

ONE ROOM SCHOOL HOUSE



*Annual
Report*

1997-1998

Fragunt, Incendunt, Nunquam Cognoscunt

OVERVIEW

The One Room School House Project, Inc. had, by any standard, a successful first year. We have hesitated to make this judgment, much less report it, without quantifiable proof of the assertion. The evidence, statistical and anecdotal, shows every indication that we have started off on the right foot.

While the school year has gone by quickly, we find ourselves at its end still working very hard each day. The students have, for the most part, developed a very good work ethic which was indicated by the fact that they were still going strong academically at the end of the school year. Teacher morale appeared high, as it had been all year. The school was blessed with an excellent staff.

Our end of the year testing, while excellent in some respects and above average over all, reflected the need for even more emphasis on individual instruction in basic skills, especially in reading. The IOWA tests indicated a good leap forward in average scores for math and language, but only a small gain in reading. FCAT reading found our fourth graders near the top of Alachua County Schools. Our fifth grade class, while too small to be statistically significant, lead all district schools by twenty points. Our fourth graders came out fifth overall in the district on the Florida Writing Assessment. All scores were well above state averages.

Our student population was very stable over the course of the year. We varied in number between fifty-six and sixty. We lost only five students to relocation. The addition of a sixth grade and kindergarten class will allow our students and their incoming siblings to remain together next year.

Our teachers worked very diligently over the year taking on additional responsibilities as needed to keep things running smoothly. All teachers developed areas of specialization, and holding to our philosophy of a family like atmosphere, every teacher taught every student. With the exception of Ms. Rajswasser, who came on board at Christmas to help us for a few months, all our teachers will return and they will be joined by two more.

Mission

The underlying purpose of The One Room School House Project, Inc. (ORSH) is the creation of an extremely intimate, rigorous, and progressive learning environment for elementary students who would not typically have the opportunity to experience academic excellence.

Our perception has been that students in lower S.E.S. settings are routinely confronted with stunted academic expectations. Experience and research indicate that pared expectations lead inevitably to curtailed performance, and ultimately to the "dumbing down" of curriculum and pedagogy. As educators we have found this cyclical decline belittling and totally unnecessary. We have seen all students thrive academically when given the opportunity, the means, and the encouragement to do so. Our School provides educational conditions that challenge students to achieve personal bests. We foster high academic expectations and standards by making a total professional and personal commitment to our elementary school. This involves establishing a family-like atmosphere that embraces students and parents, promoting a strong work ethic among students, and making the school accountable to its stakeholders: parents, students, community, and School Board.

In its wisdom, the State of Florida has established eight purposes for Charter Schools. Our School intends to serve each purpose. To wit, the school:

1. *Improves student learning by teaching knowledge, skills, and thinking. We expect our students to apply the knowledge and skills they*



acquire in school to forge an understanding of the real world. We have established a low student to teacher ratio (approximately 12:1). We encourage the participation of parents, volunteers, and students from the University of Florida and Santa Fe Community College. We bring in speakers and experts from the community so that all students have a high percentage of one-on-one and small group instruction.

2. *Increase learning opportunities for all students, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for students who are identified as academically low achieving* by actively recruiting low S.E.S. students in Alachua County. The School is interested in providing high-order educational experiences, usually associated with private or gifted education, to students, who for economic or socio-cultural reasons, would not typically be availed of such experiences. The curriculum combines a strong core of basic skills in all areas with a regimen of real-world application.

3. *Encourage the use of different and innovative learning methods* by finding the most appropriate combination of teaching methods for each student. The School avails itself of any teaching method and technology that has shown itself to be effective. These methods and technologies include computer assisted learning, one-on-one and small group tutoring, cooperative learning, parent tutoring, peer tutoring, the teaching and practicing of democratic principles, discovery learning, lectures, coaching, Socratic questioning, critical thinking, problem solving, public speaking, debate, whole language, phonics, integrated curriculum, word processing,

personal computing, etc. . The emphasis is on determining the most advantageous and efficient combination of teaching practices for each student.

4. *Increase choice of learning opportunities for students* by offering an independent, yet public, school choice to students who would not otherwise have the option of enrolling in a small school that focuses on traditional basic skills, coupled with reflective thinking within individually tailored learning programs.

5. *Establish a new form of opportunity for schools* by encouraging students to learn at measurably higher levels than would be expected in larger public schools; holding the school accountable for student's learning by expecting measurably higher learning outcomes; and requiring parents to be actively involved in their children's learning.

6. *Require the measurement of learning outcomes and create innovative measurement tools* by requiring that the school's teachers evaluate students through comprehensive and integrated portfolio based assessment procedures in addition to state and district mandated testing and grade reporting. The School pre- and posttests all students in mathematics, reading, language arts, writing, social studies, and science.

7. *Make the school the unit for improvement* by constantly evaluating innovative educational practices, curricula, and supportive public affiliations. And by holding the school responsible for establishing and maintaining a constantly higher performance standard.

8. *Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to own the learning program at the school site* by making teachers, rather than administrators, responsible for establishing the charter and maintaining the excellence of the charter's school. The School also gives other educators, especially student teachers at the university level, an opportunity to experience an innovative school design.

Testing

The One Room School House adopted the testing and report card schedule of the Alachua school district. Our students receive report cards six times in the academic year at six week intervals. Interim reports are sent home as needed.

Our students take the same battery of tests that the school district has adopted on the same schedule. In addition to this testing schedule, we administer our own placement tests at the beginning of the year in order to place students at their best achievement levels.



State Wide Scores

We have chosen our third grade class to do comparisons across the district on IOWA test. This choice was made because the district does grade level, not school level reporting and because the third grade is our largest, most diverse class.

Our Core Total Average Percentile Ranking was 57.6. This is the average of the percentile ranking for Math, Language, and Reading. Of fourteen schools in the district that reported this statistic, we ranked fourth. The average percentile ranking for all district schools was 49.

Iowa Math

All students at The One Room School House took the math section of the IOWA achievement test. Our students made modest gains on this test. The average student gain from 1996-97 to 1997-98 was seven percentile rankings. Only students who had taken the math exam in the previous school year were used in this comparison. Of course the range of improvement and regression was much greater than the average.

Our third graders had an average percentile ranking of 66.3 in math. This placed us ninth out of twenty-four schools reporting in the district. The district average was sixty-first percentile.

Iowa Reading

All students took the IOWA reading test as well. On average, our students made a gain of two percentile rankings between their scores in 1996-97 and 1997-98. Again, the range of improvement and regression was quite large.

Our average percentile ranking for third graders was 47. This placed us at the district average exactly and ranked us in the middle of twenty-four schools reporting.

Iowa Language

We were not able to compare scores in this area between 1996-97 and 1997-98 because too few grade levels take this test in consecutive years. However, our overall average percentile ranking for third grade was 59.5.



Of fourteen schools reporting at the third grade level this score placed us fourth in the district. The average district score was 48.

FCAT Math

This was the state's first year for counting the scores of the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test. We may have trouble duplicating our achievements on this test in the future. Our fifth grade students' average score was seventeen points higher on this test than any other school in the district. This result is definitely not statistically relevant due to the fact that we had only five students taking the test. However it should be noted that three of the five students were Title One qualified.

The State average score on this test was 300. The District average score was 309. The One Room School House average score was 356.

FCAT Reading

Our Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test scores in Fourth Grade Reading placed us among the elite in Alachua County schools and in the upper tier of schools statewide.

Our average student score was 314. The state average was 294 and the district average was 303. Our ranking in the district was 7th out of 24 schools.

Florida Writes!

We are especially proud of our Fourth Graders' achievements on the Florida Writes test. This is true for two reasons. First, we placed very high among district elementary schools. Second, none of our students had a test score below the state average.

Our average score was 3.4. The state average was 3.0 and the district average was 3.1. We placed fifth in the district in average score!

