Falkenburg Academy Demo

Falkenburg Academy
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About Falkenburg Academy

Falkenburg Academy is a moderate risk, 100 bed program for males that is jointly operated by the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and the Hillsborough County School District. Falkenburg Academy is located in the same complex with three other DJJ programs: Columbus JRF, Hillsborough Academy, and Hillsborough Detention East. These four educational programs share administrative and support personnel in the areas of educational leadership, transition, reading, guidance, and exceptional student education (ESE). Administrative and support personnel have a positive and proactive relationship which encourages academic performance and appropriate student behavior. The average student-to-teacher ratio is 14:1 and student’s average length of stay is eight months. Of the population, approximately 50% are classified as ESE students and their needs are addressed in various models including co-teaching, support facilitation, consultation, and inclusion.

The overall purpose of the school is to provide quality, relevant, and rewarding education for all students and to prepare students to successfully reenter the community. The program excels at, among other areas, soliciting and obtaining extensive community and business involvement and cooperation and maintaining high quality instructional staff who are committed to meeting individual students’ needs. The outstanding support from the school district ensures that teachers at Falkenburg have the same resources available to all teachers in Hillsborough county.

Falkenburg’s Best Practices

School Environment

Falkenburg Academy was established in 1999, and is designed to teach youth accountability through a restorative justice approach and address thinking errors.
through Thinking for a Change cognitive behavioral treatment modality. DJJ is responsible for the custody care of the students and the Hillsborough County School system provides on-site education.

Falkenburg’s buildings and grounds are well maintained and attractive. The classrooms and dorms encircle a sports complex with a basketball court, sand volleyball court, a horseshoe pit, tether ball, and areas for walking or jogging and pull-ups. Students’ vocational accomplishments can be seen throughout the grounds - such as a fish pond, a memorial garden, a wooden bridge, picnic tables, bird houses, a ramp for the disabled, and Adirondack chairs.

All classrooms are neat and attractive, the walls are creatively painted, and student work is displayed. Teachers use the current textbooks used in traditional schools and teachers serve on textbook adoption selection committees through the school district. Each classroom has accommodations for whole and individualized instruction and computer work stations. TV stands in the classrooms were built by students in the building construction class. The science classroom includes computer work stations with headphones for all students and textbook kits that have CDs, videos, and teacher tools to supplement instruction. Aquariums include lizards that students care for. The walls are decorated with motivational and science posters and words of encouragement from Tampa Bay Buccaneer football players who have visited the program. The science teacher receives an annual $250 supplement for experiments and students complete activities and experiments such as owl pellet dissections and building cars powered by balloons.

Education is a priority at Falkenburg and the emphasis is on student success. The education, custody and treatment staff keep open communication on a daily basis to achieve that goal. Students, who are referred to as cadets, follow a code of conduct that encourages them to give 100% in everything they do at Falkenburg Academy. Rules that cadets must follow include raising their hand for permission to talk, participate in class, take notes, respect others, have homework finished on time, open and close notebooks at teacher’s direction, come to class prepared to learn, and only bring materials to class that pertain to school. Students are rewarded for positive behavior and strive to behave as gentlemen. Examples of positive reinforcement include: Student effort attitude and leadership awards, student of the week awards, honor roll pizza parties, cap and gown graduations, and transportation to home NFL games.

The teachers and facility staff collaborate to implement the behavior management system and all receive training on its implementation. Collaboration occurs through
daily communication among the teachers and officers, weekly administrative meetings, ongoing discussions between the contract manager and the facility superintendent, and DJJ representation at monthly school improvement plan meetings. The education, custody and treatment staff is very satisfied in their working environment – including safety, workload, administrative support and adequate pay. Teacher salaries rank 30th in the state. Due to the positive atmosphere, the teachers, custody and treatment staff considers themselves to be a close-knit family, and hence there is very little staff transition. Teachers have been at the program for an average of five years.

Resources and Community Partnerships

Falkenburg Academy receives the standard Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP) funding and funding for after school tutoring through Title I Neglected and Delinquent monies. A variety of community resources and overlay services are utilized to help meet individual students’ needs. Successful completion of the residential program is based on the development of skills necessary to reintegrate with family and the community.

The assistant principal and superintendent of the facility coordinate tours of the program and work together to seek out new services to benefit students. When space became an issue, the school district provided additional portables to alleviate the problem. The assistant principal collaborated with the facility superintendent to secure funding for staff and students to receive OSHA training. Services through the regional workforce board are also being pursued.

