The Learning Center at Linlee (Grades 7-12) opened its doors for the first time at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year. Specially designed for students who perform best in a non-traditional setting, it is a project-based, hands-on learning environment with real-world applications for students.

The Learning Center (or “TLC” as it is affectionately called by its staff and students) is geared toward students “who have great potential, but for whatever reason are underachieving,” said Ron Chi, first principal of the school. With an enrollment of 50 students in its inaugural year (25 from the district’s middle schools and 25 from the high schools) TLC’s student-body is composed of young people some of whom may have been truant at their former schools or thinking about quitting school; others may have been involved in family court or struggling with an identified learning disability. Although their reasons for enrolling at the school are varied, most had circumstances that were distracting them from being able to fully focus on school.

The pupil-teacher ratio is small, fewer than 10:1 in some classes. This enables teachers to work very closely with students. Whether explaining a classroom topic or helping with personal problems, staff members are encouraged to take time to interact with students individually.

TLC is neither a remedial school, nor a school for students who are getting good grades in their traditional school. It is rather a school made up of students whose potentials seem not to respond to traditional methods. Students are taught the same core content (English, Math, Science, Social Studies) as that which is taught in the traditional schools. TLC students are also required to take the same state assessment tests as all other students.

The difference between TLC and the traditional school is the approach, the setting, and the amount of attention given to the individual needs of each student.

The approach is almost always a hands-on experience for the students, with the overarching idea of making it a learning one for all. Academic work goes hand-in-hand with real-world experience. The setting may be anywhere that learning connections can be made such as: at a nearby elementary school working...
with younger kids, in the school’s museum (school library) featuring the students own projects, recycling with LFUCG, or cultivating and nurturing a garden on the school’s own 11-acre campus. Despite the setting, the teacher’s ultimate goal is always the same: fashion the learning activities to fit the individual learning styles of the students.

To demonstrate this notion, Mike McKenzie, Fayette County Schools Director of High Schools, said it was difficult to describe the school’s curriculum and schedule to prospective parents before the school opened because, “We wanted to find the kids first; then build the schedule around the kids.”

Ron Chi says that while all staff is accountable for ensuring that each child achieves, the school is really about three things: building relationships and collaboration, empowering the students, and making connections across subjects.

Thus far, these common-sense approaches seem to be working. Stu Silberman, superintendent of Fayette County Schools, when interviewed by the local newspaper in April of this year stated, “It’s been a long-term goal for us to have something for kids who were not necessarily discipline problems but just had trouble fitting into the regular setting. It’s taken us a while to do it, but I’m tickled to death with the way it’s going so far.”

The Kentucky Center for School Safety would like to commend the Fayette County Schools and all who worked toward the creation of The Learning Center at Linlee. We believe the school is based on sound principles that work and, with the dedicated, determined staff that has obviously been put in place, we are confident that many students will thrive in its nurturing environment.