Core Total Ranking	
District Average	One Room Average
49	57.6
One Room Rank: 4th out of 14	

Math Ranking	
District Average	One Room Average
61	66.3
One Room Rank: 9th out of 24	

Reading Ranking	
District Average	One Room Average
47	47
One Room Rank: 13th out of 24	

Language Ranking	
District Average	One Room Average
48	59.5
One Room Rank: 4th out of 14	

FCAT Math Ranking		
State	District	One Room
300	309	356
One Room Rank: 1st out of 24		

FCAT Reading Ranking		
State	District	One Room
294	303	314
One Room Rank: 7th out of 24		

Florida Writes! Ranking		
State	District	One Room
3.0	3.1	3.4
One Room Rank: 5th out of 24		

Student Population

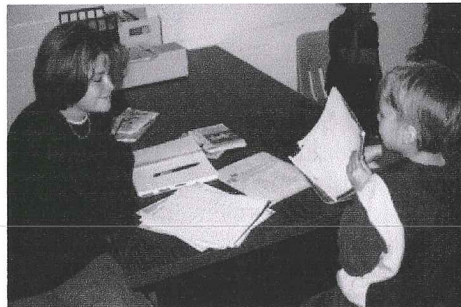
Many of our students were former students of Neil Drake, the charter school founder, at Rawlings Elementary.

Title One

Seventy Five percent of our students qualified for free or reduced lunch during the 1997-98 school year. Thus, we qualified as a Title One school. We worked closely with both the Title One office at the School Board of Alachua County and its director, Ed Smith, and with the District Director of Title One, Louis Dunbar. Dr. Dunbar was particularly gracious in his support of the school, taking pains to make sure we qualified for funding our first year and very generously donating surplus equipment and supplies from his office. Ed Smith and his entire staff at the school board were extremely helpful in guiding us through the grant proposal process.

Grade Levels / Statistics / ESE

Because we are a small school and intend to stay small we must limit our mission and our services. We do not have the resources to serve the needs of a diverse psychologically educationally handicapped population. Therefore, the only population of ESE students that we can guarantee services to are gifted. We are more than willing to work with any student who comes our way, but we advise parents that we cannot sustain any preexisting ESE services for their child. What we can offer is a great deal of individual attention to all students.



1997-98 Board

Initial Organizers:

Neil Drake: Mr. Drake has taught in the Alachua County School System as an elementary teacher for five years. He has taught first and third grades and was a grade level team leader at Rawlings Elementary. He holds the Following degrees from the University of Florida: B. A. Elementary Education
M. Ed. Social Foundations of Education
Ed. S. Social Foundations.

Arthur Newman Ph.D.: Dr. Newman has been on the faculty of the College of Education at the University of Florida since 1968. He has published numerous articles on a variety of educational issues in many highly regarded educational journals. Dr. Newman maintains a keen interest in all educational issues and serves the Board of Directors as an advisor on all educational matters.

Catherine Swan: Catherine Swan holds Masters degrees in counseling and educational psychology. She is a highly honored teacher at both the University of Florida and Santa Fe Community College where she teaches courses in education and psychology. She has directed and worked closely with students who volunteer as tutors in Alachua County schools.

Jennifer Bales Drake: Ms. Bales Drake is an attorney with expertise in corporate and property law. She has a practice in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She lends her considerable legal expertise to our project whenever necessary.

Marrie Robinson: Ms. Robinson is a parent of one of our third graders. She taught in Alachua County at Lincoln Middle School. She has served the board of directors as treasurer during the initial part of the 1997-98 school year.

Tami Fritz: Ms. Fritz is the parent of a third grade student at our school. She has been elected twice



to serve as the parent representative on our board. She has also lent her considerable expertise in computer operations to our school.

Paula Grasel: Ms. Grasel is a life long teacher in Alachua County. She serves the board as Secretary for the 1998-99 school year.

Teachers

Tina Greene: Ms. Greene came to us after teaching for a year in Alachua County and for many years in Washington State. She taught Language arts to all our students. This was, perhaps, our strongest area in our first year as witnessed by our Florida Writes and ITBS scores.

Ms. Greene has a Bachelors degree in Education. She is from Mexico and speaks Spanish especially fluently. She uses Spanish in many interesting ways and thrilled many of our students and parents by starting a Spanish club for the school.

Latoynia Hicks: Ms. Hicks was, for years, a Title One aide in the Alachua County school system. She works well with students who need a lot of personal attention and individual tutoring.

Ms. Hicks was our generalist, she filled in for anyone who was missing or needed extra help. She took a computer course at SFCC in order to be more fluent with that aspect of our curriculum. Like all our teachers, she was tireless in all her efforts to improve the school.

Jeanne Minsavage: Ms. Minsavage has been a media aide for years in the district schools. She came to us to take on the task of setting up a library and a state-of-the-art computer lab. She has worked many nights and weekends configuring our computers and learning to use the best of academic software.

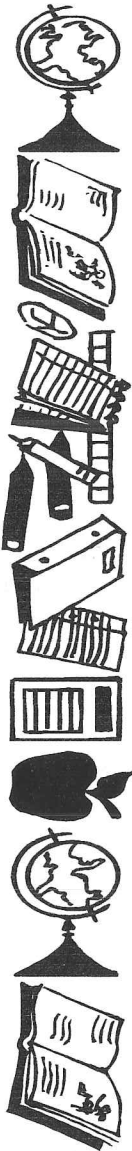
Ms. Minsavage also took on the task of learning a very complicated data entry system for providing statistical input to the school board.

Rebecca Rajswasser: Ms. Rajswasser was a recent Masters graduate in education from the University of Florida. She took over much of the reading program at Christmas time and contributed a lot of expertise in reading evaluation to our program.

Ms. Rajswasser was also responsible for many innovative teaching practices in the area of reading and writing. She has since moved to New York City to pursue various interests.

Neil Drake: Mr. Drake is the math teacher and principal of the school. He has a Specialist degree in education from the University of Florida. Mr. Drake taught for five years at Rawlings Elementary before founding the One Room School House.

Mr. Drake teaches math to all students at the school. He is beloved by few but feared by all.



Community Partnership

From its inception, The One Room School House has been blessed by a plethora of sponsors, business partners and supporters. Among those that we would like to thank are:

Nationwide Insurance - Many thanks to Angie Thomas, property manager at Nationwide. Angie has seen to it that we are well supplied with furniture, computers, paper and supplies, etc. Nationwide is a marvelous corporate sponsor.

Kinko's - Kinko's has donated many dollars worth of photocopying and supplies. They continue to be a corporate sponsor.

Dr. Louis Dunbar - Dr. Dunbar and his Regional Title One Staff have been very generous in their time and donations of material, especially computers, computer supplies and office furniture. They were an early and much needed help.

James and Valerie Korth - The Korth's, always interested in supporting a good cause, gave us our first big financial donation. It was the start up grant we needed to survive until we got our Federal Start Up Grant.

Jack and Joan Witty - The Witty's were very generous in our initial year of operation. As soon as they heard about our work, they were anxious to lend their financial support. Many thanks!

Charles & Deborah Vermorel - The Vermorel's were very generous in their financial support of the school. Due to their generosity, we were able to make substantial additions to our curricular materials.

Chance Charter School - Chance Charter School showed their support of the entire charter school movement by giving furniture to the other charter schools in their time of need.

Pandion Systems - Pandion Systems, a local environmental education company, spent many hours and much effort in setting up our Earth Day activities and in educating our students in environmental concerns.

Xerographic Copy Centers - These folks were kind enough to work with Ms. Rajswasser in donating printing services to her school newspaper.

Publix Super Markets Charities - Publix has been very generous in giving us a nice grant to support learning activities at the school.

Books Inc. - Books Inc. donated many fine editions to our library.

Barnes & Noble - Barnes & Noble made a very nice package of reading materials and supplies for each



of our students that was distributed over the holidays.

North Central Baptist Church - These fine people made it possible for us to have a playground and physical education field. Many thanks to Pastor Lloyd Jones and his flock.

