The Learning Center at Pensacola Boys Base
Building 3780 Corry Station
Pensacola, FL 32511
Robert Cotton, Lead Educator 850.453.7521
Oliver Jones, Program Administrator 850.453.7490

Program Highlights

Resources
Mentors from the naval base and community assist students in academics, as well as take them off the base for extra-curricular activities.

The school district sponsors a week-long technology camp.

Community Partnerships
Students provide community services through the Pensacola Little Theatre, Habitat for Humanity, Relay for Life, Special Olympics, the American Heart Association, and raising $35,000 for Feed the Children.

Students have completed over 3,200 volunteer hours.

Vocational Program
Because Pensacola Boys Base is located on a naval base, students have the opportunity to participate and graduate from naval training programs.

Educational Staff
While one teacher is relatively new, the lead educator and other teachers have been at the program for at least a decade.

About The Learning Center
The Learning Center is a moderate-risk residential treatment program located in Escambia County on Corry Station, a United States Naval Base. The program serves 28 males, ages 16 to 18, who are primarily from Escambia and neighboring counties (i.e. Walton, Okaloosa, and Santa Rosa). Of the population, approximately 40% are classified as ESE students. The Learning Center provides a
short-term academic program that lasts six to nine months. Students have access to a range of vocational training offered at the Naval Air Station, Pensacola and Corry Station. Among its strengths, the program excels at soliciting and obtaining extensive community and business involvement and cooperation. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice operates the facility while Escambia County Schools operates the educational program.

**The Learning Center's Best Practices**

**School Environment**

The Learning Center was established in 1972 as the first juvenile justice program in the United States to be housed on a military base, providing students with access to the base’s cafeteria, gymnasium, library, and athletic fields. Additionally, students here have the unique opportunity to participate and graduate from U.S. Navy training programs. Moreover, the Learning Center is also the only program in the nation to commit one working day each week toward building homes for low-income families, and to donate thirty-seven thousand dollars to the Feed the Children Organization. The program is also unique within the state of Florida for its participation in a variety of other community activities, such as its support for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life, the Ronald McDonald House, the American Heart Association, Special Olympics, American Cancer Society Cattle Baron's Ball, Cram the Van, and the Annual Airplane Pull for United Way of Pensacola.

The Learning Center is able to boast of several awards and recognitions, including the Commissioner of Education's Business Recognition Award for the mentoring program, and the Escambia County Board of Commissioners and the Mayor of Pensacola's proclamation recognizing the students’ contributions to Habitat for Humanity. While emphasis on academics is strong, community reintegration is also a priority at The Learning Center. In fact, the mission statement demonstrates that the program strives to provide the necessary instruction to at-risk juvenile offenders so that they may re-enter their communities and become useful and productive citizens. The Learning Center recognizes that a necessary precondition for such instruction is a safe, nurturing, positive environment wherein the students will be able to find success and achieve personal fulfillment. Students are also encouraged to develop independence, self-discipline, and self-motivation skills necessary to return to their home communities and to avoid negative influences.

Student, teacher, and administrative personnel interviews and surveys confirmed the program’s emphasis on education, as well as its dedication to vocational and
daily living skills. Most respondents agreed that education is of primary importance on the Base, while they also emphasize the inclusion of life skills, social skills, self-determination skills, and vocational and occupational training into their regular school day. Specifically, students are in class for six hours per day, beginning at eight o'clock in the morning. They generally spend the first four hours in core academic courses. Following the lunch break, they shift to physical education, which is followed by training in such areas as driver education, art education, peer tutoring, and reading.

Another strategy that appears to be effective is uniformity in philosophy across the disciplines (i.e., academic, treatment, and custody). Specifically, The Learning Center operates a fully integrated program in which classroom behavior management is aligned with facility behavior management. Teachers are responsible for maintaining appropriate behavior in their classrooms; since the program’s establishment over three decades ago, there has never been a need for behavior technicians in the classroom. All educational staff members evaluate the students on a weekly basis in both academics and behavior. Satisfactory performance in each of these domains is required for students to gain access to ancillary services and opportunities, such as Juvenile Justice Education Training (JJet), the work-study program, play groups, and volunteering with Habitat for Humanity.

