



**The Fairchild Challenge fosters interest in the environment
by encouraging students to
APPRECIATE the beauty and value of nature
DEVELOP critical thinking skills
UNDERSTAND the need for biodiversity and conservation
TAP community resources
BECOME actively engaged citizens and
RECOGNIZE that individuals do indeed make a difference.**

The Fairchild Challenge is an interdisciplinary, environmental education outreach program designed to give secondary school students an opportunity to shine. By appealing to their innate sense of creativity and curiosity about the world around them, the Challenge invites students to learn, to investigate the thorniest environmental issues, to devise imaginative and effective responses to these issues and to take action – at any level – to address them.

The program design

The Fairchild Challenge is an annual, standards-based, environmental education outreach program of Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (Fairchild). It offers a menu of interdisciplinary options for grades 6 to 8 and 9 to 12, attracting students of diverse interests, abilities, talents and backgrounds. The Challenge empowers teenagers to engage in civic life and encourages them to become energetic and knowledgeable members of their communities. And because it combines education and adventure, the Challenge has caught on, growing dramatically from 1,400 student participants when it was launched as a pilot program in 2002 to more than 40,000 students five years later.

The program has become a model beyond South Florida, influencing programs nationally and internationally. Fairchild staff have trained educators from as far away as Costa Rica, South Africa and Venezuela to adapt the Fairchild Challenge to their institutions and communities.

The Fairchild Challenge in practice

Annually, the Challenge offers a menu of separate but parallel options for students in grades 6 to 8 and 9 to 12. Schools can attempt any number of the annual Challenge options. Best entries are sent to Fairchild to be awarded points by panels of judges. Goals are attainable for all schools involved. All schools surpassing this year's goal of 700 points for middle schools and 900 points for high schools win the Fairchild Challenge Award; the top-scoring schools are given special recognition, as are individual students who excel in the Challenge.

Mindful of teachers' workloads, the Fairchild Challenge options dovetail with public school curricula and are aligned with benchmarks of Florida's Sunshine State Standards. Fairchild is committed to making this outreach program accessible to all interested students in the region, regardless of their schools' resources. The Challenge encourages and supports our community's under-resourced schools with such incentives as mini-grants for gardens at schools, sapling trees and native plants, specialized workshops, professional development seminars, transportation subsidies, books, and additional resources for such options as research projects, opinion papers and art. To promote civic engagement, voter registration is offered at all high school Challenge events. In addition to school visits from Challenge staff, teachers and students encountering obstacles know they can turn to the Challenge team for help with solutions.

The Fairchild Challenge fosters students' environmental awareness, scholarship and stewardship.

The success of the program is continuously monitored and evaluated through the use of teacher and student surveys, teacher discussion forums, interviews, e-mail communications, direct observations of the program at various school sites, and the quality of student entries. Survey results indicate that 78 percent of high school students and 74 percent of middle school students became more interested in the environment following their participation in the Fairchild Challenge. Furthermore, 79 percent of middle and high school students found that their knowledge of and appreciation for the environment increased since participating in at least one Challenge option. In addition, 58 percent of high school students that participated in either the Environmental Debates and/or Environmental Immersion Day indicated an interest in pursuing a career in environmental science.

A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history. – Mahatma Gandhi