Lake Forest Baptist - Steve Griffis, pastor, gave us permission to have our year- end Recitation in his church. We had over two hundred people attend and they were very comfortable in this fine facility.

Neighborhood Alliance Church - Pastor Barker was kind enough to let us use his facility to have our initial parent meeting. We had no building at the time and this was very important to our survival.

Bell South - Beth Christian and the fine folks at Bell South Net Day donated five phone lines and five Internet access accounts for our first year of operation. This was a big boost to our computer program. They also came in and did all the wiring of our facility for free.

Special Events



Fund Raiser

The students did a fine job selling holiday items for a month in the Fall. They raised a nice sum of money for the school and earned a lot of rewards for themselves. Our top sellers were Michael Powers, Steven Camps and Kachiri Robinson.



Christmas Dinner

Just before Christmas break, Mr. Drake fixed up a huge pot of his infamous Lithuanian-American Spaghetti Sauce, all the ladies got together and cooked up salad, garlic bread and deserts, and the entire One Room community (over 200 served) sat down to a feast and good fellowship. This will be an annual event.

Cinderella

Ms. Minsavage, Ms. Greene, and Ms. Powers organized a trip for many of our students to go to the Performing Arts Center to see a National touring company's production of Cinderella. A splendid time was had by all.

The Wiz

Cinderella was so successful that Ms. Minsavage couldn't resist getting another group together to go back to the performing Arts center for The Wiz.

Cinco de Mayo

Ms. Greene, our resident Mexican, brought a taste of Hispanic Culture to our school by celebrating the Fifth of May in South of the Border style. Pinatas were punctured, enchilatas were eaten, señoritas and gauchos were garbed in glorious color. No hablo Ingles.

Earth Day

The folks at Pandion Systems, a local environmental education company and a corporate sponsor, were magnanimous with their time in setting up Earth Day at The One Room School House. They brought in folks from Adopt a River, Gainesville Regional Utilities energy conservation department, live

Fund Raiser

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Olympics

Ted Deer Chaser Bassett

Book It

Recitations

recycling performers, tree planting demonstrations by the city of Gainesville, and their own personnel to demonstrate the manufacture of products from recycled waste. It was a very educational experience, as well as a lot of hands on fun for the kids.

Olympics

Coach Mike (Our Volunteer of the Year, Mike Rizzi) organized a terrific field day reminiscent of the original Grecian Olympics. Four teams from four different countries competed in a dozen, fun and athletic events. Many Gold, Silver, and Bronze metals were distributed. To the best of our recollection, the Lithuanian team won the metals count.

Ted Deer Chaser Bassett

We were lucky enough to have a visit from a Native American teller of tales. Ted Deer Chaser Bassett, a member of the Wampanoag tribe, spent an afternoon with our students explaining Native American tribal customs and telling stories from his youth.

Book It

All of our students participated in the Pizza Hut Book It program. They were rewarded with free trips to Pizza Hut for lunch for their prodigious amount of reading.

Recitations

This was a wonderful culmination to the school year. All of our students entertained all of our families and staff with poetry readings, living biographies, demonstrations of skills, and singing. We also had our graduation and awards ceremony at this event. It was the perfect ending for a near perfect year.

Parent/ School Association

The One Room School House is extremely proud of our family like atmosphere. All the teachers teach all the children and know all their families. Our association with parents is extremely informal because of this fact. While we started off with the idea of having an entity called Parent/School Association which would be a separate organization that supported school activities, what we discovered was that there were no boundaries between school staff organization and member families. We did not have to organize committees to perform various functions, we needed no hierarchies or chairpersons. People simply stepped forward to do what was necessary and supportive of our goals.

The parents elected a board member to serve on the corporation board of directors. Beyond that, there are no formal connections between parents and school. The informal connections are, however, quite strong. When we have parent meetings the attendance is always upward of 75 % of our families. At our end of the year Recitation, only two families were not in attendance due to graduations of older siblings. A number of our parents were highly active in setting up our computer program, fixing and configuring donated computers, and lending a hand towards the physical preparations of the school. Parents know that they are free to come in to the school, participate in activities, tutor children and lend a hand whenever they feel the spirit. When we have special events the parents are always there to help with set up, operation, and clean up.

Schedule of parent meetings for 1997-98 School Year:

June 15th, 1997	Original Organizational Meeting
August 12th, 1997	Pre-School Meeting
October 14th, 1997	School Progress Meeting
November 18th, 1997	School Progress Meeting
December 14th, 1997	Holiday Meeting and Dinner
March 3rd, 1998	Discussion of Testing
June 1st, 1998	Recitation, Awards, Graduation



Clubs

Our clubs met once a week on Tuesday afternoons. All the students participated in one of the clubs. Students were very eager to join the club of their choice and enthusiasm was high.

Science

Mr. Drake supervised the science club. Among the activities this year were construction, launching of model rockets; investigation of computer and electronic components; growing and observation of triops; the growing of various crystals and experimentation with chemical compounds.

Spanish

Ms. Greene operated a very popular Spanish Club. It was, in fact, so popular we had difficulty keeping kids in the other clubs at times. The children learned all about Mexican and Hispanic culture, ate many fine Mexican culinary treats, and had a wonderful Cinco de Mayo celebration.

Computer

Ms. Minsavage supervised the Computer Club. Students of all grade levels learned skills and participated in activities on the Internet, on CD ROM, and on various applications.

Fitness

Coach Mike, our superior volunteer, directed the physical education club. Students with extra energy to burn spent an hour burning it through fun games and sporting activities.

SBAC

We are proud to say that The One Room School House had nothing but positive experiences in our dealings with our sponsor, The School Board of Alachua County (SBAC). This good relationship was fostered by Don Lewis, SBAC pointman for charter schools. Don was always extremely helpful, knowledgeable, and dependable, as was his office manager, Maureen Moore.

The Board members themselves were extremely positive about our project and afforded us every

opportunity for success. They were Darnell Rhea, Judy Brashear, Bill Cake, Bev Carroll, and Barbara Sharp. They were unanimous in their votes for our charter, grants and funding. They richly deserve their reputation as the leading Florida school board in support of charter school education.

Other SBAC administrators who were thoughtful and helpful in getting us started and keeping us going were Robert Hughes, Superintendent; B. J. Skank and Renee Speisman from the ESE department; Sylvia Baker, testing; Russ Bedell and Judy Langford from data processing, Kathy Black, gifted; Eldon Chambers, food service; Ed Smith and his staff in Title One; Dave Hotery for explaining risk management; Mel Lucas for explaining everything; and Tom Whittmer for his fine legal advice and help with our contract.

TRACEY BAILEY

Tracey and his staff at the Office of School Choice have been an inspiration and motivation to all charter school founders. In our case, we can safely say that we would not have come into existence had we not been inspired to by one of his infamous presentations. Throughout the process of creation, mobilization, and implementation, Tracey has always been there for us with intelligent and creative solutions to any problem. He continues to be our biggest supporter and wisest advisor.



School Operation

Groups: The plan at The One Room School House is to keep learning groups as small as possible and as homogeneous as possible. We limit group size to about twelve and we mix "grade" levels freely so that each student is working at his or her correct academic level. In some cases this means that a "First Grader" is working in a group predominated by second and third graders. In one case, we had a third grade student working with fifth graders. It also means that we have no inhibitions about lowering the actual grade level of students if we feel that they will need an extra year in elementary to fully prepare for Middle School.

Schedule: Our class schedule was built around a middle school model. In order for each teacher to teach every student, we played to our academic strength. Every student went to Mr. Drake for math, Ms. Greene for Language, Ms. Rajswasser for Reading and Ms. Minsavage for Computer Studies. The afternoon hour was devoted to specialty subjects such as social studies, science, art, music, and physical education. We would break schedule and reorganize groups by grade level rather than achievement level to prepare for specific tests such as the Florida Writes! or the math FCAT. We try to remain flexible to meet the academic needs.

