

Wilkinson Junior High School (WJHS)

I. Overview

Location: Middleburg, Clay County

Type and age of school: A traditional junior high school (grades 7-8) that opened in 1977

Size of school: 750 students

Name of program: Wilkinson Legacy Project

Web site: <http://wilkinson-legacy-project.net>



II. Origins

A. Impetus/need

- The primary impetus for this program and its associated projects was the growing range of environmental issues resulting from urbanization and resource use in Northeast Florida.
- In the 1995-96 school year, teacher Karen Smith received a mini-grant for outdoor service-learning from the Bayard Council. The primary emphasis of this initial grant work was on cascade mentoring through an Entomology Lab.



Legacy project students

- In 1996, Ms. Smith sought approval from the Clay County School Board to engage her students in service-learning fieldwork at the J.P. Hall Nature Preserve (then, Bayard) in Green Cove Springs. This initial request was denied.
- In 1997, the School Board indicated that it would be permissible for Ms. Smith and her students to engage in fieldwork with Mr. David Wright, an Environmental Science teacher at Middleburg High School.

B. Initial Phase (1997-1999)

- Through Mr. Wright, Ms. Smith met Mr. Dan Hayes, with the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) Legacy Program in 1997. They discussed what SJRWMD would like to see done at the preserve and developmentally appropriate activities for these students, as well as specific service-learning projects along Black Creek.

- Ms. Smith and her students helped Mr. Wright and his students complete work on the Cougar Trail, and helped mark trails and build bridges.
- In 1997, Ms. Smith and WJHS students began to conduct water quality testing with support from SJRWMD.
- In 1998, Ms. Smith received a grant co-written with the Clay High School Legacy Program. Under this grant, Ms. Smith and her students conducted flora and fauna inventories at the J.P. Hall Nature Preserve (formerly Bayard) in Green Cove Springs with Clay High School.
- Ms. Smith became involved in the Legacy Program provided by SJRWMD in 1998, and engaged her students in submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) study for several years as part of this Legacy program (1999). This project was eventually dropped due to increases in salinity had led to a decline in native eel grass in the study area.

C. Next Major Development (1999-2003)

- Ms. Smith wrote and received the first of several grants from Florida Learn & Serve in 1999.
- Her 7th & 8th grade Science classes participated in the Legacy Program and projects, which included cascade mentoring more than water quality testing and fieldwork.
- In 2000, the number of teachers involved in the WJHS program grew to ten, and included eight science teachers, one social studies teacher, and one math teacher. By 2001, the number of participating teachers had grown to more than 25, and remained at that level through Spring 2003.



Water Action Volunteer event where the kids are singing the Water Cycle Song.



Water Action Volunteers: students building picnic tables at J. P. Hall Nature Preserve.

D. Recent Developments (2003-)

- By Fall 2003, the number of participating teachers declined from more than 20 to 9 (i.e., 8 science teachers and 1 teacher of emotionally handicapped students). Since then, the number of participating teachers has gradually declined from 9 to 6 (2004-2006), and from 6 to 4 (2006-07).
- In cooperation with the Museum of Science and History (MOSH), the City of Jacksonville, Jacksonville Public Utilities, SJRWMD, and other entities, students from WJHS began to participate in an annual Water Education Festival in January 2001. In 2003, with training and support from the Water Action Volunteers staff, these students helped run about half of the 40 learning stations, which were targeted primarily toward elementary students.
- In 2003-04, WJHS was awarded a grant to operate a mini-grant program at WJHS. Students in the leadership class enjoyed talking about service-learning and offering workshops for teachers, and were involved in writing the RFP. However, these students had some difficulties in running this mini-grant program, including agreeing on selection criteria, contending with their high expectations and apparent weaknesses in some proposals, and in awarding grants.
- In 2003, a Leadership Class was created for interested 7th and 8th grade students. The number of students in this class has remained reasonably stable: Fall 2005 (16), Spring 2006 (11), Fall 2006 (11), and Spring 2007 (22).
- The total number of 7th and 8th grade students participating in the WJHS Legacy program over 2006-07 remained high, including students in the Leadership Class (above), students in the Legacy Club (30), and 7th grades in the cascade mentoring project (about 450).
- In March 2006, the first ‘Splash into Science’ family nights were hosted by WJHS students in cooperation with WAV (Water Action Volunteer) Program volunteers at two local elementary schools and WJH.
- Over the 2006-07 school year, a ‘Zap into Science’ family night program was introduced. This program focused on electricity and energy. WJHS Legacy



Ms. Karen Smith, Dr. David McDonald, and Ms. Gayle May

students were involved in planning and securing resources, organizing, setting up, and running these programs.