Falkenburg Academy has established a variety of partnerships that provide students with vast resources to enhance education. Grants and partnerships are solicited by the administration and the Board of Directors. The program has acquired eight grants for education to include a grant from Learning for Life for a character education program, from Neglected and Delinquent Program to assist below grade level students in reading and math, from the Florida Aquarium to put aquariums in all classrooms, from the Department of Juvenile Justice for post secondary education, from Tune into Reading funded by the University of South Florida to provide computers and software for a computer assisted instruction reading program, and from USA Today and the Tampa Tribune to incorporate newspapers into the curriculum. A grant from DJJ provides funds for each student to leave the program with a book bag, a football, and a gift bag of needed items for reentry into the community. Additionally, the principal and assistant principal are always pursuing grants that will enrich their students’ academic experience.
Donations have been received from various other organizations. The program has partnerships with Erwin Technological Center and Hillsborough Community College (HCC) who work collaboratively to provide post secondary opportunities to students with a general education diploma or high school diploma. These postsecondary opportunities were obtained through grants and community partnerships. Additionally, the program receives assistance from the State's Attorney General’s office in vocational education and the State’s Attorney Office is on the program’s advisory counsel. They have partnerships with the Ready to Work program, The Arts Council, Lowery Zoo, The Museum of Science and Industry and Stage works Productions.

Teachers at the program have access to the school district’s Youth Services media center and the media specialist and clerk take orders from teachers and bring the materials on-site for program use. The media specialist is available to do internet lessons with the students or assist the teacher with integrating technology into their lessons. Surplus material has also been donated to the program.

Volunteers from a number of different agencies serve as mentors for students. The program has access to mentors through the Hillsborough County School Board, SERVE speakers, the Derrick Brooks Foundation, Purple Hearts, IMPACT, Hillsborough County Extension Services, and Bell Shoals Baptist Church. One school board member also serves the program as a mentor. Mentors are assigned based on student requests, case management recommendations, and teacher observations. Mentors provide behavioral support and academic enrichment.

Due to the students’ inability to leave campus for fieldtrips, the program works to bring field trips to the campus. Visitors include representatives from the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Jazz musician Alana Darcy, Cartoonist Tim Gibbons, Drumming Instructor Jana Broder, the Aviation School of Clearwater, Buffalo Soldiers, The Museum of Science and Industry and the Lowry Park Zoo. Additionally, the public library provides students access to the bookmobile on a regular basis.

Parents are also resources and partners in the students’ rehabilitation process. The program holds family visitation every weekend. Not only can family members offer support to the students at this time, but the weekend visit offers staff an extra opportunity to talk with parents in person concerning student’s needs and progress in the program. Parents may sign up to attend parent counseling classes and family counseling offered by the program to assist with transition. The program has a parent liaison who contacts parents by phone for information or to invite them to meetings. She also has a web site so parents can ask her questions and get information about the program and their child during his stay at the program.

**Assessments, Diagnostics, and Guidance**

Teacher assistants administer the Basic Achievement Skills Inventory (BASI), Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR), and an informal writing
assessment upon student entry. The teachers work space is utilized for a quiet environment for test administration. Assessment results are reviewed by the guidance counselor for scheduling purposes, teachers receive testing information to develop individual academic plans (IAPs), and the ESE specialist uses assessment results to develop IEP goals.

Students’ vocational aptitudes and abilities are assessed with Choices, a career interest inventory, and workplace readiness assessments. These assessments are used to identify students’ interests and aptitudes and assist in placement within the vocational curriculum (i.e. CAD, carpentry, plumbing, and life skills). The multitude of units offered in the vocational program ensure student interest in at least one area of offerings. Additionally, Military personnel volunteer to administer the ASVAB.

The program is served by an on-site guidance counselor that also serves three additional DJJ sites that are in close proximity. He is professionally certified in psychology, social sciences, and guidance, and has served the program since 2003. He is responsible for interviewing new students, reviewing previous school records, FCAT scores, and then developing a schedule based on student needs and student progression toward graduation. At entry, he is also responsible for advising students regarding their current grade, an analysis of credit history, diploma option, and post-secondary information. The guidance counselor provides all students with a welcome letter and video, which is specific for either middle or high school students. The video and letter contain graduation requirements, major areas of interest, general promotion policy and requirements, the school grading policy, and the procedures to request on-going guidance and counseling services. Students are also provided with information about the opportunity to take the GED. They are given the programs referral and screening procedures, and provided with information on the testing process, which is conducted off-site. The guidance counselor provides information and assistance with registration in the Florida Ready to Work Credential for students that are interested in participating.

