 in revenue. Along with continuing the Center's work in training educators in Restorative Practice techniques, the center now provides a comprehensive training series around teacher empowerment and retention to approximately 70 schools a year.

New projects include the development of a training curriculum on trauma and resilience in the education sector and a pilot for the 2025-26 school year focused on building the capacity of teacher leaders.

As the Center begins its second decade of work, we continue to focus on supporting education reform, data driven outcomes and student success.

Voices of Reform: Educational Research to Inform and Reform Since 2018

In 2014, the Department of Education aspired to begin a journal focusing on various topics in educational reform occurring throughout the United States and globally. Discussion began in early 2016 to make the journal a reality; bridging the gap between scholar and practitioner for educational reform. Through generous support from the Hollis Institute, funding was established for the journal, with the first issue published in September 2018. Our goal was to publish two issues per calendar year focusing on articles from scholars and practitioners from higher education and K-12 education. The articles published are traditional, double-blind peer reviewed submissions, book reviews, and stories from the field from practitioners.



Voices of Reform has always been dedicated to bridging the gap between scholars and practitioners to make a difference in the lives of children and the educators who serve them. Building on this, the journal will continue to bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners, specifically through actionable outcomes to improve equitable teaching and learning for today's students. The goal being to strategically reimagine how teaching and learning can look across preK-20 educational settings.

The journal has doubled in scope and sequence, with submissions, readership, and the number of accepted articles. Readership has increased by 140% since the prior academic year, and the number of articles submitted has increased by 125%. This increase is in part due to past articles receiving academic and scholarly recognition, which has caused the journal to increase in reputation.

Visit the Voices of Reform at www.voicesofreform.com.

Single Gender Education - Received National Audience

In 2004, education professor Dr. Kathy Piechura-Couture advised the single-gender program at Woodward Avenue Elementary in DeLand and was on the board of a national single-gender education advocacy group. Single-gender classes allow teachers to better tailor their lessons for the needs of each student, she said. Her experience is that single-gender classes do have benefits. "From the last 12 years of research we've done, we've never had a mixed-gender class statistically outperform a single-gender class," she said. "On many occasions we've had the single-gender classes outperform the mixed gender classes." Advocates say they've found girls are more likely to participate in science lessons in single-gender classes, while boys are more likely to try foreign languages, drama and arts.

On 2/4/2014, then Representative Manny Diaz, Jr made a statement as quoted in the Orlando Sentinel, regarding the program being "a choice, not a mandated program, which parents can opt in and out of. The Woodward Avenue school has offered single-sex classes for about 10 years. Those classes are optional, with parents able to choose them or regular coed classes, said Nancy Wait, spokesman for the Volusia County school district. So which grades at school have boys-or-girls-only classes varies by school year, depending on parent interest. Single-gender classes should be offered to more Florida students, lawmakers say. The school partners with Stetson University, which provides training on single-sex education to the staff and also conducts research. "It's been a very successful program," Wait said. Over the years, the single-gender program at Woodward Elementary was featured on NBC News, NPR, Daytona News Journal, Orlando Sentinel, Chicago Tribune, Newsweek, and People.



Planning Grant Timeline

Applications Due:

November 14, 2025

Planning Grant Selection

Notification:

December 1, 2025

Successful applicants (whose grant applications are accepted) will at this time, be awarded \$250 and are expected to submit a full Impact Award application.

The remainder of the planning grant award (\$750) will be awarded if their completed Impact Award is successfully approved for funding.

Research Impact Award Application Timeline

Hollis Institute 2026-2027

Funding Cycle

Up to \$10,000

Call for Proposals:

October 2025

Application Due:

March 11, 2026

Award Notification:

May 1, 2026

Funding Cycle:

July 1, 2026 - June 30,
2027

What's New!

Language Development Through Focused Play

A partnership was created between Stetson University and the United Cerebral Palsy (UCP)-Seminole Preschool Units in Lake Mary, Florida. The project's purpose is to increase social language (in preschool students) while interacting with baby dolls in a structured circle routine. Through the Impact Grant, the preschool unit was able to purchase 6 baskets and 64 babies to use with students in their classrooms.

This inclusive activity works at all levels of preschool development, and is being used in the full continuum of classrooms, general education, mixed and self-contained. Since the start of school in August of 2024, all teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and parents have received small group trainings.

The routine with babies consists of a greeting song, a short, planned activity surrounding a daily living skill, social routine, or educational activity. These occur 3 times weekly, in 10 minute increments. Sign language and Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) low tech boards help the activity reach all levels through total communication. Each task is paired with simple language, modeling empathy, and self-regulation. The grant includes trouble shooting sessions, fidelity checks, and support.

