



2020 Section Education Winner: Florida Section

The High School Academy Program

We've all heard about the "silver-wave" of retirement and the need to fill all those entry level positions that will be vacated by promotions and attrition over the next 5-10 years. Recognizing this quandary, Florida Section (FSAWWA) Operators and Maintenance Council created the Operators Initiative.

The goals of the Florida Section Operators Initiative are to:

- 1) Understand, communicate and support the need for Treatment Plant Operators
- 2) Cultivate the next generation for entry into our profession to provide "bench strength" for local water and wastewater systems
- 3) Expand the High School Academy Program

Since the first Academy graduating class in 2013, over 150 high school students have taken 200 Florida treatment plant operator exams with a 25% pass rate. It is important to note that no special exam is given to high school students; high school seniors are given the exact same Operator exam as everyone else.

Florida allows the Academy students to take the exam *prior* to receiving their high school diploma. Once the diploma is earned, FDEP releases the exam scores and issues the certificate of completion.

FSAWWA Support

The Florida Section provides the academies support in many different capacities. Local utility volunteers participate with Advisory Committees, provide guest speakers and letters of support. As schools closed due to COVID-19 several FSAWWA volunteers stepped up to tutor graduating students, helping them complete their Academy coursework.

FSAWWA also provides each Academy financial support with a three-year cash grant of \$3,000.00 a year. Schools can purchase textbooks, laboratory and classroom supplies, and pay for expensive bus rentals needed for field trips. \$100.00 scholarships are available for any Academy graduate to retake the operator exam, if necessary.

FSAWWA Fall Conference

Each year at the Section's Annual Fall Conference we hold a 'High School-Student Session'. The 2019 Session attracted over 70 students, teachers, and school. Students break for lunch and sit

with several Section volunteers to talk about their career progression and their expectations after high school graduation. Box lunches are purchased and provided by sponsors.

In the afternoon, students participate in a scavenger hunt in the Exhibit Hall, tailored after the Young Professional's scavenger hunt at ACE, with a focus on exam questions.

Our most mature Academy is Heritage High School **Academy of Environmental Water Technology** (AEWT) Palm Bay, Florida. Students focus on a three-year Environmental Technology track beginning in grade 10. Students who complete the entire three-year program, earn a "C" average or better, and pass the FDEP Operator's exam, can earn 12 hours of college credit at Florida Gateway College.

St. Johns Technical High School in St. Augustine, Florida is the home of the **Academy of Coastal and Water Resources**. Students participate in valuable hands-on curriculum designed in partnership with St. Johns County Utilities, Florida Gateway College, the City of St. Augustine, and the University of Florida.

In addition, the Academy of Coastal and Water Resources partners with the City of Palm Bay Utilities Department by budgeting and hiring up to three students every summer for a 5-week work/study program. Students earn \$10.00 an hour, gives them a "feel" for the day-to-day work and providing valuable resume experience.

Two new Academies were started in 2019

Lake Brantley High School in the City of Altamonte Springs started **Project H2O Transfer**. This Academy is a joint effort between Lake Brantley High School, the City of Altamonte Springs, and the Seminole County School Board. The Academy spans the entire Senior year of high school with specific days and times scheduled for the students to work side-by-side with licensed operators at the City of Altamonte Springs Regional Water Reclamation Facility, providing the student valuable actual treatment plant experience.

The second newest Academy is underway at Leto High School near the City of Tampa. **The Water Treatment Plant Operations Academy** prepares participating high school seniors for the Class C Water Plant Operator's Exam. The Hillsborough County School District sponsors the Academy.

So, What's Next?

Seminole High School in the City of Seminole is starting a brand-new Academy in the Fall of 2020. Eight students enrolled in the school's new **Engineering Academy's Water Resource Sustainability Program**.

This initiative is a proven opportunity to bring jobs into our communities, now and in the future, by building a strong local pool of Operator Trainees. We can hire the Academy graduate as a trainee. We can train them at our plants to provide the skills and the actual experience they need to get their license. They grow up and mature; They make some money; They learn independence. They obtain a higher license and get promoted; They buy a car and move away

to get a better paying job at a facility away from home. Then we get start all over again with the next graduating class!

Help prepare the post-Millennial generation for a career as a Licensed Treatment Plant Operator.

(Seminole HS interns)

"Thank you for showing us around more different places like the breaker room and thank you for showing us a more in-depth process of testing voltage. I picked up the cards you put down and the tour was very informative. I would like to work with you in the future if possible." Dakota

"Thank you for showing me what you do at the plant and for fixing my shoes with zip ties so they wouldn't fall off." Rachel

"Thank you for taking your time to teach me and the rest of the interns. The part of the tour with checking the computers and seeing which pump may have a problem was my favorite part. I looked forward to observing you as our operator." Amberlyn

"Thank you for showing me around the plant and for talking about how you got into the job you do there." Rachel



