



Jasmine Miller

First Assembly Christian Academy
Florida City, FL

Jasmine Miller was failing third grade and, even today, remembers why. For her, reading was an unsolved mystery.

"I was very, very frustrated," says Jasmine, now in seventh grade. "I would try to sound out the words, and they wouldn't come out straight. And then I wouldn't want to read anymore."

That all began to change in the New Year of 2005, when her mother Leslie was so desperate she uprooted her daughter during the holiday break and enrolled her in a nearby private school her sister had told her about. At the First Assembly Christian Academy in Florida City, under a Step Up For Students

Scholarship for low-income students provided locally by Florida PRIDE, Jasmine began to believe in herself. Her new teacher wouldn't let Jasmine think otherwise.

"Honestly, it's a lot of patience and a lot of encouragement," says Julie Alexander, the academy's principal and the teacher who helped turn Jasmine's school life around. "It's about being positive and continuing to reinforce and focus on what you *can* do as opposed to what you *can't* do."

Steadily, Jasmine began to sound out words, place them in context and comprehend their meaning. In the process, the daily complaints to her mother about headaches and stomach aches seemed to fade away, and Jasmine was for the first time having fun in school.

"She went from zero to 100," says her mother. "The teachers were willing to work with her at her ability level. Mrs. Alexander just made Jasmine feel like she could do it. ... I say to myself now that the Lord sends you an angel when you need it."

First Assembly Christian Academy was opened in 1986 and serves 57 students from kindergarten to 12th grade this year. The principal, Mrs. Alexander, is herself a graduate of the academy, and her focus is on letting each child progress at his or her own pace. The school uses the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum, and teachers are allowed to bring their own touch to the classroom. What Jasmine's mother likes is the individualized attention in the small school and the welcoming and nurturing atmosphere.

"It's a wholesome and very simple place for learning," she says. "The students learn at their pace. They are never ridiculed when they fail. There is no social pressure to fit in. ... The other students don't make fun of Jasmine if she doesn't understand."

Jasmine, now a seventh-grade student, has left the days of failure in her past and routinely earns B's and C's on her report card. She even talks about college in her future. But she also knows that motivation is important. She had been diagnosed with a learning disability at her previous school, and some things still don't come easily for her.

"Jasmine does have some struggles academically," says Mrs. Alexander, "and we have to be able to explain things on her terms. But I think she sees there is nothing she can't overcome without continued perseverance. We are so proud of her."

About First Assembly Christian Academy

First Assembly Christian Academy was founded in 1986 and is located in Florida City. It is serving 57 students this year in grades K-12, of which 24 attend on a Step Up For Students Scholarship. It serves an additional 35 children in the pre-kindergarten program. The annual tuition is \$3,850, and the school offers a wide selection of courses and activities that include arts, sciences, technology, foreign language, music, drama, daily devotions and athletics. The school administers the Stanford-10 Achievement Test.