

Washington County School Program at Dozier

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Program Highlights

School Environment

All staff members work in a collaborative atmosphere that encourages open communication and cooperation.

Resources

Students have access to many books in the Literacy Center.

Dozier has partnerships with local businesses that provide jobs upon release from the program.

Vocational Curriculum

Students can earn Occupation Completion Points in building construction, horticulture and agriculture sales and service, masonry, and auto mechanics.

Reading Curriculum

Students are grouped in classes according to their reading level.

Reading comprehension is integrated into all courses.

Students will soon be required to read in extended blocks of time to further enhance their reading skills.

Teachers

In addition to standard assessments, teachers create their own students assessments.

All teachers are professionally certified in the areas they teach.

About the Washington County School Program at Dozier



Dozier Training School for Boys is a high-risk intensive residential program located in Jackson County Florida. Dozier serves male sex offenders and repeat offenders aged 13 to 21 for an average of 350 days. As such, it is often considered a last stop for juvenile offenders in Florida. The youths come from all over the state, and only about a dozen have families living in the Panhandle. In addition, of the 190 youths residing at Dozier, approximately 63% are in need of ESE services. The Washington County School District is the operator of the educational program, while the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice operates the facility. Dozier offers its

students a wide range of both academic and vocational courses, as well as the latest in technology, extensive community involvement, and highly qualified teachers.

Dozier's Best Practices

School Environment

Originally named the Florida State Reform School, the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys opened in 1900 as the first commitment facility for juveniles in Florida. Over twenty years ago, Dozier Training School for Boys was among three facilities accused of housing juveniles in inhumane conditions. This allegation resulted in the landmark Bobby M. class action lawsuit, which essentially revamped Florida's juvenile justice system. Dozier, in particular, made a series of radical changes and now serves as a model program for juvenile justice education in Florida.

The guiding philosophy at Dozier – which is based on the recognition that most of its students have experienced multiple academic failures - is to use the latest in technology and teaching strategies to offer the students individualized instruction in order to address their special needs. Ultimately, this approach is designed to ensure the successful re-integration of the students back into their home communities. Moreover, it is clear that education, treatment, and custody are all priorities at Dozier, and that none of these components can be addressed in isolation from the others.

The facility grounds cover 150 acres and include a dozen dormitories, several administrative buildings, a gymnasium, a greenhouse, a swimming pool, and baseball fields. While the program is located on an expansive, sprawling area that more resembles a college campus than a juvenile detention facility, the actual school buildings and classrooms are bright and personal. Student artwork and assignments decorate the walls and bulletin boards, while impressive products of the vocational programs adorn the grounds. Additionally, classes are small – usually no more than fifteen students in each class – while each class has one teacher and one

teacher aid. Class assignments are based on ability level in order to individualize instruction.

Importantly, staff members and students alike report feeling safe and respected at the facility. Student and teacher surveys, in addition to interviews with teachers and administrative staff, indicate that the priority given to education within the program is recognized and appreciated by all who work at and attend Dozier. Students reported receiving individualized instruction, consistent and positive feedback, access to the various learning and counseling resources, and preparation for employment or schooling following release. Teachers and educational administrators reported having very little trouble acquiring necessary educational resources, and expressed the opinion that the students enjoy learning at Dozier and generally make commendable progress during their stays.

While some juvenile justice facilities experience insurmountable tension between program and education staff, Dozier's philosophy ensures that all staff members understand and respect each other's contributions to the students' academic, vocational, and social progress. In fact, once a year, Dozier has 'Fun Day,' at which time the custody, education staff, and the students cook and dine together. Interviews confirmed the apparent good relations, and suggested that a key ingredient was the open and honest communication between the education, treatment, and custody staff members.

Resources and Community Partnerships

Dozier has an impressive amount of technology, print materials, alternative learning materials (e.g., puzzles and games, science and vocational equipment), and space devoted to education. There are approximately fifteen classrooms, with each classroom having at least two operable computers, TV/DVD, overhead projector, an office for the teacher, and various other materials intended to engage the students in the subject matter. In addition, there is a Literacy Center holding several thousand books, periodicals, educational videos, computers, and reference materials; several teachers also have libraries within their classrooms.