The behavior management program at The Learning Center requires 12 weeks of Ropes Challenge Course and 24 weeks of group workshops that include the following: social skills training, life skills, employability, cultural diversity, alcohol prevention, crime prevention, restorative justice, victim awareness, gang awareness, changing directions, self esteem, and conflict resolution. Awards are given for academic achievement and good behavior, including Student of the Month, Student of the Year, Reader of the Month, Reader of the Quarter, and honor roll recognition. Conversely, rule infractions result in additional academic assignments. If the problematic behavior continues, as a last resort the student will be recommended for an alternate program, which rarely occurs.

Students at The Learning Center generally feel that the behavior management system is clear and fair; they agreed that the program rules and classroom rules are the same, and that their teachers are consistent and respectful. Teachers' surveys and interviews revealed much the same--teachers feel safe on school grounds and in their classrooms, despite the absence of behavioral technicians. In addition, they confirmed that administrative staff, teachers, custody staff, and treatment staff are unified in their approaches to behavior management, and in their understanding of the importance of having a safe and positive learning environment for the students. Regular staff and teacher meetings appear to play an important role in maintaining close relationships and communication between staff members at the program. For instance, faculty meetings are held every month, and teachers and staff are required to sign in. In addition, group bi-monthly treatment team meetings are held, and the program’s open door policy ensures that staff members can communicate freely on a regular basis, despite the formality of the regularly scheduled meetings.
The Learning Center receives the standard Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP) funding. Title I money is used to support the non-instructional aide position, classroom supplies, teacher training, and the reading enrichment program. In addition, the school district provides the Base with full access to the Total Education Resource Management System (TERMS), which aides in the student registration process, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) services, and educational psychological services. The Base has also been provided with an ESE staffing specialist to serve as the program’s local education agency (LEA) representative.

The school district’s Title I office sponsors an annual week-long technology camp, which provides all students with the opportunity to use IMac computers, digital cameras, and editing equipment to create and produce their own compact disc (CD) movies. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice only pays $1.00 per year for the lease of the property.

The Learning Center is also fortunate enough to have considerable support from the Navy. For example, the Navy pays for the program’s water and electricity services. In addition, it has contributed over $485,000 for the technical training of students, and allows students to use a variety of the base’s amenities, as detailed above. Safe Schools funds are used to support art and driver’s education, while the facility provides physical health services and has a contract for overlay mental health services from a local agency.

The Learning Center has established a mentoring program called ‘Boys-To-Men.’ The program enlists civilians and military men and women from the naval base to participate. Every student is assigned either a civilian or military mentor after two weeks in the program. Mentors provide academic assistance at least once a week, and participate in activities within the base, such as tours, bowling, baseball, basketball, and trips to the library and the gym. Students who have been in the program for at least ninety days are allowed to go off base with their mentors. Off-base excursions may include trips to the movies and other family oriented activities. The ultimate goals of the mentorship program are to reduce recidivism and dropout rates, help students further their education upon release, and teach nonviolent ways of handling disagreements and confrontations. Impressively, a recent mentor coordinator was selected as a ‘Very Important Patriot’ for her outstanding work with the students, and her name subsequently appeared on the March 2004 Kellogg Frosted Flake cereal box. The Base’s mentoring program also earned recognition from the Florida Commissioner of Education.

Equally important, the program provides extensive community involvement activities for the students. In addition to having guest speakers at the program, students in the theatre group perform throughout the community. In turn, the Pensacola Little Theatre allows students to see all of PLT’s plays at no charge. Other community service activities include volunteer efforts on behalf of Habitat for
Humanity, Relay for Life, the American Heart Association, and the Special Olympics. Students have raised $35,000 over the past five years for Feed the Children and $1,000 for the NYC Fireman's Fund after September 11, 2001.