Students receive ongoing guidance services by teachers who have been trained by the guidance counselor and district level supervisors. Students can also complete a request for guidance services and the guidance counselor will respond to their concerns. Guidance needs are integrated with treatment and are addressed during treatment team meetings on a regular basis.

**Exit and Aftercare Services**

The on-site guidance counselor collaborates with the school district transition coordinator for any student that is returning to Hillsborough County. Post-
placement services include student referrals to the local Hillsborough Community College, registration for employment with the local one-stop career center, vocational school information, and GED testing information.

The district transition coordinator is professionally certified with coverage in ESE Behavioral Disorders. She has direct access to the district MIS for in-county student transcripts and assessment results. If students are enrolling from out-of-county, a transition assistant calls to verify previous placement and request records. Depending on the student’s needs, previous program completion, disabilities, and sometimes, previous felonies, the transition coordinator seeks to find the best and most suitable placement for the student to continue and complete their educational process. Information contained within the IEP and IAP (specifically the transitional statement or career goals) provides suggestions for post-placement services. The school district has in place the following plan for DJJ students returning to the district:

1. If ESE student has only the option to attend their neighborhood school, the transition coordinator sends student information to the ESE contact at the local school.
2. If ESE students have more than one placement option, the transition coordinator sets-up an ESE re-entry meeting to discuss placement options. In addition, all ESE students assigned to either home based or alternative education instruction must have an ESE re-entry meeting prior to school enrollment.
3. Non-disabled students that have options for Adult Education Placement are given information about preparing for the GED and/or information on continuing to earn credits toward graduation, whichever is more appropriate.
4. If non-disabled students have traditional K-12 options, their previous school information is requested from the DJJ program and sent to the principal. The principal or assistant principal meets with the student prior to enrollment.
5. Non-disabled students who were at a DJJ facility for six months or longer and successfully completed the program will not have to return to alternative education. They can return to their local neighborhood school. If a student’s previous charges are considered violent in nature, a Juvenile Justice Placement Panel (includes the Assistant Superintendent for Administration, General Director for Pupil Placement and Support Programs, Manager for School Security Services, Director for Planning and Related Services, Director of Administration, seven area directors and the Juvenile Justice Transition Coordinator) hearing is set up by the transition coordinator, where information is shared and a placement option is made.
The school district transition coordinator also provides a variety of post-placement services including GED testing information, assistance with college enrollment and placement testing, information regarding area vocational schools, employment, and applications for local scholarships.

Curriculum and Instruction

The purpose of the school is to provide quality relevant and rewarding instruction for all students and to prepare them for successful reintegration into society. Academic instruction includes courses in reading, English/language arts, math, science, and social studies. Elective and vocational courses include health, career education, vocational employability skills for youth, building construction, and team sports. Students working toward a special diploma are provided functional courses and services through a support facilitator as necessary. Additional courses are offered to meet individual students’ progression needs. Students can earn a standard, special, GED, or GED Exit Option diploma if they meet the criteria while enrolled at the program. The assistant principal completed the application and received DOE approval for the school to become a GED testing site.

Student successes are celebrated and diplomas adorn the cafeteria. Independent living and character education skills are taught through the Learning for Life curriculum. Substance abuse, anger management, and life skills are also addressed through individual and group counseling provided through the facilities eight certified counselors.

Teachers provide whole group, small group, and individualized instruction based on students needs. Student prompts are written on the whiteboard for students to begin instruction at the beginning of the class period and the whiteboard is sectioned off with various assignments based on the courses students are receiving instruction in. Students receive one-on-one assistance from the teachers daily and report bonding with teachers, counselors, and officers while at the program. Students feel that teachers and staff take a personal interest in their lives and help them work through issues they are dealing with but also hold them accountable for their performance in the classroom. Whiteboards are used for direct instruction and students complete problems at the board in math. Classroom discussion is integrated into daily instruction and student and teacher laughter was observed while discussing the events in a book students are reading.

Teachers and staff facilitate on-task behavior through proximity control. Instruction builds on students’ prior knowledge and challenges students to rise to the high expectations set for them. Students work in pairs or small groups to complete projects and display activities completed throughout the facility. IAPs and IEPs are used to design and implement appropriate instruction for students and a variety of
teaching strategies and technology (overhead projector, TV/VCR/DVDs, and computer software) are used to meet students varying learning modalities. The math teacher partners with representatives from the University of South Florida to discuss money matters with students. Students write speeches and poems to recite at various ceremonies including the open mic poetry slam at graduation. Additionally students participate in annual art contests and FCAT pride recognition ceremonies.

