

When I started teaching at Okeehetee Middle five years ago I was pleasantly surprised to find that Dr. Samore is a man who knows that the future of our planet depends on the choices we make and the effect we have on the students we reach. The faculty meeting that morning centered around the global problems that the world will face in the next twenty years (water shortages, loss of biodiversity, over population, climate change etc...). Together we as a faculty work-shopped solutions to some of these issues as we got to know each other and planned how we can incorporate this into our lessons throughout the year. I can honestly say that our **school's administration** has continued to set our sights on the future while trying to make a difference now. Being in the business of educating young teens whose mindsets, habits and worldviews are forming puts us in a unique position to positively affect the way things will be.

Okeehetee Middle **school grounds** are located on 38 acres of pine and scrub land in Central Palm Beach County. We are surrounded by natural areas on three sides. These facilities lend to outdoor activities and with the philosophy that "students learn best while engaged" each teacher is encouraged to take their class outside at least one time during each marking period. We have a butterfly garden, a vegetable and herb garden, and multiple spaces on campus that serve as habitat for wildlife.

We have taken on more initiatives toward becoming a school that strives for a **sustainable** future. Student groups have taken on the responsibility of recycling aluminum, paper and plastic. Boys and girls mentoring groups have centered some of their activities and efforts toward beautification of the campus and stewardship of the environment in the community. After school clubs have formed over the past few years to plant and harvest different gardens.

Students at Okeehetee Middle learn about environmental issues throughout their classes through **curriculum integration**. All grade levels have environmental components to their science classes. Lessons have focused on water, the Everglades, waste and recycling as well as ecosystem restoration.

Okeehetee has **community partnerships** with several environmental organizations who have come to present this year. Arthur Miller Foundation and SWA have facilitated lessons by sending guest speakers: and Okeehetee students have volunteered in clean-up efforts at Okeehetee Park. Also helpful has been the efforts and support of the 4-H club.

In this second year applying for the Green Schools Recognition program we realize that there are many more things we can be doing. We see that we need to reach out beyond our bubble, include the community and incorporate environmental best practices into our daily routines. Being green is not just putting a bottle into the recycling bin or using both sides of a paper... it is encouraging carpooling, making healthy choices, being constantly aware that our actions affect something greater than ourselves.

C. Okeehetee Community Middle School