

FEF FOCUS

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President's Message

Helping students prepare for a competitive job market and develop successful careers is a primary objective of the Florida Education Fund's (FEF) McKnight Fellowship and Pre-College programs, but FEF also seeks to support the nation as it addresses major health, social and economic challenges. Our success in these endeavors depends upon the quality of the research performed by our McKnight Ph.D. Fellows and the academic achievement of our pre-college students.

At the graduate level, our selection and recruitment process enables us to fund scholars with a genuine interest in and commitment to solving some of the world's most pressing problems. You will read in this edition of the *Focus* about how Dr. Ashley Payne, having earned his Ph.D. and published an article on recently developed therapeutic approaches for neuro-protection, aging, and neuro-inflammation control, is continuing his research as a postdoc at the prestigious Baylor College of Medicine. His aim is to fill gaps in the knowledge about aging and controlling neuro-inflammation, which has been implicated as contributing to Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, depression and other neurologic and somatic illnesses.

You also will read about Luis Viera, Esq., an FEF Juris Doctor graduate, successful practicing attorney, and Tampa City Coun-

cilman, lauded for helping initiate highly effective public safety, transportation and housing programs in Hillsborough County. Viera also co-founded the Lawyers Autism Awareness Foundation to serve children with autism, a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how people interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave and afflicts an estimated one in every 36 children, spanning all ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

This commitment to addressing societal problems extends to our matriculating students, as demonstrated by athlete, author and McKnight Dissertation Fellow Taylor Darks. She is completing her doctoral training in sociology, focusing on policies, like reparations, that attempt to remedy historical wrongs and also writing books that encourage young Black girls to know and celebrate their worth. Darks is just one among 367 current matriculating Fellows expected to conduct important research, fulfill Ph.D. program requirements, and develop skills necessary to support FEF programs and contribute to the greater community.

Similarly, we look for our pre-college students to maintain academic excellence and prepare for college while they lead, serve



Dr. Lawrence Morehouse
President & CEO

their communities and help younger students achieve. You will read in this edition about Nathaniel Freeman, the Tampa president of our statewide National Achievers Society (NAS) who, in middle school, already fulfills these expectations. Nathaniel maintains outstanding grades in his rigorous International Baccalaureate program, won one of six Hillsborough County prizes for leadership, and helped his father teach a summer

technology-powered superhero storytelling workshop for underserved pre-teens.

Nathaniel also is an inaugural member of the Tampa NAS Code Squad, which helps write lessons for FEF CodeMasters' newer curricula for lower elementary students. The Code Squad will play a useful role in creating engaging projects for CodeMasters' 2024 expansion from 8 to 37 Tampa inner city elementary after school and summer computer science education sites.

Thus, as this edition of the *Focus* manifests, by collaborating with graduates and students and fully exploiting existing resources, we continue to implement and expand programming even in these uncertain financial times. We will continue honing our ability to respond to challenges with creative and innovative approaches, and we look forward to forever achieving our mission and effecting positive change in our ever dynamic world.

MDF's New Fellows' Orientation Empowers New Class for the Journey Ahead

For forty-four Fellows beginning their doctoral studies this fall, the 2023 New Fellows' Orientation on August 11 and 12 served to introduce them to the McKnight Program, initiate the networking process, and identify best practices in pursuing a doctoral degree. The Orientation provided opportunities for Fellows to meet each other, FEF staff, university deans, faculty, and administrators; trade information about research interests; and hear successful scholars from universities throughout the State



Drs. Adrienne Stephenson and Jennifer Parham on the Graduate Deans' panel.

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MDF Alumnus Ashley Payne Develops Innovative Strategies in Biotechnology

Raised by a devoted and determined mother in Chicago, McKnight graduate Ashley Payne, Ph.D., began early on to formulate strategies to overcome challenges and achieve his goals. His hard working, activity-filled years as an elementary and middle school honor student won him admission as a Chicago Scholar at the college prep Hales Franciscan High School.