Academic Emphasis: Our academic emphasis is on basics first and high achievement second. All students must master the basics of reading, language, and mathematics before their curriculum expands. Therefore, a student who is operat-

ing below age equivalent grade level, will spend most of his or her time on basic instruction until grade level is achieved. Students who are at grade level or ahead get an emphasis on achieving at their maximum rate and have time for a more diverse curriculum. Of course, this is the ultimate goal for all of our students. But, first things first.

Mastery Learning: Students must learn their current lessons thoroughly before moving on to more advanced learning. This seems like a simple concept but it is mostly ignored in the public school system. We spend whatever amount of time and energy it takes on each student to get the necessary learning accomplished before we move that student on to a higher level in any subject. Because we do not emphasize grade levels, but rather achievement levels, students do not worry about keeping up with their grade level classmates, but with their group level classmates. This provides the best benefits of homogeneous and heterogeneous learning environments.

Tutors: One of the main achievements of our school was the emphasis on individualized instruction for students who were catching up. We vigorously recruited college students in the educational fields to volunteer their time at our school. We had sixty five volunteers who average working approximately three hours per week each, for a total of over 10,000 volunteer hours. This means that each of our 20 lowest achieving students received five hundred hours of one on one tutoring over the school year.



Financial

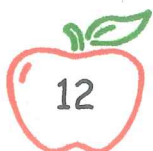
Here is a look at our Final Budget Numbers for 1997-1998 (Budget Amended July, 1998).

Revenues:	Budget	Actual	Variance
Start Up Grant	57,000.00	57,000.00	0
Title One Grant	28,000.00	28,000.00	0
WFTE Funds	192,055.49	192,055.49	0
Donations	7,456.19	7,456.19	0
Interest on Deposits	476.10	476.10	0
TOTAL REVENUES:	284,987.18	284,987.18	0

Expenditures:			
Student Instruction	160,000.00	151,398.00	8,602.00
Pupil Personnel Services	1,000.00	650.00	350.00
Instructional Staff Training	500.00	349.50	150.00
School Administration	30,000.00	24,685.79	5,314.21
Fiscal Services	5,000.00	3,915.00	1,085.00
Operation of Plant	7,000.00	5,871.73	1,128.27
Facilities Acquisition	32,500.00	32,500.00	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURES:	236,000.00	221,370.02	16,629.98

Fund Balance Carried Over:	63,617.76
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This budget indicates that we have roughly \$60,000 to carry over to operations for the 1998-99 fiscal year. During the past year we tried to spend our money where it would have the most impact on student learning. We have very low administrative costs. We spend the great majority of our funds on teachers and teaching supplies, including a bank of fine computers and software for them.



Shortcomings & Adaptations

The bad news is that nearly all our trials, tribulations, mistakes, deficiencies, concerns, and bad ideas were generated from a single source, the school administrator. The good news is that Mr. Drake is a quick learner and is surrounded by a highly intelligent, efficient and caring staff. This staff has helped him through his errors in judgment, and continues to do so daily. What a lucky man he is.

The Audit: Many of the deficiencies in our operation this first year were due to a lack of knowledge of good fiscal policy and procedure. This was patiently, even lovingly, pointed out by Mack Herren, the auditor from the Auditor General's Office who examined our books this year. Mr. Herren was incredibly generous with his time as he explained, detail by detail, how to keep good records, write policies and procedures, understand accounting procedures, create understandable budgets, synthesize governmental, not-for-profit, and school bookkeeping procedures, and generally straighten Mr. Drake out on how to keep things orderly, legal, and manageable.

The School Day: Mr. Drake went through a number of schedule changes over the course of the year. Each time the moment to moment operation of the school seemed to improve a little. In trying to maximize the homogeneity of small groups and time on task in classroom settings, many small adjustments were continually made. Often these changes lead to success, sometimes they lead to the dumpster. We tried to keep the experimentation to a minimum, but it was necessary to find a model for a small school that covered the entire curriculum efficiently and completely.

Future Plans

Boy do we have plans! We DO NOT intend to get big, to grow, to expand, etc. We are small for a very good reason. It works! We are currently looking for land in our immediate vicinity upon which to build a gleaming new elementary school. We will have a considerable amount of money that we earned through a School Infrastructure Trust fund grant. Between this fund and regularly recurring state capital funds, we should be able to build an excellent, modern facility and have it paid off in five to ten years. We do not intend for the school to ever have more than 100 students. That is a manageable size for our philosophy of treating everyone like family and having every teacher be involved in the learning of every student.

We are currently contracted for grades K through 6. Most of our families want their children to stay in the charter school beyond elementary school. For this reason we are considering going from K through 8th grade in the next couple of years. If we go this route we will have a separate facility for our middle school under a separate administrator.



A Final Note from the Principal:

We have had a truly splendiferous year. The teachers were happy, the students were happy (after they figured out that work comes before play), the parents were happy, and even I was happy. As I write this (the day before a new school year begins) it is obvious that we are doing something right. Virtually all of our students are returning and bringing their siblings along. We have a lengthy waiting list of families that call regularly hoping for an admissions lottery. We have managed to lure teaching staff away from other schools causing great consternation to their former employers. Our college volunteers have told their classmates about their experiences here and we are overwhelmed with even more volunteers. It gives one a good feeling.

I would like to thank Tami Fritz, our parent representative on the Board of Directors, for her many hours of contributions to our school and especially for designing, editing, and producing both our Yearbook and this Annual Report.

I would also like to thank everyone involved with the Charter School movement. I reside in an extremely propitious school district. It goes without saying that we could not have managed, with any amount of success, without the help and support of the School Board of Alachua County and their fine administrative staff. I can not even think of a good way to describe the help and endless efforts of Tracey Bailey, not only on our behalf, but on behalf of the entire school choice movement. I am certain his reputation precedes him.

I would like to end by thanking all of the One Room family for working so hard to make this place a reality and a success. The teachers and staff have been too good to be true. The cohesiveness and support of parents and families has made teaching a joy again.

