OVERVIEW

The Florida A&M University (FAMU) College of Education in collaboration with the Florida A&M University Developmental Research School (DRS) is in receipt of a second five-year grant award thus, becoming one of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) successful programs.

The 21st CCLC program, a key component of the No Child Left Behind Act is strategically designed to provide a range of high-quality services to support student learning and development by engaging the students’ in academic enrichment, personal enrichment, and other activities engineered to complement the students’ regular academic program, including the provision for tutorial services to help students, particularly students who attend low-performing schools, to meet state and local student academic achievement standards in core academic subjects, and offer families of students served by community learning centers opportunities for literacy and related educational development.

FAMU SMART Academies (21st CCLC) is a School-Within-A-School, after school program, housed at FAMU DRS. Commensurate with the federal and state education mandates, FAMU SMART Academies embraces the opportunity to positively influence student performance through the implementation of innovational educational practices. Select academic disciplines are offered in after school and summer programs for students enrolled in grades K-12 at DRS. FAMU SMART Academies feature five academies in the areas of Science, Mathematics, the Arts, Reading and Technology. The Arts, including visual, performing and culinary are infused in each academy. The academies provide opportunities that address the academic needs of students through project-based learning activities, homework assistance, tutoring, field experiences, career exploration, service learning, character education, physical education, recreational activities, and dropout prevention. All instructions are delivered through curricular materials that are research-proven. Academies offer parent involvement opportunities to facilitate character development and encourage family literacy. The FAMU SMART Academies program is primarily designed to support DRS academic structure; enhance students’ performance on the Florida State Assessment (FSA); increase the number of students graduating from high school; improve the academic performance of at-risk students; and facilitate at-risk students’ admission to college.

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“Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.”
— Abigail Adams
During the 2014-2015 school year students and their families were afforded a multitude of rich, relevant, and applicable experiences centered around the Project Based Learning Theme: “Crime Scene Investigation: Learning Through Observation.” The experiences, activities, and projects are specifically aligned with the Florida State Standards and are designed to enrich students’ academic and personal growth in a safe, nurturing environment and provide multiple literacy and personal growth activities and experiences for students’ family members. Through the project based learning, hands-on, exploratory design model of instruction and learning, students attending the FAMU SMART Academies Program participate in several projects, activities, and experiences including, but not limited to: “Baby Rattler Sleuths: The Case of Bigfoot,” “Mission Impossible,” “Something Has Gone Missing in Africa,” “Baby Rattler Code Breakers,” “The CSI of Me: Genetics, DNA, Anatomy, Self-Reflection,” and field experiences such as a scavenger hunt at the Jacksonville Zoo and trail and cave observations at Marianna Caverns, all designed to support and reinforce students’ learning. During the Summer 2015 Session the program infused several enrichment components such as Spoken Word/Poetry, African and Caribbean Dance, Health and Nutrition, Fitness, Photography and Videography, and Culinary Arts to expose students to varied genres, fields, and experiences.

An outcome of the program evaluation documented the fact that FAMU SMART Academies participants experienced an increase in academic performance reflected in their regular school day grades, standardized assessments (Florida State Assessment), and daily attendance. Additionally, participants demonstrated a more positive and engaging attitude towards learning. All of these factors coupled with others contributed to an improvement in the overall Florida A&M University Developmental Research School (DRS) school grade.

FAMU SMART Academies’ project concept was recently investigated by a neighboring school district as a possible program to replicate in order to address academic deficiencies of its population. The district’s interest in the project’s concept clearly demonstrates the innovative approach to supporting student learning. The Florida A & M University College of Education and FAMU DRS are pleased to again partner to offer FAMU SMART Academies to students and families.