At Hales, Payne was selected to participate in the Chicago Area Health and Medical Careers Program (“CHAMPS”)™, a pipeline program at the Illinois Institute of Technology for underrepresented high school and college students. CHAMPS prepared motivated students for careers in health-care and medicine by showing them they could succeed in those fields. Program instruction included hands-on activities and field trips, as well as counseling for graduate school and medical college admission tests.

In his final high school year, Payne applied for multiple scholarships and earned a full ride to Tuskegee University, where he enrolled as a biology major in 2000. Still involved in CHAMPS, Payne focused his schoolwork and extracurriculars on medical school, including shadowing a med student.

Payne acknowledges that Tuskegee was hard, as he mainly took advanced and graduate-level courses, and eventually graduated with a low GPA. To raise it before applying to grad school, he took courses at City Colleges of Chicago’s Kennedy-King College, where he remained involved in CHAMPS.

In 2012, Payne enrolled in the biology master’s program at

Tennessee State University. There, his work centered on obesity and food regulation, and he taught anatomy and physiology as an adjunct. After his 2015 graduation, his thesis, “Lysine mediation of neuroendocrine food regulation in guinea fowl” was published in Oxford University Press - *Oxford Journals - Poultry Science*.

Payne’s Ph.D. journey began the same year in pharmacology and toxicology at Florida A&M University, where his original project focused on stimulating the BV-2 microglial cells with amyloid Beta, but later changed to research on molecular mechanisms of the anti-inflammatory effects of Epigallocatechin-3-Gallate in lipopolysaccharide induced BV-2 microglial cells. He spent five years on this study, a time period that included the pandemic, which extended his Ph.D. training by two unexpected years.

During the pandemic, Payne passed his comprehensive exam on the third attempt with conditions; passed his proposal defense; and published his review article

entitled “Epigallocatechin-3-Gallate: new therapeutic perspectives for neuroprotection, aging, and neuroinflammation for the modern age.”

In the spring of 2022, Payne had finished his research and was ready to graduate, only to be told by his advisor that he couldn’t defend until the next semester. At that moment, frustrated by COVID and other delays, Payne coined and continued implementing P.H.D.D.P., which stands for Perseverance, Hard Work, Drive, Dedication, and Prayer. He feels



Dr. Ashley Payne

the strategy helped him throughout his education, which culminated in passing his dissertation defense on January 4, 2023.

In higher education, Payne says, you must be adaptable and up to the challenge, and he is eager to share what he’s learned through his challenges as a mentor

to both undergraduate and graduate students.

After his Ph.D. graduation, in the summer of 2023, Payne was invited to participate in the Meharry Enhancing Virology Training Summer Research Program (ENVIT) in Tennessee. ENVIT is a 10-week program that includes didactic lectures on fundamentals of virology and career development topics for a virology-focused research and education career that trains students on research methods and specialized techniques in a laboratory setting.

He now is a two-year postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Medicine – Pulmonary at Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) and postdoctoral associate at the Center for Translational Research on Inflammatory Diseases (CTRID) at the DeBakey VA Medical Center in Texas.

At CTRID, Payne is in the T32 Postdoctoral Research Training Program, a collaborative research training in thrombosis and inflammation designed to train M.D., M.D./Ph.D., and Ph.D. postdoctoral scientists for collaborative research careers. Program participants have the opportunity to train with a multidisciplinary group of faculty from five academic departments at BCM, who share a collective focus on the mechanistic understanding of disorders involving thrombosis and inflammation.

Ultimately, Payne seeks a career that will allow him to advance new strategies and innovations for drug development or biotechnology.

