

Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE): LIFE – Madison County Program

A Partnership Agreement

Summary

The Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) Program is a proposal for a statewide network of environmental-science, field laboratories on existing state lands (e.g., State Parks, Reserves, etc.) and other protected areas. These "LIFE Centers" are designed to support the needs of small, rural school districts and improve the quality and continuity of educational programming within the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). As classrooms without walls, the LIFE Centers provide an opportunity for the exploration of Florida's most unique natural communities and a place to practice and apply science.

Characteristics of the LIFE Program

The LIFE Program represents a systematic effort to combine the unique assets of the DEP (namely, conservation lands and the scientists who protect and study them) with the needs of Florida's students, teachers, and schools – with special emphasis on FCAT Science. As such, it will be a partnership between individual field sites managed by DEP, and individual or multiple school districts in the area.

Each site designated as a "LIFE Center/Program" will use the local environment as the entry point for inspiring students through hands-on, field-based activities/labs. Students will spend a minimum of two days (and up to four days) per year involved in field-based activities/labs applying, reinforcing, enriching, and integrating content from their existing, standards-based curriculum. The "processes of science" will guide instruction and serve as a method to integrate other subjects into an interdisciplinary program.

The goals of LIFE Program are to improve student achievement, support teacher professional development, increase participation of underrepresented populations in environmental science, and enhance stewardship of the region's unique natural communities and resources. Teachers – together with DEP educators - will play a lead role in designing and implementing field labs to address the priority needs of their students. The LIFE Program will also provide professional development opportunities for teachers including Project WET workshops, internships with DEP staff, and the establishment of an internet-based, environmental science, learning community.

Each LIFE Program will share the core characteristics outlined above; however, each Program will be the unique product of the local teachers, DEP staff, and other resources available at the site.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Department of Environmental Protection, through the Office of Environmental Education, will serve as the project developer and first year coordinator (coordination to be transferred after year-one to staff of Madison County School District and partners), and will work with the Madison Central School to outline the scope of the project, identify and develop program content, define program delivery methods, clarify assessment and evaluation methods and work with teachers to integrate content into other subjects. The OEE will help secure the necessary

equipment, identify scientists and other educators, help secure supplemental financial support and ensure access to the managed facilities where labs can safely be conducted.

The participating teachers and administrators from Madison Central School and the Madison County School District will ensure school level and district-wide support for the LIFE Program by providing the following: 1) transportation for students and teachers to and from the field sites; and 2) support for substitute teachers if necessary to allow science and other participating teachers the opportunity to participate in field labs and professional development opportunities.

In addition to the primary partners, other partners have committed support to the LIFE-Madison County program. The DEP Groundwater Program has already provided financial support for year-one to help cover the cost of teacher stipends, transportation, equipment and substitute teachers. NFCC will host and support one of the three field experiences, and UF-IFAS Madison County Cooperative Extension may provide staff to support the delivery of field experiences whenever possible.

Other partners – including universities, state and federal agencies, local businesses, local foundations, and local non-profit organizations – may be added to this partnership when their participation is agreed to by the primary partners described above.

This partnership agreement is designed to clarify the shared interests of the primary partners and to guide their good faith efforts to achieve the stated goals of the LIFE Program. It does not commit the partners to any specific financial obligations; however, it encourages each partner to ensure implementation of its roles and responsibilities as described above.

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