

## Students from Jefferson and Madison Counties participate in the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars Summer Challenge The Great EcoDebate*

### Participating School Districts



#### Panhandle Area Educational Consortium

Patrick L. McDaniel, Executive Director

Calhoun

Franklin

Gadsden

Gulf

Holmes

Jackson

Jefferson

Liberty

Madison

Taylor

Wakulla

Walton

Washington



#### Heartland Educational Consortium

Dr. Debra Elliott, Executive Director

DeSoto

Glades

Hardee

Hendry

Highlands

Okeechobee



#### North East Florida Educational Consortium

James Surrency, Ph.D., Executive Director

Columbia

Flagler

Gilchrist

Lafayette

Levy

P.K. Yonge

Putnam

Union

Many of the Panhandle Area Educational Consortium's *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project participants will begin the academic year with new skills, developed through participation in one of the project-sponsored Summer Challenges. The Summer Challenges gave gifted and talented students in the consortium-served small and rural districts opportunities to explore STEM content in depth, collaboratively problem solve and conduct investigations, enhance leadership skills and learn about STEM careers.

STEM Scholars from Jefferson and Madison Counties participated in a four-day STEM experience, *The Great EcoDebate*, at Tallahassee Community College. Associate Professor Mabry Gaboardi, Ph.D. and Assistant Professor Bob Lutz challenged students to make an informed decision concerning a potential road site that would offset and reduce its environmental impacts. One step in the process was to map and describe the ecology of the selected potential road field sites which were located on the TCC Campus. Collaborating as a team, students worked to identify, describe, and calculate diversity for plants and animals at their designated site. Further, each team was asked to become familiar with any rare species that might be present, as well as explore the microscopic communities at each site. As each team came to a consensus, a lively city commission meeting was held to present scientific findings, describe possible road locations and features, listen to the interesting views of local citizens and debate environmental and policy issues associated with the building of the road. Throughout this challenge STEM careers in environmental sciences and engineering were highlighted.

This engagement in an authentic STEM research experience, under the guidance of Dr. Gaboardi and Professor Lutz, provided students the opportunity for hands-on analysis of the decision making process for road construction.

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Savannah Salter (Madison County HS), Ja'Mya Madry (Jefferson County Middle/High School) and Ceridwyn Griffis (Madison County HS) compare notes about their field site on the TCC Campus.



Professor Lutz assists Takaya Broxsie (Jefferson County Middle/High School), Tyler Burnett (Madison County HS), and Faith Siplin (Madison County HS) as they learn how to use a GPS device to document the specific location of plants on the field site

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Nicolas Rykard (Madison County HS), Kelli Garner (Madison County HS), and Tania Cazares (Jefferson County Middle/High School) prepare to examine their field site for plant diversity.