Dr. Ashley Payne commends his Perseverance, Hard Work, Drive, Dedication, and Prayer strategy to all graduate students:

- *Choose your advisor wisely. Make sure from the beginning that both parties agree with the project expectations and future conditions related to the development of the research.*
- *Utilize the whole school, as well as outside mentors to mature as a graduate student, because lab productivity is only 20% of what you’re supposed to do.*
- *Fight for what you want.*
- *Always look for outside funding.*
- *Pray, Pray, and Pray*
- *Keep your mind on the prize.*
- *Aim for perfection.*
- *Be fearless.*

FEF's MPLE Alumnus and Tampa City Councilman Luis Viera: An Advocate for Equity

North Tampa native Luis Viera, Esq., a 2003 FEF Minority Participation in Legal Education (MPLE) graduate, has emerged as a prominent figure in Tampa's political landscape. Earning his bachelor's from the University of South Florida in 2000 and Juris Doctorate in 2003 from Stetson Law, Viera has served on the Tampa City Council since winning special election in 2016.



Councilman Luis Viera

Before taking office, as a practicing attorney, Viera consistently participated in endeavors that evince his dedication to diversity and inclusion. He served as the Chair of the Hillsborough County Bar Association Diversity Committee; as President of the Tampa Hispanic Bar Association; and as a member of the George Edgecomb (Hillsborough Black/African American) Bar Association, the Thaddeus Stevens Society and the Urban League of Hillsborough County. He also is a founder and former President of the Lawyers Autism Awareness Foundation, underlining his commitment to positively impact lives of individuals with special needs and developmental disabilities.

Notably, he has won the Equal Opportunities in the Profession Award from the Florida Bar, the Civic Involvement Award from Tampa Hispanic Heritage, Inc., and the Tampa Hispanic Bar Association President's Award for Service.

"I always say that I am in office to do what I think is right. Over the last nearly seven years in office, I have held about 65 town halls where I have listened to my constituents. In the end, I believe it is my job to — after consulting with those constituents — do what I think is right."

-- Luis Viera, Esq.

On the City Council, Viera's legal training and subsequent certification as a mediator have served him well, enabling him to help foster a culture of respectful communication and build consensus while seeking input from and advocating for constituents. "I always say that I am in office to do what I think is right. Over the last nearly seven years in office, I have held about 65 town halls where I have listened to my constituents. In the end, I believe it is my job to—after consulting with those constituents—do what I think is right," he has said.

As Councilman, Viera has played pivotal roles and actively participated in key committees and organizations. From 2019 to 2020, he chaired the City Council, showcasing acumen in leadership and collaboration. Presently, he chairs the City Council's Public Safety Committee, helping ensure the community's security and well-being. Also, serving on the Hillsborough County Public Transportation Commission and the County Metropolitan Planning Organization, he has developed keen insights into transportation and urban planning. He chaired the Planning Organization's Transportation Disadvantaged Committee, again

showcasing dedication to addressing the needs of vulnerable communities. He also serves as the board Chair of the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART), where he continues to help shape the region's transportation policies.

While in office, Viera has been recognized for his commitment to and advocacy for veterans, receiving the Keeping the American Patriotic Spirit Alive Award from the Hillsborough County Veterans Council and the Community Champion Award from the County Veterans Treatment Court Mentors.

He also secured funding for Tampa's first-ever disability and sensory-friendly playground. Designed for children with autism spectrum disorder and other cognitive challenges, this initiative sets a new standard for inclusivity and equity among children.

In addition, in early 2022, Viera successfully reintroduced the Tenant's Bill of Rights, a measure addressing the ongoing housing crisis in the Tampa Bay area. This initiative, among

other provisions, mandates landlords provide notice of rights and accept Section 8 vouchers and other forms of government assistance as a prospective tenant's income.

Always receptive to exploring ideas that address inequity,

Viera met with FEF in 2023 to discuss a concept focused on bridging Tampa's digital divide. Viera agreed to champion the effort, which will aim to ensure area residents have access to the resources, opportunities, and skills necessary to navigate today's increasingly digital world. Discussions and planning will continue in 2024.



Councilman Viera with members and parents of the Tampa Area National Achievers Society and other volunteers at the 2024 MLK Day of Service at McKay Bay Nature Park

MDF's New Fellows' Orientation Empowers New Class for the Journey Ahead

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discuss the history, pitfalls, and promises of graduate education.