Thanks a million,

Your Pal,

Mr. Drake

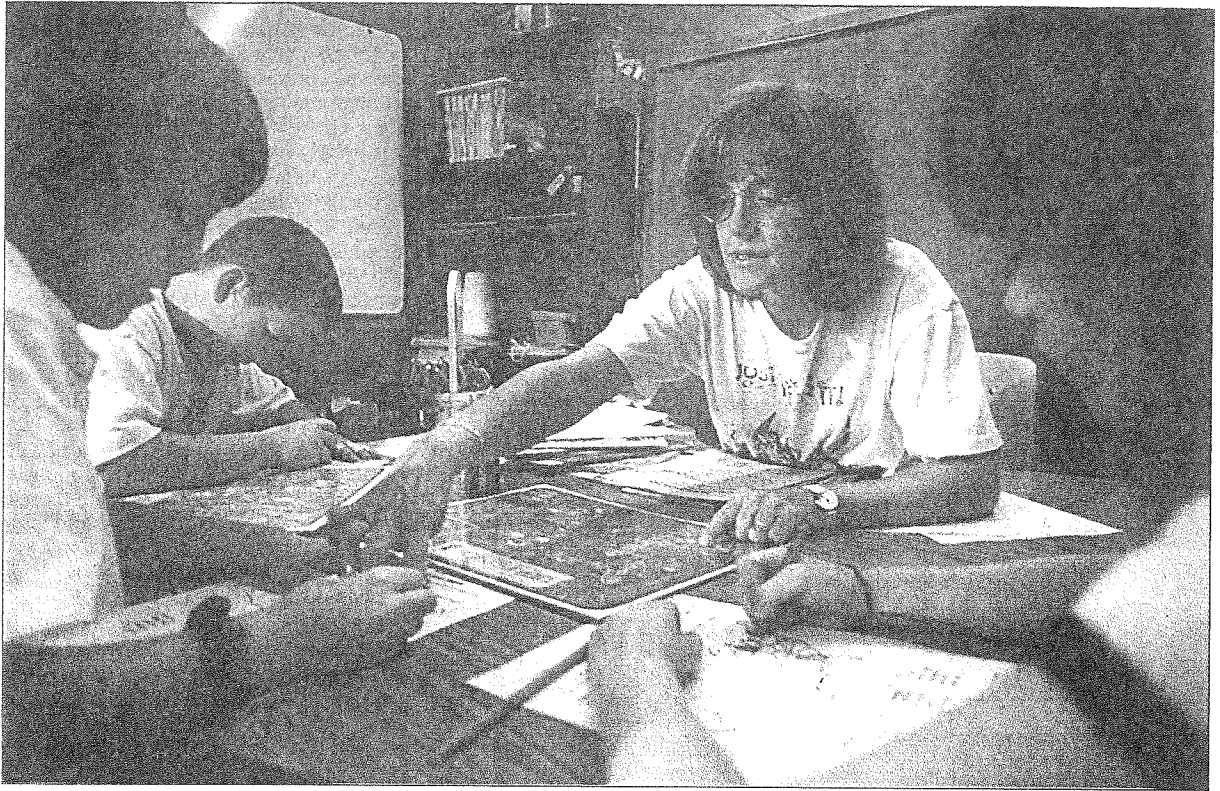


Appendix A



**One
Room
In
The
News**

Charter schools bring county praise, concern



JOHN MORAN/The Gainesville Sun

The One Room School House is one of Alachua County's three charter schools. Classes are held at the Small World Nursery on NW 4th Street where teacher Jeanne Minsavage works on a geography drill with students, from left, Rachel Ludlow, Michael Powers and Courtney Thurston.

Testing the norm

By CINDY SWIRKO
Sun staff writer

Neil Drake doesn't look like an elementary school principal. He's got long hair in a pony tail and is partial to jeans — and even shorts and straw hats when the weather is hot.

Probably no other principal would show up at school in such casual clothing, even on field day.

But Drake is not the principal of an ordinary school. He heads the One Room School House, a school in the vanguard of an educational movement that could turn public education inside out.

One Room is a charter school, one of three in Alachua County preparing for their second year. A fourth charter school is joining them.

They are part of a growing trend nationwide as parents and educators look for more effective and different ways to teach kids — in this case, using public money to create schools that are

What are charter schools?

- Charter schools are public schools.
- Nonselective Nonelitist
- Nondiscriminatory Nonsectarian
- Operate under a performance contract.
- Held strictly accountable for academic and financial results.

JAKE FULLER/The Gainesville Sun

constraints of regular public schools.

The charter school movement was begun in California in the mid-1980s by teachers who wanted to create their own schools, believing they could do a better job than the bureaucracy-mired traditional schools.

However, the nation's first charter school didn't open until 1992, in Minnesota, and they've since spread faster than a flu virus in a kindergarten class. Now 21 states allow charter schools, and 800 of them exist. If President

explosive in the next year — he wants 3,000 charter schools by 2000.

Parents seem to love charters for reasons as diverse as the charters. The schools might stress a particular curriculum, such as arts or technology, or more traditional teaching methods using repetition and drills, or experimental methods that let children learn at their own pace.

Those with kids who were barely surviving in traditional schools say the youngsters are thriving in charters that have small classes, intensified instruction and more teachers per student.

Parents who work for corporations that have started work site charters can easily pop in for lunch, to read to the class or to help soothe a tummy ache.

The schools are typically small and emphasize parental involvement.

Some prepare students for a particular career — performing arts or aeronautics are two in Florida. Businesses such as NationsBank in Jacksonville are starting them on-site so parents can be near their children, while some are

CHARTER: Concerns center on costs

Continued from 1A

located in inner cities or housing projects.

Proponents believe their accountability to parents who can simply pull their kids out if they don't like the school — will force them to be good schools if they want to survive. Proponents also believe charters will make traditional schools more competitive.

And charters are spurring debate on whether they are bleeding money away from traditional public schools. Some district officials say Alachua County's charters are costing the regular public schools almost \$1 million over two years. Nonsense, says the state's charter schools director.

Alachua County's three charters are One Room with 60 students last year, Micanopy Area Cooperative School with 18 students and Chance Charter School with about 50.

Drake was a Rawlings Elementary teacher until he started One Room last year, frustrated that regular schools were not reaching the students who most need help — those from poor families that can't give kids pencils and paper, much less computers and books.

But Drake is now as giddy as a third-grader because the test scores of his students — most of whom are from poor homes and attended Rawlings — were as high as some of the county's better schools.

"This year went beyond my expectations. It's been absolutely great," Drake said. "On Florida Writes! we were fifth in the county. That's right up there with Norton Elementary and all those. In reading on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, we were sixth in the county. Now check this out — in FCAT math, we were No. 1 in the county by a long way."

The Micanopy school was started so youngsters would be spared long bus rides to Gainesville schools. It is such a hit that it's building new classrooms to accommodate more students.

"We're growing a little quicker than we thought," said Faye Baird, a founder of the school and a

student's mother. "It has been clear for years that this community has been crying out for an elementary school. I see only growth ahead for this school, and the quality of the program is terrific."

The folks at Chance Charter School in Alachua, which is for students with learning difficulties, have had a few problems.

While officials say they are pleased with student progress, the school has been under attack by some Alachua residents because of its location on land at the Alachua Recreation Center. Opponents fought the city commission's decision to allow the school, saying it took up too much recreation land. Chance has agreed to leave and is looking for a new site.

But overall, Alachua County's charter schools smoothly cruised through their first year with success that can primarily be attributed to their small enrollments, said Don Lewis, district director of secondary instruction.

Lewis said it will take a few more years to learn if the initial success can be continued.

"They've all made really good progress, and it absolutely pleases me," Lewis said. "You have to have some kind of objectivity in evaluating the schools, and I know all three have that evidence to support their academic achievement. The other component, which I think is as strong or stronger, is the human side. We've got parents who are happy their children are in those schools and who feel the schools are helping their children. You can't beat that."

But that success is coming at a price to traditional schools, district finance director Keith Birkett said.

State money is given to school districts for each student. That money follows the student, say, from Rawlings to One Room.

Enough students left Rawlings so that the school needed fewer teachers, but it did not reduce other costs at Rawlings. And the other charters do not draw enough students from any one school to enable that school to cut even one teacher.

District finance director Keith Birkett said the charter schools cost the district about \$490,000 last year. Estimated costs for the 1998-99 school year are \$425,000.

"If you take 40 kids out of Rawlings, we save two teachers. But we don't reduce utilities, we don't reduce media, we don't reduce guidance, we don't reduce transportation and on and on and on. So it costs us," Birkett said. "It's not a complete wash. That's the thinking that a lot of people have — that it is a break-even proposition. But it is not."

Tracey Bailey is director of charter schools for the state Department of Education. He does not believe charters are putting the hurt on traditional schools.

Bailey said district enrollment increases soon make up for the students lost to charters. He added that Alachua County's three charters will bring an additional \$678,000 into the district in facilities money.

"The misperception is that the school district should have somehow continued to generate money for kids they no longer educate," Bailey said. "I know that debate. The argument is a valid one, but are you telling me that Alachua County didn't grow by 140 students last year? If we were talking about a static, glass aquarium situation, maybe the argument would be true. But over a period, the cost savings absolutely should be there."

Florida first allowed charter schools in 1996, when five opened. The number rose to 33 last year, and 75 are expected to be open this fall. The charter of just one — in Collier County — was not renewed.

Florida's charter schools operate under a performance contract awarded by county school boards. Alachua County's schools are on a three-year contract.

Charter schools do have some academic requirements. Students must take certain tests such as Florida Writes! or the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Students must meet state graduation requirements, and the schools must comply with state school improvement and accountability.

But they are free from many regulations and have greater flexibility than regular schools. Drake, for instance, had all students zero in on math for a time, letting other subjects slide. Micanopy's teacher uses a Montessori approach that emphasizes guidance and encourages self-education rather than the rigid control found in most regular schools.