In order to acquire all of these resources, Dozier has solicited extensive community and school district involvement, as well as additional funding. Specifically, Dozier has partnerships with Chipola Community College, six community automotive repair shops, one auto parts shop, Hasting's Air Conditioning, Mase Electronics, and the Regional Apprenticeship Coordinator for the Florida Masonry Apprentice and Educational Foundation, Inc. The Masonry Foundation, for instance, assists qualified students with job placement and training upon



leaving the program. In addition, guest speakers and community organizations also visit the school for such events as the annual Career Day.

Dozier has researched, solicited and received several grants and entitlements, such as Department of Education entitlements, a Perkins grant for the auto program, Oglesby plant seedling donations for the horticulture program, a grant for at-risk students that funded the Literacy Center, and tool kits donated to the masonry program. In addition, Dozier conducts its own fundraising activities, including a chicken dumpling cook-off and plant sales.

The school district and the program ensure that a variety of ongoing evaluation techniques are implemented for monitoring and accountability purposes, and to determine overall program effectiveness. They have school improvement plan reviews, teacher and student needs assessments, and mock QA reviews. Additionally, the school district provides oversight and assistance with ESE services and with academic and career/technical curriculum development.

Assessments, Diagnostics, and Guidance

Unlike most juvenile residential facilities, Dozier has a diagnostic specialist in charge of FCAT, ACT, and pre- and post-testing, as well as a designated testing center. When a student arrives at the program, the diagnostic specialist administers the STAR and Woodcock Johnson Diagnostic Reading Battery; the Test of Written Language-R (TOWL-R) to assess writing; and the STAR to assess mathematics. Students are also given a learning style assessment and two vocational assessments (i.e., Choices and the Pictorial Inventory of Careers). Students who score two or more grade levels below their expected level on the entry reading assessment take the Diagnostic Assessment of Reading (DAR). At this point, the diagnostic specialist compares the variance between the two reading assessments. If they are similar, then the student is properly assigned to a classroom. If not, the student is still placed, but teachers are notified and asked to monitor the student's progress. All testing information goes into an onsite electronic information network that the teachers can access at any time on the network.

Classroom placement is primarily based upon a student's testing levels. There are three categories in reading: K-3rd, 4th-7th, and 8th grade level and above. The difference is that students in K-3rd are given two classes of reading in their curriculum; grades 4-7 have one reading and one writing class, and grades 8 and above go to the Language Arts lab. However, student class schedules can change as credits are acquired. Other factors that determine a student's placement include information taken from his previous transcripts, such as prior school behavior reports, truancy records, and grades. Further, each student has both a general academic goal and a specific reading goal. The diagnostic specialist tracks these goals and attends all 90-day meetings in which the academic, behavioral, and goal-oriented progress of the student is reviewed.



Aside from the school's standard entry assessments, some teachers have their own assessments and all teachers use academic monitoring procedures. For example, one of the reading teachers gives her new students an additional reading assessment and interviews them as soon as they are placed in her class. Using the results of these assessments, she designs a flexible reading plan for each individual

student, and then meets with each student every 30 days to review their progress and update their plan. Often, to get them motivated to read, she selects reading materials that match the students' movie preferences. Dozier's Accelerated Readers (AR) program provides further incentive to the students. Once a student successfully completes a book, he gets points that transfer over to the facility's Point Store. In addition, students receive more points for more difficult books, thus encouraging students to tackle more challenging reading materials.

Dozier makes the effort to involve the parents at every step of the transition process, and several members of the instructional staff also encourage and assist communication between the students and their parents. For example, the masonry instructor allows the students to take pictures of their completed projects and mail them home to their parents. Parental input is solicited while entry and exit placement decisions are being made. Parents are invited to attend the students' bi-monthly treatment team meetings either in person or by telephone, and the school sends copies of the students' progress reports home to their parents at the end of each grading period. Moreover, there are weekly visitation days, and parents are encouraged to visit the facility at other times to meet with teachers and check on their child's progress and residence.

Exit and Aftercare Services

Post placement plans are initiated upon the student's entry into the program. The first priority of the education staff is to help students earn enough credits to return to school at their proper grade level, or graduate with a standard or special diploma. However, if a student does not plan to return to school, they first try to use the Exit Option if the student is eligible. If the student is found to be ineligible, then the GED option – which is based on age, credits, truancy history, and the student's desires - is offered. Finally, a letter or phone call is made to the parents for permission to take the GED and for any further input.

