

# Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE):

## LIFE –School Board of Clay County/Northfork Leadership Center Program

### A Partnership Agreement

#### Summary

The Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) Program is a statewide network of environmental science, field laboratories on existing state lands (e.g., State Parks, Reserves, etc.) and other appropriate locations. These "LIFE Sites" are designed to support the science education needs of underserved and/or underrepresented middle schools and improve the quality and continuity of educational programming within the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). As classrooms without walls, the LIFE sites 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, manage, and study them) with the needs of Florida's students, teachers, and schools – with special emphasis on science. As such, each site represents a partnership between individual field sites managed by the DEP or other state or federal agency, or other appropriate partners, and the Office of Environmental Education, and the local school district.

Each LIFE site harnesses the local environment as the entry point for inspiring students through hands-on, inquiry-based, field-based activities/labs, applying, reinforcing, enriching, and integrating content from their existing, standards-based curriculum. The "nature of science" will guide instruction and serve as a method to integrate other subjects into an interdisciplinary program. LIFE field program sites model STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education by integrating the STEM subjects, making use of current technology, involving informal education providers, exposing students to STEM careers, and addressing real world challenges.

The goals of the LIFE program are to improve student achievement, support teacher professional development, increase participation of underrepresented and/or underserved populations in STEM academic fields and careers, and enhance stewardship of the region's unique natural communities and resources. Teachers – together with DEP educators – will play a lead role in the designing and implementing field labs to address the priority needs of their students. The LIFE program will be the unique product of the local teachers, DEP staff, and other resources available at the site. The LIFE program will also provide professional development opportunities for teachers in order to establish the necessary local capacity to sustain the LIFE site into the future.

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 (OEE), will serve as the project coordinator for the first year of the project. After year one, day to day operations of the program will be the responsibility of the participating teachers, volunteers, and staff of the primary field site (Northfork Leadership Center, Middleburg, Florida) and others.

The administration of the Clay County School System will work with the participating teachers to ensure school support for the LIFE Program by providing the following: 1) transportation for students and teachers to and from the field site; 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. Funding for these costs in the first two years will be provided for the 6<sup>th</sup> grades at the PASS Grant schools by PASS grant funding. The DEP will provide the professional development for teachers at no charge to the district. The district, through PASS grant funds, will pay reasonable travel expenses for DEP trainers to travel to provide professional development.

The OEE will work with local partners to support efforts to secure funding beyond the first two years. The OEE will continue to compile, analyze and share pre-posttest assessments and survey results. Finally, the OEE will continue to support the program with teacher professional development based on needs identified by the teachers or the district.

Other partners – including universities, county extension offices, 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 or staffing obligations; however, it encourages each partner to ensure implementation of its roles and responsibilities as described above. Any party may withdraw from this agreement at will with 30 days written notice.

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Office of the Secretary                      Date  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman, School Board of Clay County    Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Representative                                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Representative                                      Date

Northfork Leadership Center

PASS Grant