The Orientation's highly rated annual Graduate Deans' panel, moderated by Dr. Sonja Montas-Hunter, former Florida International University McKnight liaison and current Program Director with the National Science Foundation, included Dr. Michael Abazinge from Florida A&M University, Dr. Ruth Bahr from University of South Florida, Dr. Murielle Gammons from University of Florida, Dr. Jennifer Parham from University of Central Florida, Dr. Rene Price from Florida International University, Dr. Hudson Santos from University of Miami and Dr. Adrienne Stephenson from Florida State University. The panelists shared a wealth of diverse experience and insight with the Fellows, explaining that seeking a Ph.D. means embarking on an educational endeavor that will exceed the rigor of prior studies and require greater time commitment, perseverance, and independent discovery, research, and writing.

They advised Fellows to study their department handbooks and understand the policies concerning their expected degrees, get involved in the culture of their programs by attending colloquia and interacting with faculty and other students, and take advantage of the counseling and other support offered by the office of the graduate school.

The Deans encouraged Fellows to learn the academic culture of their departments; develop a reputation within the department as a hardworking, serious scholar; develop relationships with and seek guidance from mentors; seek to collaborate with others on publications, conference presentations, and research grants; learn to accept criticism without becoming defensive; and avoid conflict or keep it from escalating to a harmful level. They also suggested students develop a daily plan of study and set dates for

completing coursework, comprehensive exams, and both the proposal and dissertation defenses.

When discussing dissertation writing, the panel proposed Fellows begin early to decide on manageable research topics, choose advisors to guide their research, and immerse themselves in the literature of their fields.

On the current Fellows' panel that followed the Deans' session, 2022 Fellow Johnnie Allen, in educational leadership at Florida State, presented "The Importance of Mentoring in Graduate Education;" 2018 Fellow David Perez, who studies environmental engineering at FAMU, discussed "Balancing Course Load with Personal and Family Commitments;" and 2022 Fellow Malena Price, a Psychology scholar at the University of Miami, shared "Tips and Tricks for Getting through the Ph.D. Program." Their and other Orientation speakers' goal: to ensure this year's class keeps pace with the greater cadre of McKnights, who graduate with their Ph.D.'s faster and at higher rates than their peers around the country.

This new class of students, while similar to former McKnight classes in diverse disciplines and selected schools, is fairly unique in that 13, close to 30% were slated to begin their doctoral programs right after earning their bachelor's degrees.

As such, the Orientation keynote speakers, University of South Florida Associate Professor Dr. Iraida Carrion and Professor, Vice President for Research & Innovation, and President & CEO of the USF Research Foundation Dr. Sylvia Thomas, along with other



Dr. Sylvia Thomas

presenters, spent a considerable amount of time explaining the differences between doctoral and bachelor-level study. They emphasized that, while students who have earned master's degrees generally have gained appreciable exposure to graduate-level research, students completing bachelor's usually have not.

They noted that earning A's and B's in doctoral courses, although expected, is merely a baseline requirement for earning the Ph.D., which, in addition mandates students conduct and report on specialized research in a narrow field with the end goal of becoming "experts." Thus, they clarified the Fellows' charge as doctoral candidates to synthesize theory and research data into their dissertations and create "new knowledge," in contrast to simply consuming and restating information, as often accepted in undergrad.

"Having this group of knowledgeable, influential people all in the same place, sharing their experiences and providing advice for persisting through the Ph.D. journey has been invaluable," said one new Fellow. She and the rest of her cohort began their programs in August, with four pursuing degrees in education; four in the humanities; thirteen in the social sciences; and twenty-three in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.



Dr. Iraida Carrion



New Fellows at the 2023 Orientation

Published Author and Fellow Taylor Darks Works to Right Societal Wrongs

McKnight Dissertation Fellow Taylor Darks is a talented doctoral candidate in sociology at Florida State University, and much more. She is a poet and the author of several children’s books, and has a book deal with Harper Collins for *Be, Black Girl, Be*, to be published this summer. Her poetry collection, *Caged*, written as an undergraduate, is part of the sociology curriculum at Florida A&M University. Among her many additional accomplishments, Darks has been a Congressional Black Caucus Fellow (2020) and has served as president of her Delta Sigma Theta Sorority chapter, Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society, and the Sociology Graduate Student Union.



