

Third Annual *Learn Green Conference & Expo* Furthers Local Green Schools Movement

Christina M. Crespo, Environmental & Conservation Services Department

"*Learn Green* was a unique event; it challenged attendees to raise the bar on their existing commitments to greener schools and the education of a generation of sustainability natives." Those were the words of keynote speaker Rachel Gutter, Director of the Center for Green Schools at the US Green Building Council, as she described the third annual *Learn Green Conference & Expo*, held on November 11, 2011, at the Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts.

The one-day event, presented in partnership by Florida Atlantic University's Pine Jog Environmental Education Center and the School District of Palm Beach County's Division of Support Operations, attracted more than 850 attendees, speakers and exhibitors from twenty different Florida counties and six other states and stands as Florida's first statewide green schools conference. The conference featured concurrent sessions and exhibits that provided opportunities for school staff, parents, administrators, and students to learn how to "go green" at school and at home. This year's conference also included a special educational track, called "Lessons Learned & Best Practices," for design and construction professionals.

Held on Veteran's Day, the conference's opening ceremony began with a patriotic salute to the nation's servicemen and -women. Students presented the flags, Pledge of Allegiance, and national anthem. Then, Ms. Gutter addressed the audience with what was called, "an incredibly inspirational and uniquely informative discussion" about the future of green schools and the mission of those involved in the green schools movement; that is, to provide every child in America with a green school within this generation.

Conference participants were provided with a choice of more than 80 educational sessions held throughout the day, with topics ranging from school gardening and recycling to climate change and renewable energy. In addition, the school's gymnasium was transformed into a vibrant exposition hall, with approximately 90 exhibitors displaying their environmentally-based products and services. Exhibitors included this year's presenting sponsor, Solid Waste Authority of Palm Beach County, as well as many other organizations. The day ended with approximately 50 participants enjoying a guided walking tour of the downtown West Palm Beach Waterfront and cultural attractions of nearby CityPlace. We look forward to hosting the 4th Annual *Learn Green Conference & Expo* in the fall of 2012!