



**Jennifer Shonak**

Principal

Tortuga Preserve Elementary

Jenniferis@leeschools.net

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To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the students and teachers at Tortuga Preserve Elementary School, I would like to thank Ding Darling, Melissa Maher and her team of volunteers for sharing the Wildlife on Wheels (WOW Bus) with our school.

Before the WOW Bus arrived at our school, Melissa shared grade specific curriculum and resources for our teachers to utilize in their classrooms with our students. This was a great insight to the amazing things the students were about to experience. After the bus arrived, for just about over two weeks, Melissa and her team made presentations to each of our K – 5 classrooms including four of our self-contained ESE classrooms. About 1,000 students made their way through each of the exhibits, learning about the different ecosystems in our area and how we can help save and protect our surrounding wildlife.

Our teachers felt that the presentations were fun, interactive and educational. They loved the integration of vocabulary, hands on activities and the opportunities for their students to ask questions. One teacher shared that her students were able to retain information on invertebrate and vertebrate animals, animals found in estuaries versus lakes, ponds or oceans and survival rate of endangered animals. Overall our teachers appreciated the kindness of the volunteers, organization of materials and the valuable content taught through engaging activities.

Our students are still talking about the WOW Bus! As they rotated through the stations, the students were engaged in hands-on experiences such as turtle golf, drawing a duck, and the animal puzzles. They also enjoyed reaching into the wall to find a variety of animals in their home and learning about the diverse habitats we have here in Southwest Florida. Our 4<sup>th</sup> Graders were sent off with free passes to any refuge or national park and all of our students received a WOW water bottle to take with them – a great parting gift after a great visit at the WOW Bus!

The success of the WOW Bus is due to the amazing volunteers that made each day and every presentation possible. They were patient and kind while keeping the students well managed and engaged in their learning. Teachers felt the volunteers were energetic, flexible and understanding of the diverse learning styles and needs of our students. One volunteer spoke Spanish which was amazing support for over 250 of our English Language Learners that passed through, giving them the feeling of involvement and helping them understand the content in their native language.

Overall, the WOW Bus brought an amazing experience to our teachers and students, an experience that many of our students do not have the opportunity to enjoy due to financial situations or lack of transportation. Thank you for the chance to bring a smile to our students' faces while teaching them about the amazing wildlife our area has to offer and how to preserve the ecosystems that surround us.

We hope the WOW Bus continues to be available for students to enjoy and we look forward to working with Melissa and her team in the near future.

Marla Vest

Assistant Principal, Tortuga Preserve Elementary School

**ADMINISTRATORS**

**JENNIFER SHONAK**, PRINCIPAL | **DAVE CRAWFORD**, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL | **MARLA VEST**, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

**TORTUGA PRESERVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

1711 Gunnery Road North, Lehigh Acres, FL 33971

P: 239.693.5023 | F: 239.693.5033

<https://tpe.leeschools.net>

@tortugapreserve 

