

Part B- Summary of 2014—2015 Green School's Activities

West Gate Elementary (WGES) is much more than a Green School in terms of our physical building. WGES is a thriving community where educationally engaged children explore the wonders of their natural world while they learn how to take care of its precious resources. WGES might be a Title 1 School with a 97 percent free and reduced lunch program, but it is also a vibrant space where teachers, staff and administration prepare our world's next generation of leaders and citizens with the knowledge necessary to reduce their ecological footprints.

Through a team effort, we have researched and created outdoor learning labs to rehabilitate and enhance the ecological integrity of our school's grounds. 4H Youth Development Program leaders brainstormed with our Green Team in order to collaborate on the "Tracking Nature at the Gator Trail" project. Lowes Toolbox for Education funded last year's project launch that included six large benches built by a local Eagle Scout applicant. This year, WGES and its surrounding community have continued to work in cooperation to bring the study of insects, plants, and other natural life back where it belongs -- outdoors. Science lessons offer a refreshing change of pace and Nature Journals are used to help students record these sounds and sensations around them.

WGES is the only elementary school in Palm Beach County awarded the SunSmart E-shelter Solar Array grant for a 10.08 kW system. This system helps with energy conservation, allows for in-school field trips to learn about alternate energy sources and how solar energy works, and serves as a solar-powered emergency shelter should the need arise in our community. Orange plugs that are powered by our solar grid are located in the cafeteria to help increase student, faculty and staff awareness of this renewable energy source.

Our wellness program is in full swing with the collaboration of our teachers, students and Green Club members working diligently with community partnerships such as 4H, FAU, UF, and many local businesses to rehabilitate and enhance the physical appearance of our school grounds. Teachers are utilizing the Gator Trail as a walking and running track to train for 5K and half marathon races before and after school, while students are exercising outdoors twice weekly with their PE classes. By modeling healthy eating habits through the Healthy Fruits and Vegetables Program, our students are actively learning from an early age the importance and benefits of becoming responsible stewards of their human bodies as well as their planet.

The key to our school's successful recycling program is our dedication to working cooperatively with students, staff, and family members who have been asked to bring in newspapers and other discarded paper, along with clothing and shoes thanks to our new FUNraising dumpster. Recycling paper, cardboard, plastic, cans, batteries, print cartridges, bottle caps and cell phones has become routine with the students and staff at WGES. Our pre-K uses recyclable lunch plates daily and makes adorable arts and crafts with milk cartons and other formerly discarded containers. Our kitchen no longer uses foam plates on PD days, and we use more eco-friendly thin plastic bags. Solid Waste Authority (SWA) provides in-school field trips for several classrooms and has partnered with SP Recycling for fundraising with our paper only dumpster.

An "all-hands-on-deck" motto has been implemented at dismissal: staff and teachers report to the front of the school to help minimize idle cars and enhance a safer, faster, more energy-efficient afternoon dismissal time. Green Club *No Idle* and *Put Cell Phones Away* signs will soon further reduce car emissions and improve air quality.

Additionally, South Florida Water Management partnered with WGES's Green Team to promote our water conservation school-wide project: "Reduce Water Use, NO EXCUSE!" They provided us with many student, family and staff incentives along with posters, and brochures to help create awareness. Monitors in each classroom help ensure that water and electrical energy are not wasted, and Recycle Rangers check that paper is recycled. Our Principal reminds us frequently of the importance of shutting everything down ASAP, and signs throughout the school serve as an extra prompts. Future activities on the topic will be included at our Green Night next year.

"Tracking Nature at the Gator Trail" is an ongoing project as we continue to incorporate new and exciting additions to our curriculum designed to fully prepare our students to understand and act on current and future environmental challenges. 4-H funded an Arbor Day Celebration with a Field Trip to Mounts Botanical Gardens with 150 Kindergarten students. It included hands-on activities teaching students the meaning behind Arbor Day. Our science IDEAS Project funded by the National Science Foundation has created an awareness of environmental issues by integrating daily reading comprehension with in-depth science instruction to cumulatively build a meaningful understanding of science. Through extensive professional development opportunities, our primary teachers have been prepared in this innovative inquiry-based science and reading comprehension effort to respond to our inquisitive science students. Additionally, Cornell University's BirdSleuth Project is our most recent initiative designed to involve our students in helping our environment thrive through fun and engaging activities.

Through our partnerships within the school between Green Team, Green Club, Peaceful Schools, Science IDEAS, K-Kids, and 21st Century, our students gain knowledge and encourage one another. Community partnerships with 4H, FAU, UF, PBSO, Kiwanis Club and others, help us plan and reach eco-friendly goals as WGES students work together to help our world. Plans for future community service projects are in the works between school and community partnerships.

Active administrative support for West Gate Elementary School's overall philosophy that embraces sustainability is evident. Priority is given for ongoing grade level planning; teachers and staff join forces daily to create meaningful learning opportunities within a positive and dynamic culture. Green School updates are included in many Faculty meetings and announcements. Our website has a Green School component in which our community can keep abreast of current events. ESE, Pre-K, 1st, 2nd, and 5th Grade teachers all benefitted from Green School workshops this past year. This year our popular Green Team/Green Club Environmental Door Contest will return. We are very proud to also have a WGES nominee for the 2015 Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators. Good luck!