Charter school opponents feared the campuses would siphon off too much money from existing public schools and hurt schools already struggling with low-achieving students.

But Florida's charter schools — which will have about 11,000 students next year — have so far catered to students that opponents feared would be shortchanged.

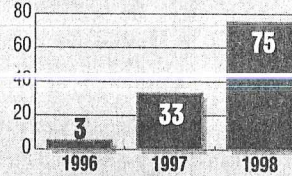
In Florida, 45 percent of charter school students are economically disadvantaged — the group targeted by the One Room School House and the new Caring and Sharing charter school.

Another 10 percent of charter students statewide are in schools that provide education tailored for those with learning disabilities or difficulties — such as that given by Chance.

Municipalities are joining in. Pembroke Pines and Marco Island have started charter schools. A parallel can be found in Micanopy. While the town council did not

Growth of charter schools

Florida charter schools have more than doubled since 1997:



Charter school enrollment has increased:

600 students in 1996, to 3,000 students in 1997, to 11,000 or more expected by fall 1998.

JAKE FULLER/The Gainesville Sun

start the school, it is providing space and support.

"Charter schools have really turned out to be a broad-based thing. What pushed it through was educational reform — the idea of the charter was that there was unexplored educational territory out there," Baird said. "The town of Micanopy has been very supportive. They are our landlords and have really been there for us. The town councilmen have been very supportive. The guy who comes to fix things talked to the children about carpentry for a living."

Charter schools can receive a federal \$50,000 startup grant for each of their first two years.

Drake and Baird said the grants were a godsend. Bailey said he believes most charter schools will be financially sound enough after two years to survive without the grants.

Alachua County was initially allotted three charter schools under state legislation. It got special approval to start a fourth — the Caring and Sharing school created by University of Florida education professor Simon Johnson. It will open in August and be located in an east Gainesville housing project.

Under new legislation, however, Alachua County can have 12 charter schools. Lewis said no one else has applied for one in Alachua County, but he and Bailey believe the number will continue to grow.

One of Florida's first charter schools was started by gubernatorial candidate Jeb Bush. His running mate is Education Commissioner Frank Brogan, a charter school booster. If they win, officials say, no end is in sight for the growth of charter schools.

"There is no doubt the number of charter schools is going to expand rapidly. The rate of growth is huge, just bogging," Bailey said. "It is the nation's fastest growing education reform movement. Some people worry about what's going to happen to the poor school district. But charter schools are part of the school district. They are a different way of providing the service and meeting needs of the parents."

Demographic indicators for 1997-98

Racial demographics:

45% Black
49% White

Economic indicators:

45% Economically disadvantaged

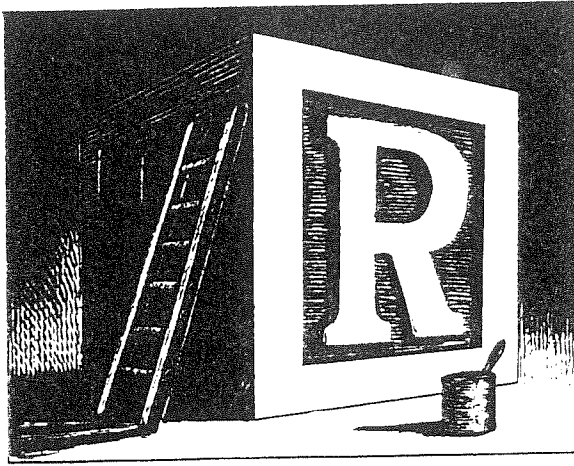
Exceptional education:

10% of students receiving exceptional education

Existing public school students:

92% of students from other public schools

JAKE FULLER/The Gainesville Sun



DAVID ROSE/North America Syndicate

Charter schools save money for taxpayers, government

In an excellent article about charter schools (July 27), *The Sun* reported that school district officials have calculated that charter schools cost, rather than save, the district money. Let me explain why this is untrue.

There are two parts to the argument that charter schools cost the district money. The first part claims that charters take students from the district, creating a funding gap.

The facts, as indicated in district records, show that last year 140 students left the district for charter schools, and 877 new students took their place. At \$3,000 per student, this is an outflow of \$520,000 and an influx of \$2,631,000, or a net gain to the district of \$2,111,000.

The second part of the argument claims funds transferred from the district to charter schools are never replaced. Indeed they are.

I can speak only for the One Room School House, but I believe that our circumstances are similar to the other charter schools in Alachua County.

We received \$192,000 in state funding for teaching 57 elementary students. On July 22, I signed a grant that will provide the school district with \$165,000 simply for giving permission to start our charter school. This leaves a balance of \$27,000 in "cost" to the school board.

This \$27,000 is more than made up by the saving of my salary and benefits when I left the district to teach at the charter school. It is easy to see that the One Room School House actually produces a net savings for the district.

Charter schools are a wonderful opportunity for school districts. Not only has the One Room School House generated a positive cash flow for the school district, we have generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in extra state and private funding with which we intend to build the first new elementary school on the east side of Gainesville in nearly 30 years.

We hope to continue our highly successful partnership with the Alachua County School Board well into the next century.

Neil A. Drake,
President, The One Room School House
Gainesville

He's got the school; now he could use paper and pencils

■ The head of Alachua County's first charter school scrambles to find equipment.

By CINDY SWIRKO

Sun staff writer

Now that Neil Drake's charter school is a reality, he has a whole other reality to deal with.

Drake has Alachua County's first charter school, which is set to open in

the fall. He has 50 students.

What he doesn't have is all of the books, computers, audio-visual gear, microscopes, chalk boards, art supplies, furniture — all the equipment it takes to make a school function.

"We get the same amount of money (per student) of other schools, but they



Neil Drake will open Alachua County's first charter school this fall.

already have a library and science equipment and all the things that make a school," Drake said. "But because we are not-for-profit, we can accept donations and services. That's what we're looking for."

The Alachua County School Board made history last month when it approved Drake's One Room School House, making it the county's inaugural charter school. The school is aimed at economically disadvantaged youngsters from northeast Gainesville.

Drake was a Rawlings Elementary School teacher until the charter was approved. He and his associates believe children can best learn in smaller settings in which they get more individualized instruction.

Students' progress will be based on mastery learning — the youngsters must first master their assignments before moving on to the next level of work. They will get all the instruction and tutoring it takes to master the work.

Parents said they were attracted to the school because of the instruction and small setting. Many of the students had attended Rawlings, and they and their parents knew Drake there.

"It's just so exciting to be a part of something new," said Dana Powers, whose son will attend the school. "I like that the children will get extra attention. There is going to be a nice mix of

students, and I like that. Plus, I know Mr. Drake and how good of a teacher he is."

Legislation enabling charter schools was passed by lawmakers last year. Alachua County is allowed three new charter schools and three conversions of existing schools.

Charter schools are run by non-profit organizations but receive public money based on enrollment.

Still, the start-up needs are considerable.

Residents of the Micanopy area have gotten a charter. They have been holding time-honored school fund-raisers such as bake sales to help get the school started.

A charter school targeting children with learning difficulties has been proposed. Organizers are already seeking donations.

Drake has gotten a \$25,000 state grant, but he said that will not even cover rent at the school's location — a former day-care center at 1214 NW 4th St.

Computer equipment is especially sought by Drake because use of the machines will be a key part of learning at the school.

"We want the students to learn to use computers the way college students or people in a workplace use them," Drake said. "Our goal is to have every kid on a computer an hour every day."

Drake will be the head teacher. The school will have two other teachers plus many volunteers, including parents and students in education programs at the University of Florida and Santa Fe Community College.

People willing to volunteer services such as accounting, book-keeping and other duties are also sought.

Drake said the students and staff will return the community's support.

"We're looking for ideas and means for giving back to the community," he said. "They are just kids, but I'm sure there are lots of projects they can do to give back."

The One Room School House will be more than one room because response to the project has been so great. Drake said the enrollment grew to 50 students with relatively little publicity.