- During this time period, WJHS students have actively participated in other projects (e.g., marking storm water drains with the WAV Program, teaching science to local elementary students at Jennings State Forest), as well as supporting other annual events (e.g., planning and running stations on selected water topics for ‘AgVentures’ for younger students at the Clay County Fairgrounds, and Earth Day).

E. Funding History and Program Support

- **Principal Involvement and Support:** Dr. David McDonald, Principal, provides support for the WJHS Program in numerous ways (e.g., supporting the creation of the Leadership Class, scheduling service-learning activities, and arranging transportation).
- **Grant Funding from Florida Learn & Serve:** The WJHS Legacy Program has received indirect and direct funding from Florida Learn & Serve since 1995. 1995-96: The first grant funding for outdoor service-learning was provided by the Bayard Council as part of a Community Service Block grant to Clay County from Florida Learn & Serve. 1998-99: Ms. Laura Bennett, a former teacher at Clay County High School and SJRWMD’s Water Action Volunteer (WAV) Program Coordinator, wrote and received a Florida Learn & Serve grant for Clay County. Schools involved in this grant program were as follows: Wilkinson Junior High School, Green Cove Spring Junior High School, and Clay County High School. 1999- : The WJHS Legacy Program has received direct grant funding from Florida Learn & Serve since 1999, including a multi-year award starting in 2003-04.
- **Outside Support from SJRWMD’s Legacy Program:** Over 1997-02, the WJHS Program received assistance from SJRWMD to support a water quality testing project. Since 1999, Mr. Dan Hayes, Education Program Coordinator at SJRWMD, has supplied background materials and support, helped to identify projects, and provided service opportunities for WJHS students. Additional in-kind support from SJRWMD has included expert training of and assistance to students in the field (e.g., forestry and land managers), material and editorial support for publishing materials prepared by WJHS students (e.g., for kiosks), field equipment, and t-shirts.



Legacy project students

- **Program and Project In-Kind Support:** Florida’s Division of Forestry and Jennings State Forest have provided expertise, opportunities, maps, and recognized students with a

cookout. DuPont built an outdoor classroom at their Gum Branch Demonstration site (a strip mine site for titanium) to support student involvement in and monitoring of wetland reclamation efforts (see Description of Project H).

III. Operating Features

List of Major Program Features

- **Major Subjects:** Science, Social studies, Mathematics, and Language Arts
- **Major Service-Learning Courses:** Critical Thinking (a leadership class) and Life Science
- **Extra-Curricular Clubs and Activities:** Legacy Club
- **List of Major Projects:** Critical Thinking; Cascade Mentoring; Water Action Volunteers (WAV); J. P. Hall Nature Preserve; Middleburg History Project; Gopher Tortoise Population Study; School Yard Tree Frog Monitoring; and Restoration of a Strip Mine owned by DuPont
- **Major School/Program Awards and Recognition for Service-Learning:** Volunteer of the Year 2000-2001 (a Legacy student); DuPont International Sustainability Award in 2001; National Service-Learning Leader School Award in 2002; Take Pride in America National Award from the U.S. Department of Interior in 2006; and Teacher of the Year in 1996 (Ms. Karen Smith)
- **Recognition or Celebration:** T-shirts from community partners; Cookout at Jennings State Forest; Certificate of service; Articles in local newspapers; Presentations at regional and state conferences; and Thank-You letters from elementary students; ice cream party for students at the end of the year given by WAV

Description of Project A:

- **Name of Project:** Critical Thinking
- **Teacher(s) and Students Involved:** Ms. Karen Smith and 25-30 students in grades 7 & 8 who scored level 2 or above on FCAT in Critical Thinking
- **Subject Areas and Classes:** Critical Thinking (a leadership class)
- **Service Sites Used and Nature of the Service Activities:** At WJHS; Provide presentations and games at and build Mystery Boxes for Science Nights
- **Uses of Reflection:** Writing, discussion, PowerPoint, picture, presentation, and skits
- **Grading:** 90% of the grade for this course comes from service learning
- **Student outcomes:** Increased willingness to engage in solving community problems; have more task persistence;



Water Action Volunteers at Davis Landing at J. P. Hall Nature Preserve and students are learning to use a seine net to sample the baby fish populations.

become environmentally aware; developed communication skills and strategies; and built an attitude for giving service; historically show increased writing NRT scores. Wilkinson does not have a student council, so one student from Critical Thinking serves on the School Advisory Council as the student body representative.