Some of the program’s business partners include the Naval Air Technical Training Center and Corry Station - including its bowling alley, gym, auto hobby shop, and library - the Warrington Kiwanis Club, and the International House of Pancakes. Local community members and businesses also play a large role in providing the students with incentives for academic and behavioral success. For example, the student of the month is treated to a steak dinner at the Kiwanis Service Club’s monthly meeting. A and B Honor Roll students, moreover, are listed in the local newspaper. Students who are recognized readers may also earn seven days off of their term of commitment. Other activities include monthly parent support groups and training for Operation Drug Education for Youth (DEFY). In fact, The Learning Center has earned the Golden School Award for the past six years and, in 2004 alone, amassed over 3,200 volunteer hours. There is no mandate to attend extra programs, but students are given time off their commitment term for volunteer hours.

Largely because of the Learning Center’s community and business partnerships, it is able to offer its students and teachers a remarkable array of learning materials and teaching supplies. For example, the program has a wide range of instructional materials that are appropriate for the various ages and ability levels of its students. The library contains approximately 1,150 fiction and nonfiction titles, and students also have access to 14 monthly periodicals to which the program subscribes. Further, each classroom has a TV/VCR, DVD player, and an overhead projector. Twenty computers are available, all of which are connected to the Internet, and laptops are provided for all teachers. A wide range of software is available on the computers, including Plato, New Century, CCC, Compass Learning System, Fast Forward, and Choices. Student progress is monitored by Zen Works.

Assessments, Diagnostics, and Guidance

The Learning Center’s Lead Educator performs most of the duties associated with entry and exit assessments and preparation, and also serves as the guidance counselor. He obtains students’ past records at the time of their arrival at the Base. The program uses the school district’s TERMS to enroll students, develop student course schedules, and finalize student registration. To establish academic ability,
IAPs are created using past records, results of the Basic Achievement Skills Inventory (BASI), Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading and Math (STAR), a learning style inventory is administered, and information obtained through student interviews. In addition, the program administers the Science Research Associates (SRA) screening assessment to students who are performing two or more years below grade level. Most testing is administered within the students' first two days at The Learning Center, and the Lead Educator enters the entry and exit scores immediately after testing.

IAPs include all items required by law. They also include academic levels; entry test results; instructional strategies and the correlated resources; review dates; and specific goals and objectives for classroom behavior, driver's education, career awareness, and transition to work. The team members and the students sign all IAPs. Academic and behavioral progress notes are submitted to the weekly treatment team meetings, and the academic plans are formally reviewed and revised (as needed) every 60 days.

The reading goals and objectives are developed based on entry reading assessments and the SRA screening instrument. Academic improvement plans (AIPs) are developed for students who score two or more grade levels below age-appropriate levels on the entry reading assessments and the SRA screening instrument. In addition, AIPs contain the student's reading level, components of the methods and services that will be used to meet the stated reading goals, assessment results, and the date the goals and/or objectives are mastered.

IAP goals and objectives are reviewed and revised (as needed) at biweekly treatment team meetings. At the meetings, students are advised by the lead teacher, the classroom teachers, the social services counselors, and an ESE staffing specialist regarding ability and aptitude, education and occupational opportunities, personal and social adjustments, diploma options, post-secondary opportunities, and their educational status and progress. Students are constantly kept aware of their performance level and accomplishments. The teachers regularly discuss students' progress with them, and the students' lesson plans may be modified as frequently as necessary to reflect the students' changing interests and abilities. Moreover, the counseling office has an open-door policy allowing students to receive supplemental counseling as often as they feel is necessary.

Students' vocational aptitudes and abilities are assessed with the Choices vocational assessment. Additional assessments include the Boys Base Employability Skills Test (BBEST) and the Plan Survey for tenth graders. The vocational results are used to appropriately place students in a vocational program and work-study programs. The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) is administered to "identified" students prior to placement in the vocational program at the Naval Air Station (NAS). "Identified" students are those who, after 60 days in the program, have reached the appropriate level (i.e., A or B flights) and have scored a minimum
score of thirty on the ASVAB. These students will be considered for the United States Navy JJET Program, which provides demanding and invaluable work experience.

