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South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com

Green school to set standard for all new Palm Beach County schools

With a focus on the environment and energy-saving devices, Pine Jog Elementary's a model for future eco-friendly projects.

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South Florida Sun-Sentinel

August 15, 2008

The new Pine Jog Elementary, in all its wild, green glory, promises a special first day of school Monday.

About 550 students will explore a groundbreaking campus that serves as the [Palm Beach County](#) School District's much-anticipated entry into the green-school era.

The campus is the model for all green public schools set to join the area's landscape, including an elementary west of [Boca Raton](#) that could open in 2010, said Joseph Sanches, facilities management chief for the school district.

"It's going to be a great learning opportunity for us," he said, also citing plans to apply green standards at older schools set to be modernized.

Five years in the making, Pine Jog Elementary showcases an abundance of environmentally friendly building features. The school sits on land west of West Palm Beach had been part of a 150-acre preserve filled with saw grass marsh, pines and other natural habitats.

"The view from here is terrific," Principal Fred Barch said.

The school's neighbor is Florida Atlantic University's Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, which has taught area children to respect and protect nature since 1960.

Despite initial objections from environmental activists wishing to preserve the site, the district budgeted \$37.6 million to build the school and a new, green home for FAU, which opened last month. As part of the package, the district is leasing 15 acres from the university for \$1 a year until 2104.

This year, Pine Jog Elementary is getting nearly all of its students from Cholee Lake Elementary in Greenacres. But in 2009-10, the green school will offer a still-undetermined number of environmental



science choice-program seats to students outside its neighborhood boundary.

Pine Jog Elementary could become one of the first schools in South Florida to achieve a certification from the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council, which awards Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design ratings.

Only four schools in the state hold the certified status, according to the Washington, D.C., organization.

Several Florida schools, including St. Andrews School in [Boca Raton](#), have registered with the council and will seek a rating. On Aug. 20, the private school opens an \$11.5 million green building primarily for pre-kindergarten to second-grade students.

[Broward County](#) Public Schools held a ceremony Thursday to mark the start of construction on a \$30 million elementary in Parkland. It's scheduled to open next August with assorted green elements, including a photovoltaic roof that collects solar energy.

Officials will seek green certification for two other planned projects: a replacement for Stranahan High in Fort Lauderdale and a new media center for Atlantic Technical Center in Coconut Creek.

Pine Jog is different from typical modern schools in that Pirtle Construction followed a "green" print of sorts down to each low-flow toilet.

The design required using environmentally sensitive and recycled materials and energy-saving touches such as an emphasis on natural light.

Windows along one hallway wall allow students and faculty to observe a room containing the school's electrical and air-conditioning systems. Touch-screen controls will allow students to monitor energy usage and compare it with usage in similar-size traditional schools.

In a nod to Pine Jog's surroundings, the cafeteria and main office include large photos of trees on the property before they were cleared for the school. Walls are painted with earth colors — shades of green, orange-brown and yellow.

Classes will be able to use a high-resolution camera, perched on the second floor, that can spy bird nests and gopher tortoises at the neighboring sanctuary, Barch said.

The campus, large enough to serve 1,000 students, also includes an outdoor classroom with tables and chairs, and two gardens where students can study plants.

"Wrapping environmental education with this project is going to make it a winner," said Barch, who will patrol the campus grounds on a solar-powered golf cart.

Green school construction favors the environment, but it isn't cheap.

It can cost about \$725,000 more to design and build a green elementary school than a typical one of about 125,000 square feet, according to a recent analysis.

But the district should make up those extra costs in nine to 12 years, through annual savings of at least \$61,000 on electricity, water and sewer, maintenance and fewer sick days for employees because of better indoor air quality.

"There's certainly a payback," Sanches said.

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