Description of Project B:

- **Name of Project:** Cascade Mentoring
- **Teacher(s) and Students Involved:** 4 teachers and all 7th graders
- **Subject Areas and Classes:** Cascade Learning
- **Service Sites Used and Nature of the Service Activities:** At WJHS; Provide Science (butterfly and frog) and cooking lessons to kindergarteners and 1st graders at Wilkinson Elementary School and environmental science lessons to third graders from W.E. Cherry Elementary School at Jennings State Forest
- **Uses of Reflection:** Writing about their experiences; discussing on the bus on the way back (e.g., what bothered them)
- **Grading:** Reflective writing and participation counts for almost 100% of the grade for this unit
- **Student Outcomes:** Actively engaged in education; developed communication skills and strategies
- **Recognition or Celebration:** Thank-You notes from students, pictures on website

Description of Project C:

- **Name of Project:** Water Action Volunteers (WAV)
- **Teacher(s) and Students Involved:** 3 teachers, Critical Thinking, and Legacy Club students
- **Service Sites Used and Nature of the Service Activities:** At Black Creek and community; monitor water quality, label storm drains, clean up waterways, and provide presentations, educational games, and hands-on activities at county events (e.g., AgVentures, MOSH Water Festival, Earth Day, Splash into Science Night)
- **Inclusion of Service in the Grading Plan for that Class:** no grade assigned because it is a club
- **Student Outcomes:** Increased awareness of service, stronger communication and leadership skills
- **Recognition or Celebration:** Ice cream party at the end of the year



Water Action Volunteers: Jennings State Forest where third graders, parents, and students are examining what can be found in a rotten log.

Description of Project D:

- **Name of Project:** J. P. Hall Nature Preserve
- **Teacher(s) and Students Involved:** Mr. Jordan Bright, Legacy Club students, Critical Thinking, and Emotionally Handicapped students
- **Service Sites Used and Nature of the Service Activities:** At J.P. Hall Nature Preserve; build kiosks, foot bridges, and picnic tables, help maintain trails and facilities, research and write information for visitor kiosks, and facilitate visits by other students
- **Uses of Reflection:** Writing and discussion
- **Inclusion of Service in the Grading Plan for that Class:** Emotionally Handicapped students receive a grade that also serves as a check in their IEP as progress toward acceptable social skills
- **Student Outcomes:** Emotionally handicapped students built a kiosk for J. P. Hall Nature preserve and were featured on the front cover of *Streamlines*, a publication of the SJRWMD.
- **Recognition or Celebration:** T-shirts from SJRWMD

Description of Project E:

- **Name of Project:** Middleburg History Project (2002-04)
- **Teacher(s) and Students Involved:** Mr. Jim Trott and at-risk students in the Drop-Out Prevention Program
- **Subject Areas and Classes:** Drop Out Prevention Program, Social Studies
- **Service Sites Used and Nature of the Service Activities:** At Middleburg Museum and Hilltop, an historic black settlement in Middleburg. Students visited major historic sites in Middleburg, interviewed residents, and built a three dimensional map of the area
- **Uses of Reflection:** PowerPoint presentations, website
- **Inclusion of Service in the Grading Plan for that Class:** Graded products
- **Student Outcomes:** Increased tolerance for each other; increased appreciation for their community
- **Recognition or Celebration:** Web site

Description of Project F:

- **Name of Project:** Gopher Tortoise Population Study (2001-2003)
- **Teacher(s) and Students Involved:** 24 teachers and 450 students
- **Subjects Area and Classes:** Science, Language Arts, Social Studies, Math
- **Service Sites Used and Nature of the Service Activities:** At Jennings State Forest with support from the State Division of Forestry. Students collected and recorded data on the gopher tortoise habitats, planted trees, picked up trash, and taught 3rd graders



about the importance of fires.