Prior to exiting the program, students undergo the same assessment process as at entry. At the completion of these exit assessments, the diagnostic specialist provides a written summary of the student's academic performance to the transition specialist, and makes school placement recommendations that are typed directly onto the student's transcript. The transition specialist, in turn, makes every effort to ensure that students leave with the proper information that will allow them to

transition well into the community, their next school, and/or their next place of employment. She compiles an exit portfolio for each student consisting of diplomas, certificates, test scores, and grades. Additionally, the portfolio contains community college information, college applications, financial aid applications, facility contact information in the event that something gets lost, and the like. Graduation ceremonies and class rings for students that graduate exemplify Dozier's dedication to the well-being and success of its students.



Aftercare services, however, are somewhat limited for Dozier students. For example, the Florida Masonry Foundation guarantees employment for released students, provided they attend school, but this service is only offered to those youth that participated in the masonry program during their stay at Dozier. For most of the students, responsibility for supervision is delegated to the student's juvenile probation officer (JPO). Dozier's

treatment personnel routinely send out letters to see how the youths are doing, and there is approximately a 40% response rate from the students. In addition, the transition specialist regularly attempts to contact the students 30-60 days following their release, and exit interviews are conducted prior to the student's release. A follow-up questionnaire is given to all students with a self-addressed return envelope, to be returned approximately 3 months after their exit. Further, the transition and diagnostic specialists are able to work closely with the community, parents, and schools of in-county students.

Curriculum and Instruction

Dozier students attend six 50-minute periods each day, and the types of classes they are enrolled in depend on their chosen academic or vocational track. Additionally, the program provides formal and informal instruction year-round on employability, social skills, and life skills through personal, career, and school development classes for credit. Moreover, the program's transition specialist provides classroom instruction to address students' needs for career exploration and workplace skills development.

Dozier offers its students a wide range of academic courses utilizing varied instructional techniques, as well as four rigorous vocational programs. In addition, the incorporation of technology is a key practice that is endorsed by administrative and instructional personnel. Academic courses include English, language arts, reading, mathematics, science, social studies, writing, computer applications, computer skills, applied communication, and employability skills. The program also provides a self-contained class for middle school students that offers courses in language arts, science, and social studies; additional elective courses are provided in the mainstream. Based on entry and ongoing assessments, remedial courses in

reading and mathematics are offered. Reading and writing skills are integrated throughout the core courses.

Vocational instruction includes the option of earning vocational certification hours and/or Occupational Completion Points (OCPs) in building construction, horticulture and agriculture sales and service, masonry (pre-apprenticeship), and auto mechanics. Additionally, students can participate in a vocational work experience program, Friends of the Elderly Training Companions for the Home (FETCH), a dog-training program in which dogs are trained and placed in the homes of local community members. All of the vocational courses are offered for credit and follow workforce education course requirements, and the Masonry Apprentice and Educational Foundation, Inc. offers employment apprenticeships to students upon graduation from the program.

Furthermore, every student who has received a high school diploma or the equivalent participates in employability curricular activities and vocational skills training.

An important aspect of the vocational program at Dozier is that the vocational instructors require the students to successfully complete classroom assignments – such as computer activities, workbook assignments, quizzes and tests – before they are permitted to begin their hands-on training. For example, the auto mechanics instructor ensures that his students attain a grade of 100% on shop safety before they are allowed to move from the classroom to the auto shop. Vocational instruction is self-paced and performance-based, so that students who demonstrate behavioral stability are rewarded with hands-on training.

Perhaps one of Dozier's best academic offerings is its reading program. Specifically, all students who score two or more levels below their expected grade levels or below the 6th grade level on the STAR reading assessment are provided a literary improvement plan (LIP). The LIP addresses specific reading areas requiring improvement, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. In addition, all students receive reading instruction in all content areas and participate in the Accelerated Reader (AR) program to enhance comprehension. Importantly, Dozier's highly qualified reading teachers conduct their own entry assessments, closely monitor their students' progress, and routinely adjust their teaching strategies and lesson plans as a result. Moreover, reading classes operate more like workshops than traditional academic classrooms, as the teachers foster a sort of doctor-patient relationship with their students. The teachers will be discussed in more detail below, but it is important to note that Dozier's reading teachers are highly qualified, teaching in-area, use monitoring to modify their students' reading plans, and use a plethora of effective teaching strategies in order to engage the students in the subject matter. An intensive reading plan, approved by DOE, is implemented that includes 50 or 90 minutes of intensive, uninterrupted reading. Placement is based on previous FCAT scores, reading scores, and a

diagnostic assessment of phonemic awareness, phonics, reading vocabulary, comprehension skills, and oral fluency.

