

Our School History

Land to build the school was purchased from Gordon and Cora Tison on June 20, 1938 for \$7,500. The main building was built in 1938 and cost approximately \$100,000. Completed in 1939, it was surrounded by dirt roads and cornfields with a circular dirt drive in the front of the school used for dropping off students. The school had six classrooms, six teachers and about 200 students. The classrooms were all located on the first floor of the building with the upper floor left unused. There was no library or lunchroom, however, there was a beautiful auditorium that seated three hundred people with a full theatrical stage. The wall of the old projection room was built two feet thick, due to the type of film used at that time being a fire hazard.

The school is the oldest-operating school in Alachua County and has undergone many changes during its history, including more than tripling in size and student population. At its opening, the entire student population was White. Black students were first admitted to the school in the mid-1960's. Since August of 1996, the school has been the elementary-level English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) center school for Alachua County and welcomes students from all around the world. In the 2019-20 school year the demographics of the school were the following: 38.9% White, 24.3% Hispanic/Latinx, 22.2% Black/African-American, 7.4% Asian, 7% Multiracial and .2% other.

For the first 80 years of its existence, the school held the name J.J. Finley after Jesse Johnson Finley (1812-1904). During his life Finley held many positions of leadership including an officer in the Second Seminole War, a judge, a brigadier general in the Confederate Army, and a member of the United States House of Representatives. He was a man of his times and exercised his authority in ways that were oppressive, harmful and undermining. The legacy of his life is incompatible with the current inclusive and diverse atmosphere of the school. In response to community outcry, the school board voted to change the name in June 2020.

At this time (Summer 2020), a committee is working to determine a name which better represents the mission statement, culture and community of the school.