- **Uses of Reflection:** Created displays and presentations, data collected
- **Inclusion of Service in the Grading Plan for that Class:** Grade for that unit
- **Student Outcomes:** Increase in cooperation and leadership skills, understanding of scientific study methods, increased parent participation
- **Recognition or Celebration:** Thank you from Jennings State Forest

Description of Project G:

- **Name of Project:** School Yard Tree Frog Monitoring (2003-2006)
- **Teacher(s) and Students Involved:** Mr. Danny Tarrant, DOP teacher and science students
- **Subject Area and Classes:** Science
- **Service Sites Used and Nature of the Service Activities:** WJHS; monitor tree frog population (classify and count the number of frogs) and send the data to the School Yard Tree Frog Monitoring Project at the Florida Integrated Science Center in Gainesville
- **Uses of Reflection:** Data collected, class discussion
- **Inclusion of Service in the Grading Plan for that Class:** Participation grade
- **Student Outcomes:** Increased student interest
- **Recognition or Celebration:** Recognized on website

Description of Project H:

- **Name of Project:** DuPont Strip Mine Restoration (2001-04)
- **Teacher(s) and Students Involved:** 30 teachers and 800 students
- **Subject Area and Classes:** Science, Social Studies, Math, Language Arts, ESE
- **Service Sites Used and Nature of the Service Activities:** Representatives from DuPont contacted Ms. Smith about involving WJHS students in the restoration of the 'footprint' of a strip mine on their property. At the Gum Branch Wetland Restoration Area, students were involved in monitor wetland tree growth, investigate animal population, and check water quality. Students were involved in restoration activities until the site was shut down in 2004.
- **Uses of Reflection:** Writing, drawing, class discussion, pictures
- **Inclusion of Service in the Grading Plan for that Class:** Grade for that unit
- **Student Outcomes:** Increased awareness of resource management
- **Recognition or Celebration:** Awarded International Sustainability Awards and \$2,500 to the school

IV. Program Benefits and Impacts

A. Longer-Term Impacts on/Benefits to Participating Students

- All S-L projects address benchmarks in the Sunshine State Standards and on the FCAT.
- For some participating students, service-learning activities provided new experiences, particularly to those who have had had limited experience (e.g., they had never been to the beach).
- Most students developed a more positive self-image (self esteem).
- Students developed pride in their own work and the products they created, and learned the value of preparation.
- Participating students had opportunities to develop leadership, planning, organizational, communication, and hands-on teaching skills, as well as to learn how to interact with adults and develop teamwork among themselves.
- Those involved in projects that involved teaching or presenting (e.g., cascade mentoring, Jennings State Forest, Water Education Festivals, Earth Day events) learned what it was like to be a teacher in front of group of students. As a result, many of these students developed a greater respect for what teachers do. Teaching is a life skill. Everyone must be able to teach at some time. Also, effective teaching develops effective communication skills.
- Students involved in the Leadership Class become very excited about their leadership roles and leadership opportunities. They expanded their environmental awareness and developed an increased willingness to problem-solving and risk-taking activities, as well as activities that require persistence.
- S-L experiences encourage participating students to be more productive citizens by helping them cultivate positive attitudes toward community service.

B. Major Impacts on/Benefits to Coordinator, Teachers, and Other School Personnel

- “Service-learning can fit any classroom and any program. Your imagination and energy are the only limits to service-learning so don’t confine yourself to what some other program has already done.” (Ms. Karen Smith)
- Advocate for service learning since it is so effective, recognition as the director of the project with awards from DuPont, National Service-Learning Leader School, Take Pride in America Award 2006, Bob Owens Award 2007.
- Some thought it was too much work and others find it very enjoyable. The school has been recognized multiple times in the newspaper.

- Many personnel moved to other schools when a new school was built in the attendance area in 2005.

C. Major Impacts on/Benefits to Service Sites and Other Community Partners

- Participating kindergarten and elementary school teachers and students look forward to coming each year.
- Many students who graduated from partnering elementary schools look forward to participating in WJHS' Legacy Program as a provider.
- Parents of participating students are more involved in school events than other parents.
- WAV says they could not run their programs without the students.

V. For Further Information

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You may find additional information about the WJHS Program in Legacy Program Annual Reports (1999-) at <<http://www.sjrwm.com/education/legacyprogram.html>>.