Students access the FLVS for courses not regularly offered at the program and computer software available includes STAR reading and math, Mavis Beacon (typing program), Choices, Encarta, FCAT Explorer, My Skills Tutor, A+, Academy of Reading, and Tune into Reading. Teachers enhance the reading curriculum with The Bluford Series and activities from the local Tampa newspaper as well as the USA Today. After school tutoring is also provided through Title I N&D funding.

Students who have earned their high school diploma or its equivalent have post-secondary opportunities and have access to a laptop computer devoted to students use for on-line courses. These students also assist teachers by serving as peer tutors and participate in hands-on training through the vocational program.

Falkenburg Academy is a Type 2 career education program and students are provided access to hands-on career and technical training. Students receive training for specific occupations, such as carpentry, and are provided direct work experiences. After seven months in the building construction course, students can earn a maintenance certificate that allows them to get a job on a construction site. Students also learn health and safety procedures and become OSHA certified while attending the program. Other hands-on training include: relevant projects such as, construction of handicap ramp, design and building of picnic tables, the removal and installation of floor tile, forming of concrete sidewalks and the drawing of the architectural plans as well as building the Falkenburg sports complex.

The program uses the recommended post-secondary curriculum for career and occupational awareness for juvenile offenders. This employability skills training and implementation program includes workstations with eight interactive CD-ROMS (choosing your job, your job search, applying for a job, interviewing for a job, good work habits, getting along, getting ahead, and money matters). Additionally, an aptitude skills inventory, occupational outlook handbooks, and student job search, job changes, and personal finance workbooks are used. Teachers participated in the Ready to Work webinar and plan to implement the program.

Teachers

The program has five core academic teachers, two ESE support facilitators, a lead educator, and an assistant principal. All teachers have professional certifications. The social studies teacher is certified in social studies, two other teachers have certification in middle grades integrated curriculum and the science, math and
English teachers have HOUSSE coverages in those areas. The reading teacher is professionally certified in elementary education and has a reading endorsement. Additionally, three teachers have ESE certifications and ESOL endorsements. ESE personnel co-teach in all core academics and vocational courses.

Instructional and support personnel indicate that each had to go through an extensive interview and screening process before being selected to work at Falkenburg Academy. The process includes using current teachers, staff members, and administrators to interview candidates and make selections. An ESE vacancy, due to internal promotion, resulted in over 50 applicants for the position. The ESE support facilitator hired for this position has both an ESE and case management background and was excited when a position became open at the program. Teachers state that they stay at Falkenburg because it is a collaborative setting that values teacher professionalism and provides resources to meet students’ needs. Teachers feel connected with the school district and attend subject matter curriculum meetings on a regular basis to ensure they are aware of all district policies and expectations.

Teachers appreciate the assistant principal’s direct leadership style and the ongoing support he provides them. Teachers stated that his appointment of site based lead teachers and his implementation of an internal mock QA team have been vital to their success and have increased their level of services provided to each student. The assistant principal has been nominated for multiple awards and was recently recognized as Boss of the Year for Hillsborough County. The assistant principal places a strong emphasis on recognition. For instance: he recognizes an outstanding employee every month, provides teacher and staff appreciation luncheons, and nominates teachers/staff for numerous awards to include: Council of Exceptional Children, Youth Services and District Teacher of the Year, Instructional Support and DJJ Teacher of the Year.

Classroom teachers have the opportunity to participate in a facility training program, orientation, and ongoing facility and school district training. Teachers attend student focused learning community meetings monthly. Each teacher has the opportunity to attend one day of the Juvenile Justice Education Institute training hosted by JEEP and DOE. Trainings are relevant to the instructional needs of students and prepare teachers to work with this population.

The program has a very low teacher turnover rate (only one teacher has been hired in the past 4 years) and all teachers and staff interviewed were happy to be working at the program and enjoy helping change lives. Additionally, teachers have over two hours of collaborative planning time each day to prepare for instruction.
Falkenburg Academy has much to offer its students and teachers in regards to a safe and positive environment, opportunities for success, and community involvement. The facility administrators and staff members, the school district administrators and support personnel, and the educational program's teachers, paraprofessionals, and support personnel have a positive and proactive relationship that encourages excellence in academic performance and appropriate student behavior.