

District wins top state award for promoting healthy learning environment

Alachua County Public Schools is one of just eight school districts across Florida to be named a winner of the 2017-19 Florida Healthy School Gold Award by a coalition of state organizations focused on promoting healthy learning environments



Those eight districts now join six others that currently have the coveted Gold level status. The designation lasts for two years and is based on an extensive list of criteria that cover health and physical education, health services, nutrition, counseling, school environment and family involvement, among others.

“We have to document that we are following best practices to promote the health and wellness of students, families and staff,” said energy systems director Theresa Spurling-Wood, who compiled the district’s application in collaboration with district staff representing a wide range of departments and programs. “It’s a very comprehensive review of everything we’re doing as a district to support learning.”

The criteria were developed by the Florida Coordinated School Health Partnership (CSHP), a statewide organization whose stated mission is to “create health literate and health practicing students and staff in all Florida schools.” CSHP works with Florida Action for Healthy Kids, the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation and the Florida Association of School Superintendents to coordinate the awards program, which also includes Silver and Bronze designations.

“These school districts are sending a powerful message to their staff, students and parents—that health is an integral part of every aspect of life, including education,” said Healthy Kids Corporation CEO Rebecca Matthews in a news release about the awards. “These district efforts are setting positive examples for kids so they are encouraged to engage in healthy behaviors and lifestyles as part of their daily routine.”

Included in the district’s application were school nurses, the district’s numerous and award-winning food and nutrition programs, the System of Care for children and families in crisis, school-based flu immunizations, health and physical education, and many other programs, people, services and initiatives.

The district’s application received additional credit based on its Green Ribbon Award from the federal Department of Education ‘for exemplary efforts to reduce environmental impact and costs, promote better health, and ensure effective environmental education.’ The district won that award in the spring of 2016.

“Our schools and district are doing much more than teaching the three R’s,” said Interim Superintendent Sandy Hollinger. “Across departments and in collaboration with families and the community, we are working to address the needs of the whole child because we all recognize that’s critical to success in school.”

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