Dissertation Fellow Taylor Darks

A self-described “introvert involved in numerous extrovert activities,” Darks grew up with her parents and younger sister in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she excelled in three high school varsity sports—track, soccer, and basketball. She led her basketball team to a conference championship and was named player of the year as a high school junior.

That was the same year Darks read *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison. It was Dark’s first time reading a book written by a Black woman, and she was hooked by the depth of Morrison’s writing as well as by seeing herself represented. Now, Darks’ own books are centered on “quirky black girls” who can see themselves as main characters in their own stories, a nod to Morrison’s practice of writing books that she herself would want to read.

Following high school, Darks initially landed at Furman University, a small (fewer than 2,300 students), private liberal arts university in South Carolina, where she considered several disciplines, including business, graphic design, and journalism, as a major. After a year, she transferred to Florida A&M University, where she would eventually decide to major in sociology. Choosing sociology as a major resulted from her desire to help people and was influenced by learning about Martin Luther King’s drum major speech, in which King preached about achieving greatness through service, love, and humility, rather than by being at the

forefront. King delivered it two months before he was killed.

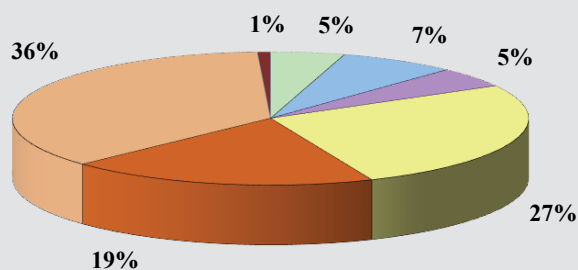
“We all have the drum major instinct. We all want to be important, to surpass others, to achieve distinction, to lead the parade... And the great issue of life is to harness the drum major instinct. It is a good instinct if you don’t distort it and pervert it,” Darks says.

Darks had transferred to FAMU for basketball, but it turned out to be the change she didn’t know she needed. It felt like home. “I remember going to my first football game and my teammate just starts doing the Rattler Strike with the band, and it was ... surreal, and so confusing at the same time.” Despite being a wallflower, she immersed herself in all facets of campus life—academics, sports, and activism, while continuing to write poetry and children’s books.

Darks also tackled the idea that being an athlete defines and limits what students should strive to accomplish and has used social media to urge fellow athletes to discard the “shut up and dribble” mindset. She credits FAMU with expanding her goals and giving her the foundation to pursue a graduate degree. “Without their captivating lectures, I don’t know where my educational journey may have taken me. They directly inspired my research questions, curiosity, and desire to educate others.”

With so much going on, Darks’ senior year at FAMU was a blur. Upon graduating in 2019, she entered FSU to pursue her doctorate as a FAMU Feeder Scholar. Last year, her presentation before the FSU Fellows Forum was recognized as the “most impactful” in the Humanities. She studies inequality and social justice, and is particularly interested in policies designed to remedy generational and historical harm. Now a doctoral candidate, her dissertation examines the processes, viewpoints, and consensus-building involved in the development of a housing reparations program in Evanston, Illinois. She plans to defend her dissertation and graduate this year.

2023-2024 MDF MATRICULATING FELLOWS (367)



Discipline Breakdown

- Business (17)
- Education (27)
- Humanities (18)
- Social Sciences (98)
- STEM-Engineering/Computer Sciences (71)
- STEM-Health/Life/Physical Sciences (133)
- STEM-Mathematics/Statistics (3)

Tampa Area NAS President Nathaniel Freeman Receives County Leadership Award

At the October 18, 2023, Hillsborough County Commission meeting, Tampa Area Center of Excellence National Achievers Society (NAS) president Nathaniel Freeman won the prestigious Youth Excellence and Achievement (YEA!) Award in the Leadership category. The YEA! Awards recognize exceptional middle and high school students in Hillsborough County who exhibit initiative, innovation, and commitment to leadership excellence.