One Room School House serves dinner to its 'family'

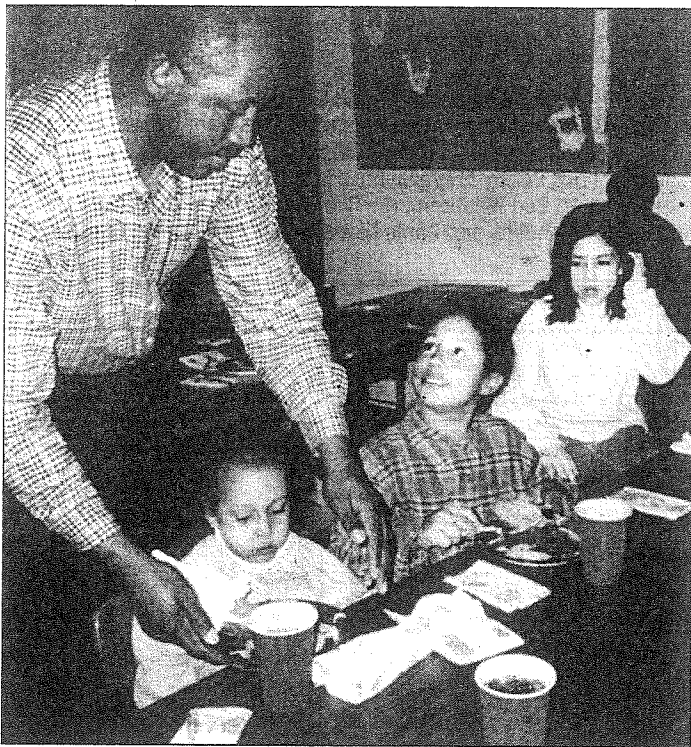
Special to The Sun

One of the major aims of the One Room School House, the first charter school of Alachua County, is to provide a small family-like atmosphere for economically diverse children in the first through fifth grades.

Over the course of the fall, students, parents, and volunteers from Santa Fe Community College and the University of Florida worked hard with Neil Drake, Tina Greene, Jeanne Minsavage, Latoynia Hicks,

and Dana Powers to create a caring and rigorous learning environment.

To thank everyone for their hard work, Drake, the headmaster of the school, hosted a spaghetti dinner for all the students and their families. It was a very festive occasion. The students agreed that not only was Drake a good teacher, but he cooked a tasty plate of spaghetti. Of course, the students also mentioned that the desserts their moms and dads provided were "really good."



Special to The Sun

Bobby Dunnell helps serve his daughters and a school friend at the spaghetti dinner.



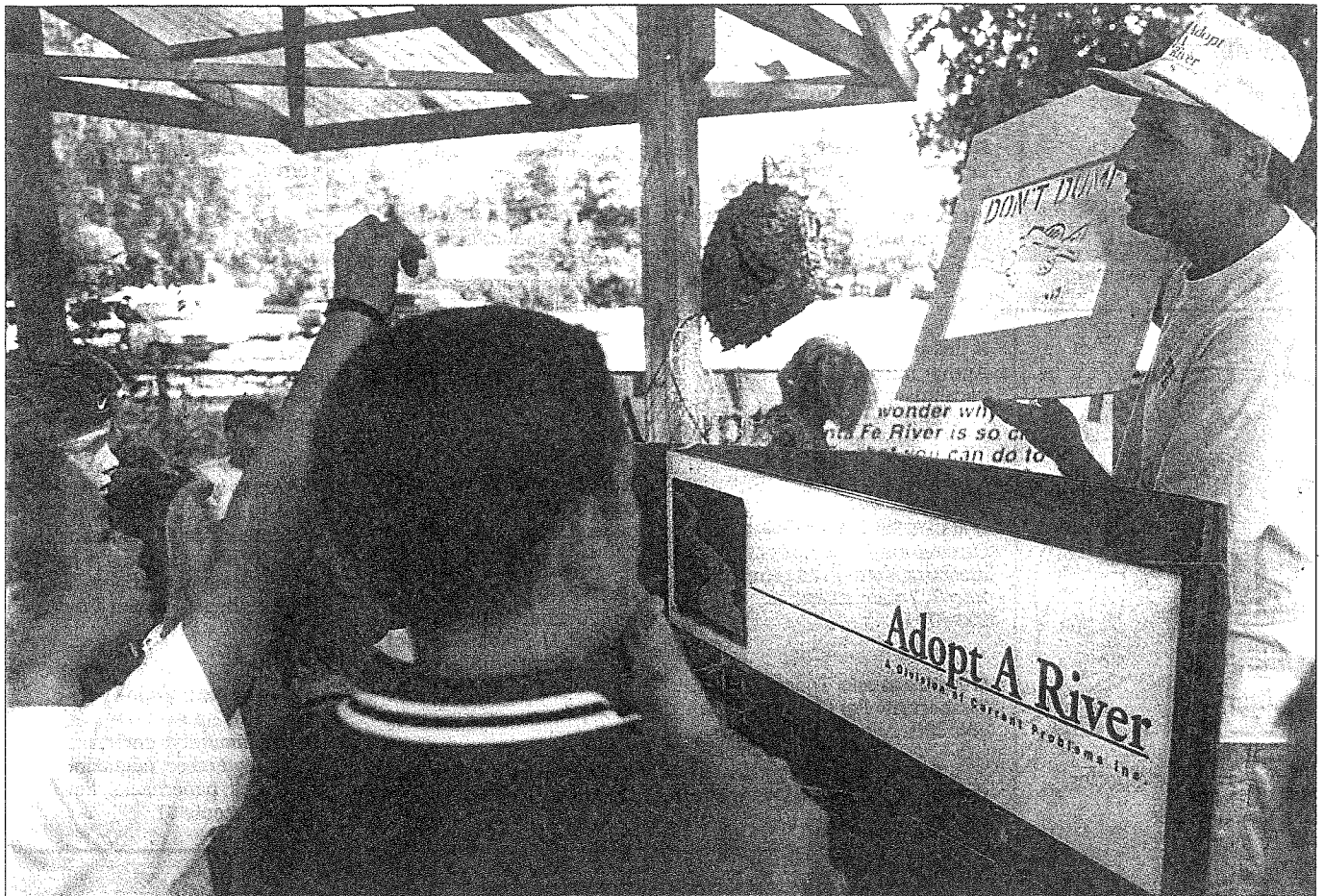
Special to The Sun
Crystal Fox, Marie Robinson and her mother, Marie Magee, helped prepare the rolls and desserts.



Special to The Sun

A Cinderella story

Students who attend The One Room School House enjoyed an afternoon at the performance of "Cinderella" at the Center for the Performing Arts. This was the first time most of the 26 students, grades 1-5, had ever been to the center. Also attending were 15 parents and Santa Fe Community College volunteers. Shown here with Cinderella cast member Jeri Lynn Minsavage are, from left, Jasmine Woods, Avery Schuring, Logan Schuring and Kelly Leigh. Tickets to the performance were donated to the school by Danscompany of Gainesville.



ROBERT BURNS/Special to The Sun

Showing children the template for the logo found on drain covers around Gainesville, Mike Jamerson of Current Solutions Inc. tells One Room School House students about the environment in hopes to "get them to understand storm water runoff and how it affects drinking water."

Earth Day lessons at the One Room School House

■ Additional photos on Page 12.

Special to The Sun

On Earth Day, April 22, the students at the One Room School House in Gainesville received some very special lessons from some very special people.

The 58 students were treated

to an Earth Day presentation by the employees of their corporate sponsor Pandion Systems, which specialize in environmental training and education, as well as others.

Pandion's **David Gerhardt** and **Shannon Cline** organized demonstrations of paper manufacturing from recycled waste. They also played a game called "Predator and Prey" that taught

students about ecological balance by allowing them to experience different species' place in the ecosystem.

Bock Folken from Gainesville Regional Utilities displayed energy conservation devices. These included thermostat switches and energy efficient light bulbs.