**Exit and Aftercare Services**

In addition to the mandatory attendance of the student and the Lead Educator, a classroom teacher, or the ESE staffing specialist, The Learning Center solicits the participation of the student’s parents and other family members in exit transition services. The same assessments used at entry are employed at exit, although in an alternative format. Meanwhile, the Lead Educator, who has had 30 years of experience working with troubled youth, offers post-placement recommendations about 30 days prior to the students' release. Specifically, the Lead Educator's recommendations are made to the group treatment team, and are then forwarded to the student’s social services counselor. At the exit staffing, the student and his parents are advised of his progress and the recommendations, and the exit transition plan is then finalized.

Aside from the provision of educational options and recommendations to all students, the program coordinates interagency services for both in-county and out-of-county students with Southeastern Vocational Services and Florida Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services. Furthermore, a local hospital and a local builder provide work-study programs for ‘in-county’ students, and monthly parent groups are conducted by social services.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

According to their dorm assignments, students are separated into two groups and three classrooms (one is the computer lab), where there is an average student-to-teacher ratio of 14:1. The school uses a competency-based curriculum for all academic courses. Specifically, all students are enrolled in language arts, math, social studies, science, and P.E. based on their grade levels, past academic records, and assessment results. Other courses offered include civics, psychology, sociology, driver’s education, and art.

Reading is an essential component of the school’s curriculum and all students regularly participate in a variety of intense reading activities. The goal of The Learning Center's reading program is to help students acquire the skills and confidence to become successful independent readers. Consequently, several strategies are employed, including the Accelerated Reader Program, SRA Corrective Reading, Diagnostic Assessments of Reading with Trial Teaching Strategies (DARTTS), Timed Reading Plus, and Sustained Reading. All students, regardless of their reading level, participate in Accelerated Reader and Sustained Reading, the latter of which occurs once a week for a five-hour period. During this time, the students read books from the Accelerated Reader program, as well as develop and revise drafts of book reports.
As previously mentioned, students who score at least two years below their expected grade level receive further assessment by the ESE teacher to determine their placement in one of two remedial programs (SRA or DARTTS) or the maintenance program (Timed Reading Plus). Students who have trouble with decoding skills are placed into SRA decoding, while students who place out of SRA participate in the DARTTS instructional program, in which they benefit from 20 short teacher-led lessons. The instructional plan allows the teachers to place students at a level of difficulty that is optimal for learning and for continual progress-based modifications to the students’ individualized plans.

Students who complete the DARTTS program advance to a Timed Reading Plus program in both science and social studies. This program allows students to work independently during regular class time — reading short articles at their instructional level — and then complete exercises based upon the readings. This program is designed to provide students with systematic, structured reading practice that helps maintain and improve both reading rate and comprehension skills, and to prepare students for standardized, timed testing. Student achievement is monitored throughout these remedial and maintenance programs via graphs that provide a visual record of student progress. Any continuing difficulties experienced by individual students are addressed through explicit one-on-one instruction with the teacher, and additional learning strategies provided by the ESE teacher.

The Learning Center students are also provided with peer counseling on a year-round basis, while social and life skills are integrated throughout the program on a daily basis. As mentioned previously, students have additional opportunities to practice appropriate social and life skills through such community endeavors as speech and drama presentations, fundraising activities, and volunteer efforts. In addition, all students participate in the vocational skills for youth course, which encompasses basic employability skills as well as hands-on practical work experience. Those students who already have a high school diploma or GED participate in vocational courses and work experience opportunities, which are extensive at the Base.

As a component of the Career and Personal Development course, all students are given practical work experience opportunities, such as those provided by Habitat for Humanity. Students who are working toward their high school diplomas or the equivalent may take advantage of several work study sites, including the gymnasium, the library, the bowling center, the auto hobby shop, the bachelor’s enlisted quarters (BEQ), and Gulf Coast Enterprises where students at the
galley for $8.31 an hour and receive full benefits. These students receive weekly work evaluation reports from their employers or supervisors, and these reports are incorporated into the students' behavior management system.