Nathaniel, an I.B. middle school student, earned the honor for persevering through challenges and displaying critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, all while making a positive impact on others. His remarkable accomplishments set him apart in a competitive field of nominees.

An excellent, straight A—Principal's Honor Roll student and leader, Nathaniel won induction into the Tampa chapter of FEF's statewide pre-college National Achievers Society and election as Tampa president in 2023. Nathaniel leads and participates fully in NAS college preparation and community service activities and



Tampa National Achievers Society president Nathaniel Freeman among six winners of prestigious Hillsborough County YEA! Award

even joined the group's newly formed Code Squad, which helps FEF write coding challenges for elementary students. Nathaniel also has been inducted into the National Junior Honor Society at school.

Notably, Nathaniel's impact extends beyond traditional education and NAS settings. In 2022, in collaboration with his father, USF professor McArthur Freeman II, Nathaniel conducted a "Superhero Storytelling" workshop as part of the USF Sarasota-Manatee Florida Center for Partnerships in Arts-Integrated Teaching. Over a two-week period, they taught middle schoolers to combine technology, including coding, illustrating, and editing, with superhero storytelling. The program aimed to make technology and the arts

accessible to black and brown children in the Bay area, exposing them to digital art and empowering them to create stories that reflect their experiences.

In addition, in early 2023, Nathaniel demonstrated eloquence as a gifted speaker when he addressed over 1,000 attendees at the Tampa Organization for Black Affairs MLK Breakfast. His speech focused on the importance of

continuing Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy, showcasing his commitment to community engagement and service.

Nathaniel's diverse interests, from mastering academics, coding and storytelling to his love for Lego and admiration for Black Panther, showcase a well-rounded individual with aspirations ranging from becoming an astronaut to a game designer.

His recognition with the YEA! Award in the Leadership category highlight Nathaniel's exceptional qualities as a student, leader, and community contributor. FEF congratulates Nathaniel on this well-deserved honor, and we look forward to witnessing the positive impact he continues to make as he leads Tampa NAS into the future.

Students Learn True History in FEF's Statewide Critical Reading Scholarship Competition

Since 1985, FEF's statewide History and Culture Competition has focused on sharpening critical reading and thinking skills while educating students about the role of minorities in the United States. Teams of students in grade 6 through 12 study college-level literary and historical manuscripts in county, regional and State Championships, where they answer hundreds of SAT-patterned questions that ask them to determine meanings of words from context, display understanding of significant information in text, analyze information, and evaluate assumptions made and techniques used by authors.



Placing teams earn a bevy of prizes, including an all-expense-paid two-night trip to Tampa and trophies. First and second place team members also win Dr. Mary Lindsey cash scholarships of up to \$400, and first through third place winners earn the opportunity to choose from four-year scholarships donated by accredited colleges and universities across Florida to help fund the ever-increasing costs of pursuing bachelor's degrees.

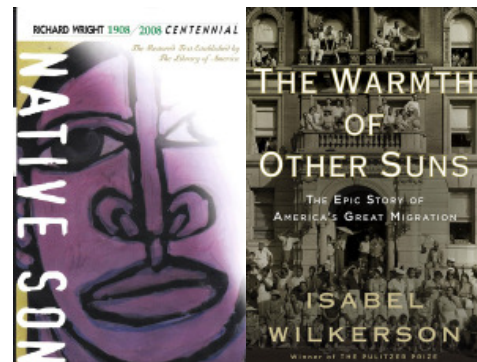
In the face of Florida book bans, this year's Brain Bowl book selection committee sought to choose titles that afford competitors the opportunity to read African American literature and learn true African American history, material they may no longer cover in their home schools.