Big Blue, Compost Kid and Recycle Pal — characters

dressed up to make an environmental point — explained the benefits of conservation and recycling.

The City of Gainesville helped plant four large oak trees which the students will care for and enjoy.

Bill Jamerson from Adopt A River demonstrated the problems caused by storm water

EARTH continued on Page 12

EARTH *continued from Page 1*

runoff. He also brought a display showing the cleanup of the Santa Fe River as well as tools

he uses.

Teachers plan to conduct follow-up activities to reinforce the environmental messages taught during the day.

The charter school houses students in first- through fifth-grade, with most in the third and fourth grades.



ROBERT BURNS/Special to The Sun

Helping to make a rainstorm with his hands William Caudle, 10, (left) slaps his knees with a group of kids to make the sound of a downpour. As part of Earth Day Pandion Systems, Inc. hosted several experiment tables and group activities at the One Room School House.



ROBERT BURNS/Special to The Sun

Practicing to pick up trash using a Pik-Stick, Jaleesa Conyers, 9, picks up a coffee mug on as a classmate watches. She said learning to use the Pik-Stick to get trash out of rivers and off the ground, "will save animals." It was one of several activities planned for the 58 students.

The Gainesville Sun

Monday, March 31, 1997 *

REGION

Florida

Charter school expected to move closer to reality

■ The school board will vote Tuesday on a recommendation to OK the county's first such school.

By CINDY SWIRKO
Sun staff writer

The first step in establishing Alachua County's first charter school may be taken Tuesday night when the school board votes

on a recommendation for approval of the school's concept.

The school is proposed by Rawlings Elementary School teacher Neil Drake and is aimed at disadvantaged students.

Some details and areas of concern must be worked out, but district administrators who reviewed the application are recommending the concept be approved and a charter contract developed.

"We're going to recommend the school board approve it pending approval of the

site," Assistant Superintendent Dan Boyd said. "One of the things the state wants charter schools to focus on is at-risk children, reducing pupil-teacher ratios and developing innovative instruction programs. It seems that (Drake) is within the spirit of that."

Charter schools are run by nonprofit corporations with public money. They are free from many state requirements. Legislation enacted last year allows Alachua County three new charter schools and three conversions of existing schools.

Drake's One Room School House project plans to draw students of low income status from the Rawlings school zone. Drake had sought to have it housed at Faith United Methodist Church on NE 15th Street but could not get city approval. A new site has not been found.

Drake wrote in the application that the underlying mission for the school is an extremely intimate, rigorous and progressive learning environment for students who

Please see BOARD, 2B

BOARD

continued from 1B
would not typically have the opportunity to experience academic excellence.

"We have seen all students thrive academically when given the opportunity, the means and the encouragement to do so," Drake wrote. "The school intends to provide educational conditions that

challenge students to achieve personal bests."

Founding directors of the school include Drake, University of Florida education professor Arthur Newman and Santa Fe Community College instructor Catherine Swan.

If the board OKs the initial concept, a public hearing on the project will be held May 6. The board would vote on the charter May 20.

Tuesday night's meeting is at 7 p.m. at the Kirby-Smith Center on E. University Avenue.

Charter school proposal OK'd

By CINDY SWIRKO

Sun staff writer

Alachua County's initial cartographer in the uncharted world of charter schools may be an elementary school teacher whose concept for an innovative campus was approved Tuesday night.

The Alachua County School Board approved a proposal by teacher Neil Drake to begin a small school for economically disadvantaged youngsters.

Drake, a teacher at Rawlings Elementary School, said the One Room School House will provide small classes and intensive instruction to give the students a better shot at success.

"This is my way to do teaching more correctly and the way it should be done," Drake said outside the board meeting. "I think that in the long run, it could be a model to prove that it is possible to do things like this."

The school will be the first charter campus if it is established. A group of residents from the Micanopy area are also trying to organize a charter school.

Charter schools are relatively new in Florida. They are operated by private nonprofit organizations using public money. They do not have to meet many state regulations.

Students at the One Room School House will come from northeast Gainesville neighborhoods and will be from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Such students often have more difficulty succeeding in school.

"These are the only students I know," Drake said. "I've always taught at Rawlings and I love the place, but it is too big -- as most schools are."

The board approved the concept of the One Room School House. Some details must be worked out. A public hearing and the final vote will be held in May.

Drake said the school could open in the fall if he can arrange a site. He said the city planning and zoning department has no provisions for charter schools.

If a site cannot be found, opening of the school would be delayed.

Various school district departments reviewed Drake's application to determine if it met state law. Board attorney Tom Wittmer said a draft of the charter contract should be written within a few weeks.

Board members said they were pleased to see progress on the creation of a charter school.

"I know this is new ground, and I think a lot of good work has been done by both sides," said board member Judy Brashear.

By CINDY SWIRKO

Sun staff writer

Charter school proposal received

■ The Alachua County School Board will vote on the request May 20.

A decision on whether to approve the first application it has received for a charter school will be made May 20 by the Alachua County School Board.

The application was submitted by Rawlings Elementary School teacher Neil Drake. It targets financially disadvantaged youngsters.

Charter schools are operated by private, non-profit groups but are paid for with public school funding.

State legislation allowing charter schools was passed last year. Alachua County can have three new charter schools and three conversions of existing schools.

Dan Boyd, assistant superintendent for instruction, said Drake's application is now being reviewed to determine if it meets legal requirements.

"Our intention is to help get three new charter schools," Boyd said. "If we find deficiencies in the applications, we will work with the people to try to get it straight."

Drake is president of the One Room School House Project Inc., the nonprofit group proposing the school.

Plans call for 25 to 30 third- and fourth-grade students in the school's first year. More grades would gradually be added.

Students would primarily be low-income residents of northwest Gainesville.

"The underlying purpose of (the school) is the creation of an extremely intimate, rigorous and progressive learning environment for elementary students who would not typically have the opportunity to experience academic excellence," Drake wrote. "We have seen all students thrive academically when given the opportunity, the means and the encouragement to do so."

Boyd said the application review will be completed by March 14. A recommendation on approval will be made by early April. A public hearing will be May 6. The board will vote on May 20.

Charter schools must meet some of the same requirements that public schools face, such as *Please see CHARTER, 3B*

CHARTER

continued from 1B
safety laws.

But charter schools are free from many regulations. Proponents believe that will allow charter schools to offer greater freedom

and specialization.

Proponents believe charter schools can better suit the needs of parents and students.

For instance, a group of parents from the Micanopy area are developing a charter school proposal. They believe a small local school is preferable to having their elementary students bused to Gainesville

schools.

Board members said the district should do what it can to help applicants.

"I would hope we would work with any group so we could help them through the nightmare," said board member Bill Cake. "I don't want anybody to accuse us of dragging out feet."

SCHOOL DAYS



Special to The sun

Meeting a real Indian

When Tina Greene, who teaches grades 1-5 at The One Room School House, announced that Ted "Deer Chaser" Bassett would be a guest speaker to her social studies classes, her students were very eager and excited to meet a "real Indian." Bassett's ancestors are from the original Wampanoag Indians who greeted and assisted the pilgrims. He made quite an impression on the students as he shared facts about his culture, their beliefs, played music, and demonstrated dances.

The Gainesville Sun

Wednesday, May 21, 1997 *

SCHOOL BOARD

Charter school approved

The Alachua County School Board on Tuesday night gave final approval to the county's first charter school and initial approval to another.

A final contract was approved for the One Room School House, which is aimed at economically disadvantaged youngsters from northeast Gainesville.

"I think we just made history, guys," said board Chairwoman Bev Carroll after the vote.

Neil Drake, a Rawlings Elementary School teacher who is starting the school, said he plans to open it when school resumes in August.

Meanwhile, initial approval was given to a charter school in Micanopy.

Public hearings will be held on the Micanopy school before a board vote on final approval.

Charter schools are run by non-profit corporations using public money. Alachua County can have up to three new charter schools and three conversions of existing schools.