Additionally, students have access to a GED curriculum that is integrated throughout the core courses. Students who already have a GED diploma or receive a GED diploma while in the program have the opportunity to participate in the Juvenile Justice Education Training Program (JETT), which collaborates with the Naval Air Technical Training Center. The JETT program is a college-accredited program and the only vocational opportunity in the United States that offers training for juvenile offenders by the enlisted men and women of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corp. Qualifying students must have been in The Learning Center for at least 60 days, met the behavioral requirements, scored a minimum of thirty on the ASVAB, and successfully interviewed with naval personnel. Students receive training in courses such as jet diesel mechanics, sheet metal repair, electronics, basic electricity, hydraulics, and aviation support. All classes incorporate lectures, demonstrations, and laboratory experience into daily instruction. Students are expected to perform as well as the other recruits. Upon completion of the course of study, students receive a certificate of completion (equivalent to six to 15 college credits) and will have the education necessary to maintain, troubleshoot, and repair the equipment on which they were trained.

Regular classroom instructional and learning strategies include various combinations of one-on-one assistance, peer assistance, CAI, hands-on experiential learning, thematic units, mind-mapping, graphic organizers, sequential skill building, experiential learning activities, and discussions. Remedial students receive the same learning content, but the text is simplified, while students who are behind in school are often paired with accelerated students. Weekly grades are based on academic progress; in turn, progress directly affects the students' length of stay. For example, by earning six plusses for four weeks in a row – or earning mostly plusses in a four-week period - the student will receive time off of their length of stay at The Learning Center.

**Educational Personnel and Teachers**

The Learning Center has a Lead Educator, two full-time teachers, two part-time teachers, a speech and language therapist, and a full-time teacher assistant. The Lead Educator does not have full-time classroom responsibilities, but he does teach five hours of reading one day a week and physical education. He has professional certification in several areas: administration/supervision (K-12), guidance and counseling (preK-12), school psychology (PreK-12), psychology (6-12), and sociology (6-12). One of the full-time teachers is professionally certified in ESE (K-12), social science (6-12), and earth/space science (6-12), and teaches ESE, social science, and science. The other full-time teacher is professionally certified in elementary education and mathematics, and teaches English/language arts and mathematics. The part-time driver's education instructor is professionally certified
in administration/supervision, guidance and counseling, general science, physical education, school social work, middle grades endorsement, and drivers education. The part-time art teacher is also professionally certified in his area. In addition, the U.S. Navy certifies the JETT instructors in their respective fields.

Classroom teachers have the opportunity to participate in a facility–run training program, orientation, and ongoing facility training (as needed). They receive training in working with substance-exposed students, ESE, direct instruction, technology, art, math, and FCAT preparation. Although one teacher is new, there is a relatively low turnover rate within The Learning Center’s educational program; the Lead Educator has been at the Base for almost three decades, while one of the teachers has been there for over a decade.

The Learning Center has much to offer its students and teachers: a safe and positive environment, opportunities for success, and community involvement. The seamless behavior management system, combined with the open-door policy, clearly aids open communication among educational, treatment, and custody staff. Moreover, the high staff retention rate at the program seems to play an important role in creating a pleasant, fair, and respectful environment in which students may realize their highest possible academic, vocational, and civic potential. Furthermore, students are provided with a wide range of opportunities to achieve academic and behavioral success, which serve to build their confidence and foster a healthy and responsible attitude toward school. The role of the surrounding Naval and civilian communities - as well as local businesses and colleges – also contributes to the success of The Learning Center. The program has formed dozens of partnerships, which have provided its students with various real-life experiences, hands-on training, employment opportunities, and invaluable community-based connections that will help them reintegrate back into their homes, schools, and jobs. In sum, The Learning Center has diligently endeavored to provide students with every opportunity to gain the necessary skills that are crucial for success in the real world.