Students Learn True History in FEF's Statewide Critical Reading Scholarship Competition

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As such, for the 2024 and 2025 competition years, all competitors will study Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Nickel Boys: A Novel* by Colson Whitehead, which tells the story of Elwood Curtis, a Black teenager who is sent to a reform school in Florida in the 1960s and discovers the brutal reality of the school's racist and abusive practices; and National Book Award selection *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation* by Imani Perry, a non-fiction exploration of the history, culture, and landscapes of the American South that argues understanding the South is key to understanding America as a whole.

For the State meet, regional winners also will read the classic *Native Son* by Richard Wright, which tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a young Black man living in poverty in 1930s Chicago who accidentally kills a wealthy white woman and faces the consequences of his actions; and National Book Critics Circle Award-winning *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* by Isabel Wilkerson, a non-fiction book that chronicles the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North and West between 1915 and 1970 and the impact it had on American society.



FEF CodeMasters Expands from 8 to 37 Sites in Hillsborough County in 2024

FEF began teaching computer programming to pre-college students in 2008 in an Alachua County middle school camp led by then University of Florida McKnight Fellow, now Google software engineer, Pierre St. Juste, Ph.D. Since then, we've offered camps and programs each year, certifying beginning web developers and teaching robotics, animation, game design and phone app development to thousands of upper elementary, middle and high school students and adults. Those thousands left out just one group—students in Kindergarten through grade 2—while we searched for and/or developed curricula suitable for very young underserved youth who don't always have reliable access to the Internet.

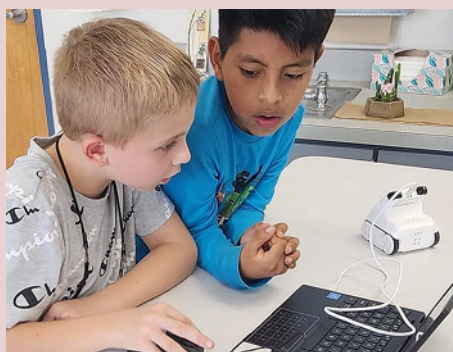
In 2019, we put our first K-2 courses to the test, based around a small robot called Codey Rocky with its downloadable programming software. At the behest of a few partners, we taught five-, six- and seven-year-olds to drag-and-drop program Codey Rocky, after which they'd gleefully get down on the floor with the robot, watch it move and blink according to their code, run back to the computer to debug and reprogram, and then, back on the floor. We and our partners watched as the children's desire to continue playing quickly alleviated any fear of making mistakes and prompted them to work collaboratively to find solutions.

They loved the classes, and the partners continue to engage us to teach Codey Rocky robotics each year. That success put

us on the radar of a major funder, the Children's Board of Hillsborough, which tapped us in early 2022 to provide the STEM/coding enhancement to eight school district and city park elementary after school and summer program sites, starting with Codey Rocky. In 2024, we will expand that work to 29 additional locations, serving over a thousand more K-5 students from underserved communities and groups currently underrepresented in tech.

Twenty-four of the locations are Title I schools with student populations that range from 75 to 98% economically disadvantaged and 71 to 99% minority. Fifteen schools enroll 90% or more economically disadvantaged students, and seventeen enroll 90% or more minority students. The five other new locations are parks that serve students attending the new schools.

By the time these kids reach middle school, they will have already formed an idea of their capabilities and their limitations. Before then, our goal over the course of several years, is to expose all—not just the high-achieving and gifted—to a full computer science educational pipeline that will impart important computing and computational thinking skills, grow their confidence in using these skills, and show them how computer science can be used in any career. We intend to help them develop a strong foundation and self-efficacy early that they can build upon as they prepare to contribute to a dynamic workforce where a growing number of jobs require computer science skills.



Students learn to program the Codey Rocky robot.



Students program the Artie robot to draw.

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Upcoming FEF Events

March 22-23, 2024	38 th Annual Brain Bowl Competitions & Florida National Achievers Society Pre-College Summit, Tampa
August 2024	MDF New Fellows' Orientation, Tampa

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The FEF's mission is to strengthen the larger community by creating and implementing programs and services that lead to greater educational advancement for historically underrepresented groups.

For information on how you may support FEF programs, please call 813-272-2772.



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