

Clay County, FL  
Supervisor of Elections  
"Florida Youth Challenge  
Academy: Elections and Voters  
Responsibility Program"



**Election Administration Best  
Practice Award Submission  
2005**

**Florida Youth  
Challenge  
Academy  
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Submitted by

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## Election Administration Best Practice Award 2005 Entry for Clay County Florida

Barbara A. Kirkman, Supervisor of Elections of Clay County, Florida has incorporated a program with the local Florida Youth Challenge Academy (FYCA) located at Camp Blanding in Starke Florida. The FYCA is a program for at risk youth who have been expelled or suspended from school and have not been arrested. These students are receiving their last chance to become useful citizens. This academy has been recognized nationally for it's participation in voter education and the election process.

The FYCA falls under the purview of the Florida National Guard. Guard members conduct classes and put these at risk students through rigorous physical, academic and vocational training.

Clay County started conducting the FYCA elections in 2001. The students run for President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and each platoon votes for 4 Senators. Students that are interested in running for office must file and qualify. In the most recent election there were 51 candidates that filed for the election. The Outreach Coordinator for the academy, Tammy Russell, had to hold a primary election prior to our scheduled event to pare the field of candidates down to a more manageable number.

During our program the *First Vote* video is shown to groups consisting of 1/2 of a platoon, approximately 25 students. The cadets are informed that a short question and answer period will follow the video so they must pay attention. After the video is shown the class is guided step by step through filling out a voter registration application. We even have the 16 year old cadets complete the application to get practice for when they are eligible to pre-register to vote. Each application is turned into the staff member prior to the cadet receiving their ballot.

After the registration forms are completed and signed, the question and answer period addressing the video is broached. We have found that the retention of information is phenomenal. The questions are usually answered correctly with the exception of one, which is not addressed in the video. We placed the question "Do you have to take your photo and signature ID with you to the polls on Election Day?" Most students answer YES, but we let them know that in Florida if you do not remember to bring your ID, you can sign an affidavit and cast a ballot. We have found that some people will not bother to vote if they do not have their ID with them on Election Day.

The ballot distribution follows this question and answer period. Each cadet receives a ballot with sections for each position available to vote for. Because the election is one of the first things done when a new group or class is formed, there isn't time to print the names after the candidates sign up. Consequently, we have a number where the candidate's name should appear. There is a list of the candidates names with a corresponding number next to it. They are instructed how to mark their ballot and to review the list that is posted in each voting booth. This process saves the Elections Office money since we use the same ballots for each election and don't waste unused ballots. We can use these ballots for future elections.

The Clay County Elections Office holds an election at the FYCA twice a year. The classroom where the presentation takes place is separated from the "precinct" where voting booths, vote tabulator and "clerk's" table is located. When the cadets enter the "precinct" they turn in their completed voter registration application to be reviewed by the staff member manning the table. They receive their ballot and are given voting instructions along with an "I Registered to Vote Today" sticker. After the ballot has been marked they place it in the vote tabulating equipment and receive an "I Voted" sticker. Several cadets have asked if the stickers are "regulation" and they are assured wearing the stickers for the day had been approved.

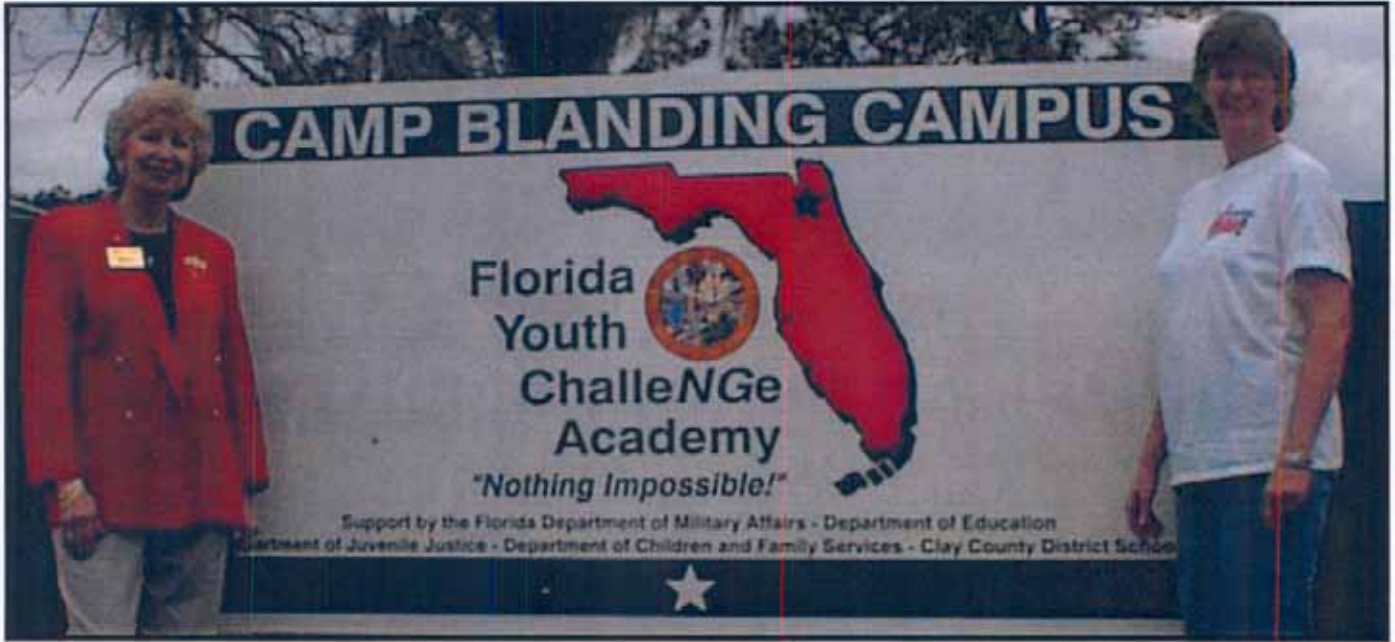
The comments from the students are overwhelmingly positive. They don't believe how easy the process is. This program allows them to ask the questions they might be afraid to ask on Election Day. The office staff gets a great feeling of accomplishment after attending these elections.

Those students that ran for office were given information on running for state and local offices when they reach age requirements. Included in that material were the election laws regarding campaign contribution information and requirements. We may have future candidates from this group of young people.

Hopefully, the FYCA and the Clay County Elections office can instill a sense of self-worth in these at-risk cadets and help turn their lives around. Their future looks brighter through this wonderful program and we are happy to be a part of it.



FYAC Cadets  
attend class and fill out  
voter registration  
forms.



**Florida Youth  
Challenge Academy  
cadets  
mark their ballots.**