



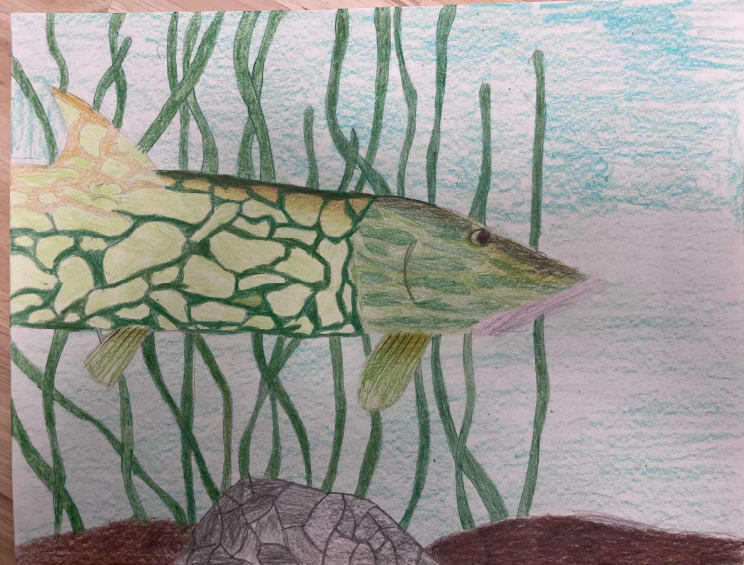
Saving My Alachua: A Community Effort

Art, Environment, & Student Voice across Alachua County

The Saving My Alachua Environmental Art Contest is a longstanding initiative led by the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department, inviting students across the county to explore their connection to the natural world through art.

At the heart of this work is Erika Capin, Administrative Assistant for the department, who coordinates the annual contest and supports its continued growth year after year.

Open to students from kindergarten through 12th grade—across public, private, charter, and homeschool settings—the contest encourages thoughtful engagement with the local environment and the role we all play in its care.



April 2026



A Vision for Environmental Stewardship

As Erika shares, the contest is designed to do more than showcase artistic talent. Students are invited to create work that reflects environmental themes such as:

Water conservation

Wildlife and habitat protection

Pollution prevention

Climate awareness

A Program That Continues to Grow

Since its launch in 2014, the contest has expanded from 185 student participants to more than 600 submissions in recent years.

This growth reflects the dedication of those who sustain the program, as well as the increasing interest from students and educators across Alachua County. The contest now includes grade-level recognition at the high school level, allowing for more meaningful celebration of student work.



Melanie & Brani with Steve Hofstetter & Erika Capin

Through this process, students begin to understand their place within a larger ecological system—learning not only to observe their environment, but to care for it..

Recognition and Public Celebration



Student artwork is honored through:

- First, second, & third place awards
- Selection for the annual Saving My Alachua calendar
- Public display in the County Administration Building
- A County Board recognition ceremony held near Earth Day



These opportunities provide students with a broader audience, connecting their work to the wider community!

Expanding the Vision: An Educator's Perspective



At Laniakea Montessori School (LMS), art teacher Branislava Lakic has long encouraged students to participate in the Saving My Alachua contest, recognizing its value as a meaningful and creative experience.

Over time, her perspective deepened.

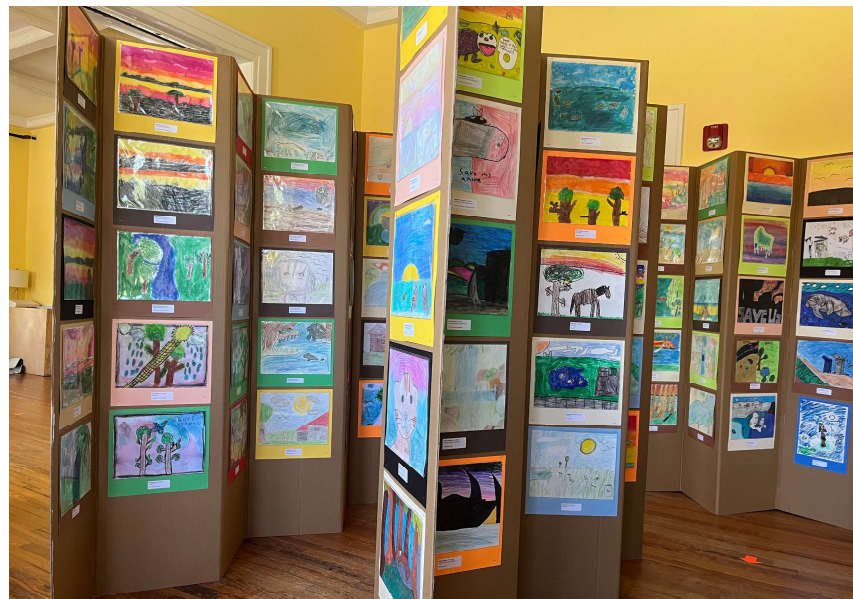
She began to reflect not only on the selected winners, but on the many thoughtful and expressive pieces that were not publicly displayed. This led to a simple but powerful question: How might we create space to honor more of the students' work?

My name is Branislava Lakic. I am the art teacher at Laniakea Montessori Secondary School.

I have been an Elementary and Middle School art teacher in Alachua County since 2011. My mission is to show possibilities in art, encourage creativity, and ultimately celebrate young artists and their work.

My students always enjoyed participating in this meaningful art contest. Somehow, I always wondered about all the beautiful non-winning artwork that goes home without being seen, and how it would be to have an art show for all the contestants.

Melanie, the head of our LMS, an incredibly supportive and exceptionally capable leader, made it possible. We became the hosts of this beautiful annual event!



From Artwork to Community Impact

Selected pieces from the contest are featured in the annual Saving My Alachua calendar, with one work representing each month.

The calendar also includes information about local environmental resources and conservation efforts, extending the impact of student work into homes, schools, and public spaces throughout the county.



From Question to Partnership

With the support of school leadership, that question evolved into action.

Laniakea Montessori became a host site for the contest, providing space within the Adolescent Community to showcase student artwork and support the work of the Environmental Protection Department.

This partnership reflects a shared commitment to:

- creativity
- environmental awareness
- and meaningful student contribution



A Shared Commitment

The continued success of Saving My Alachua is made possible through the dedication of individuals like Erika Capin and Branislava Lakic, whose work bridges community, education, and environmental stewardship.

Together, this collaboration creates opportunities for students to engage thoughtfully with their world—and to see their voices reflected within it.