Finally, pre data was collected in the fall of 2024 and post data will be collected in May of 2025 to see how the students have improved, language understanding, use, social skills, and self-regulation.



Practicing present progressing -ing words- standing, jumping, holding hands.



Joint attention with baby, working on empathy, are you okay.



Changing baby's diaper working on gentle touch, toileting, and familiar routines.



Feeding baby -familiar symbolic play, 1 agent, one action.

Emily K. Fagerstrom
2025 VOLUSIA COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR
 Visits Ron Clark Academy
 By: Emily Fagerstrom



Emily Fagerstrom and
 Ron Clark

As the 2025 Volusia County Teacher of the Year, I had the incredible opportunity to visit the Ron Clark Academy on January 30-31, 2025, thanks to the generous scholarship from the Nina B. Hollis Institute for Education Reform at Stetson University. This experience is one that I believe every educator should have the chance to encounter.

At RCA, I witnessed exceptional teaching practices that were not only impactful but truly inspiring. The energy within the school was electric, creating an atmosphere of excitement and joy that moved me to tears on several occasions. The keynote speakers delivered powerful messages, and the Q&A sessions offered valuable insights into effective teaching strategies. Observing model classrooms in action allowed me to gather new tools and innovative ideas that I am eager to bring back to my school and share with fellow educators throughout Volusia County.

Perhaps most memorable was witnessing teachers from all over the country having their spirits lifted and their passion for teaching reignited. The sense of community and dedication to student success was palpable. This experience was nothing short of magical, and I am profoundly grateful to the Nina B. Hollis Institute for making it possible.

2024-25
IMPACT GRANTS

Dr. Raisa Ankeny –
 Volusia Implements
 Bilingual Education

Prof. Christine Cerniglia
 – Pathways to Justice
 Advocacy Academy

Dr. Sarah Garcia –
 Brain Fitness Academy

Dr. Kathy Piechura-
 Couture – Language
 Development thru
 Focused Play

Prof. Judith Scully –
 Know Your Rights for
 Teens

Dr. Steven Smallpage –
 Political Polling Pre-
 College Summer Camp

Dr. Amy Smith – Early
 Elementary Math Prof.
 Development.

Kevin Winchell –
 Recognizing &
 Cultivating
 Volusia County Local
 Legends

2024-25
PLANNING GRANT

Jesse Fox - Stress
 Management and
 Resilience

Supporting Volusia County Teacher
 of the Year for 6 years.

Nina B. Hollis Institute for Educational Reform TIMELINE



2000

Conversation/Ideas begin with Former President Doug Lee, Mark Hollis and Dr. Bette Heins.

The Institute focused on Professional Development for teachers and principals as well as supporting innovative projects.

Mini-grants for district teachers

2002

2004

Cats and the Hatters summer reading program.

Awarded the T-3 grant Technology Teacher Training Grant – Brought the first projectors to Stetson classrooms

Stetson develops/hosts single gender conference (Woodward begins hosting schools from all over the nation to observe single gender classes)

2007

2013

Florida Campus Compact first place Campus-Community Partnership Award

Volusia County Public Schools had the first elementary single gender classes.

2014

2017

Nina B. Hollis Institute Conference Room Dedicated

Impact Grants, a three year, \$10,000 grant was created and introduced to faculty members.

First Voices of Reform Journal published

2018

Leadership Center was created and Restorative Practices training began in Volusia County Public Schools.

Stetson Restorative Practices training featured in Restorative Works magazine.

2019

First Leadership Center Symposium with Former Justice James C. E. Perry as the keynote speaker.

Conducted Restorative Practices training for Stetson Undergraduate Juniors and Seniors.

Selected as the recipient of Community-Based Research Project of the Year!

2020

2021

Mini Grants, a \$1,500 grant was created for faculty with smaller requests.

Leadership Center secured a \$210,000 external gift for leadership training around teacher retention.

2023

2025

To date, the institute has provided \$536,088.50 in funding for 55 projects. Grant projects include:

- o Community Education (prison project)
- o Language Development through Focused Play
- o LIFE Teaching Advocacy for the Hard of Hearing
- o Volusia Implements Bilingual Education
- o The Leadership Center
- o Young Sound Seekers
- o Garden-based Learning
- o and so many more.



**Nina B. Hollis Institute
for Educational Reform**

Nina B. Hollis Institute for Educational Reform

Mission

It is the mission of the Nina B. Hollis Institute at Stetson University to stimulate innovations for the advancement of all learners, particularly birth through grade 12 and non-traditional students relating to creating educational opportunities for all students through research and applied partnerships. The Institute focuses on outreach and dissemination to address ways in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations and other factors contribute to or perpetuate lower educational aspirations, achievement and attainment for affected groups of students.

Contact Information:
Email: nbhi@stetson.edu
Phone: 386-822-7950