In addition to a well-rounded academic and vocational curriculum, a GED curriculum is integrated throughout the core courses and students can earn a GED (or an Exit Option) diploma. Those students who have already earned their diploma can take the ACT onsite, take courses onsite through Chipola Community College, participate in vocational programs, serve as classroom assistants, and provide peer tutoring.

Regarding instructional techniques, students are provided tutorial, remedial, and literacy lessons via computer-assisted instruction, intensive reading and math courses, remedial reading and math courses, small group instruction, and individual assistance. Peer tutoring, thematic units, hands-on projects, games, and other creative learning strategies are often employed by the instructors in order



to motivate the students to learn and develop more favorable impressions of school in general. For example, Dozier's teachers generally endeavor to foster a personal relationship with each student that is based on mutual trust and respect. As part of this system, once a new student arrives, the teacher strives to learn his particular strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Then, the teacher will incorporate that new knowledge into his or her individualized lesson plan for the student. The science teacher, for instance, will pick a rather general topic that most students appear to be interested in, and then design more specific individualized assignments based on the lecture according to each student's interests and ability levels.

Another key teaching strategy practiced by most of Dozier's teachers is immediate and positive feedback. The math teacher, for example, ensures that all student assignments are graded immediately and returned to the student that same period with constructive criticism included so that the student understands exactly why he got his grade. Teachers also encourage positive and intellectual interaction in their classrooms. The math teacher regularly calls on students to make sure they are paying attention and understanding the material, while the history teacher sits with his students on Fridays and tries to get them to come up with academic-related questions that he is unable to answer.

In surveys and interviews, both students and teachers indicated that they are pleased with the diversity in teaching strategies and instructional materials. For example, of the six instructional strategies included in the student climate survey, almost all students reported that they performed all of them more than once a week. Teachers, on the other hand, reported that they felt that such a diverse array of strategies is necessary to keep the students interested in the subject matter and to therefore achieve their highest academic potential. The teachers also confided that

such diversity was only made possible by the generous annual supply budget, and by the assistance of the Principal in supplying other necessary classroom materials throughout the year.

Educational Personnel and Teachers

In addition to the Principal and Principal Designee, Dozier employs a diagnostic specialist, a librarian, a transition specialist, a full-time ESE specialist, a behavioral specialist, and 12 teacher aides. Dozier's exemplary education program is certainly reflective of its highly qualified teachers. All nine of the academic teachers have professional certification; eight teachers are certified in more than one subject area, and seven have ESE certification. Additionally, the school principal, the ESE specialist, the diagnostic specialist, and the transition specialist have professional certification. Furthermore, all six of the teachers in non-core academic areas are qualified. The three employability skills teachers have professional certification; two of these have ESE certification as well. In the vocational areas, one teacher has professional Department of Education certification and three have school district professional certification as experts in their respective fields.

In addition to the creative strategy of training teachers in-house, teachers are recruited from the Washington County Schools and Department of Education websites, and from the local community. While recruiting, the Principal focuses on compatibility; he tries to select teachers whose personalities and teaching strategies are compatible with the program. Once they are hired, new teachers are paired for roughly one year with teachers who have more experience teaching at Dozier. In addition to this mentoring practice, new teachers are required to attend a training program. In their interviews, all teachers cited the openly communicative environment and freedom in their classrooms as one of the school's best practices. Additional benefits of working at the facility are that the school provides \$1,500 in supply money so that teachers are never in need of supplies, and pays for their in-service training. Teachers are also provided two planning days each year, and their classrooms are cleaned for them. According to teachers, these practices, in turn, contribute to the high retention of staff.



While Dozier exhibits a multitude of research-based best practices, the staff is arguably the most impressive aspect of the program. The Principal has been with the program for almost 20 years, while his Assistant Principle has been there over 10 years. In addition, most of the academic and vocational teachers have been at Dozier for a considerable length of time. Not only does this create a stable staff that fosters open and honest communication, but also it allows the teachers to gain valuable experience interacting with and instructing Florida's diverse male juvenile justice population. Additionally, their in-service training topics cover such pertinent areas as cultural

awareness, sex offenders, and Dozier's behavior modification system, which aids the teachers in better understanding the behavior and attitudes of their students. In sum, Dozier's emphasis on hiring like-minded staff while ensuring that they remain satisfied with their jobs, and that they're equipped with adequate resources, has played a major role in the school's success.