

DRAFT
MITIGATED FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF THE
LEASE TO BAY DISTRICT SCHOOLS FOR
CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF A NEW TYNDALL ACADEMY AT
TYNDALL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA
UNIQUE IDENTIFIER NUMBER: EAXX-007-57-UAF-1753182053

Introduction. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as amended by Public Law 118-5, the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 (Title 42 of the *United States Code* (U.S.C.) § 4321 *et seq.*); the *Department of Defense National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures* (DoD NEPA Procedures) issued by the Department of Defense (DoD) on June 30, 2025; Department of the Air Force (DAF) *Memorandum for Initial Department of the Air Force (DAF) Policy for Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)* dated July 7, 2025; Executive Order (EO) 14148, *Initial Recissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions* (January 20, 2025); and EO 14173, *Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity* (January 21, 2025), the 325th Civil Engineer Squadron (325 CES) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate the potential environmental effects associated with the Proposed Action of the DAF entering into a lease with Bay District Schools (BDS) for the construction and operation of a new Tyndall Academy at Tyndall Air Force Base (AFB), FL. The new Tyndall Academy would be a kindergarten through grade 8 (K–8) school and would replace the existing K–8 Tyndall Academy on the base.

Purpose and Need. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to ensure a high-quality educational environment for the current student population as well as for the anticipated influx of students that will occur with the expansion of the F-35 mission at Tyndall AFB. The need for the Proposed Action is to accommodate the current and projected student population. Because the existing Tyndall Academy was over capacity, BDS brought in modular units as a temporary solution to provide the needed additional classroom space. The existing Tyndall Academy is undersized to accommodate Tyndall AFB’s projected population increase resulting from its mission expanding with the transition to the F-35A Lightning II, exacerbated by the loss of a Bay County middle school in 2018 from Hurricane Michael.

Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is for the DAF to enter into a 50-year lease agreement with BDS for a 40–80-acre parcel on Tyndall AFB, on which BDS would build and operate the new Tyndall Academy. The new school would be an approximately 253,000-square foot, two-story K–8 school building with the capacity for 1,200 students. It is anticipated that enrollment for the new school will be at capacity. As with the existing school, the new Tyndall Academy would serve civilian and military-dependent children. BDS estimates that school construction would take about 27 months from approval to notice to proceed and permit approvals to completion. School construction might occur in phases, with the elementary school part of the building for K–5 built first and the middle school part of the building for grades 6–8 and sports facilities built later, depending on construction cost. Construction staging areas would be within the boundary of the leased parcel.

The school would have an administration office, a cafeteria, elementary and middle school classrooms, a gymnasium, a media center, outdoor dining/gathering spaces, playgrounds, and sports fields and facilities. The 325th Fighter Wing (325 FW) also would continue to allow limited access for students currently enrolled in Tyndall Academy to use Tyndall AFB sports fields and facilities for practice on a scheduled basis. The site design would include separate elementary and middle school entrances and areas for buses and parents to drop off students. The school would have parking for the faculty, staff, and visitors. The necessary electrical, gas, potable water, and wastewater utilities would be installed and connected to the base's existing utility systems. The site would have stormwater management facilities (drainage and fenced stormwater detention pond(s)). The school campus would be secured by a combination of access control, security systems, and fencing.

Alternatives. To identify candidate sites for the lease and the new Tyndall Academy, the 325 CES, 325 FW, and BDS evaluated available sites on the base against a set of selection criteria. The site selection criteria were developed to assist them in identifying reasonable alternatives and determining the basis for eliminating any alternatives. The selection criteria were site availability, avoidance of sensitive natural and cultural resources, land use compatibility and accessibility, and site size sufficiency.

Action Alternatives. The 325 CES, 325 FW, and BDS identified three alternative locations on Tyndall AFB for the Proposed Action:

- Alternative 1: Cleveland Gate Site (outside the base security fence)
- Alternative 2: Youth Center Site (inside the base security fence)
- Alternative 3: Beacon Beach Site (inside the base security fence)

They determined those locations for the school would meet BDS's short-, mid-, and long-range project requirements for the physical infrastructure and function of the school. All three Action Alternatives were carried forward for analysis in the EA. The sites range in size from about 40 acres to almost 80 acres. The sites of more than 40 acres would provide BDS with the flexibility to plan how the school would be situated on the site. For this reason, the EA assessed the full acreage of each alternative site.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, none of the proposed alternative lease sites would be pursued for construction of a new K-8 school. Current land uses and activities would be maintained at the alternative site locations, and the land would be available for other DAF priority uses. Although the No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action, the No Action Alternative has been carried forward for analysis in the EA (DoD NEPA Procedures Part 2.3(a)(3)). The No Action Alternative analysis includes the consequences of not undertaking the Proposed Action and serves to establish a comparative baseline for the other alternatives.

Alternative Eliminated. Using the existing school site to meet the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action was determined not to be an option because it does not meet several of the site selection criteria. The existing site is undersized, lacks sufficient developable space, and is subject to land use controls associated with the site's environmental restoration. For those reasons, the existing school site alternative was not carried forward for analysis in the EA.

Environmental Consequences. The EA, which is attached hereto and incorporated by reference into this mitigated finding of no significant impact (FONSI), examines the potential effects of three Action Alternatives and the No Action Alternative on the following resource areas of concern: airspace and airfield operations, land use, visual resources, air quality, noise, geology, soils, water resources, biological resources, cultural resources, hazardous materials and waste, infrastructure and utilities, transportation and traffic, safety and health, socioeconomics, and protection of children. The potential environmental effects associated with Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 and the No Action Alternative are summarized below. The summaries are compiled from the EA analysis in Section 3.0, *Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences*.

Alternative 1: Cleveland Gate Site Consequences. No effects would be expected on airspace, cultural resources, geology, or visual resources under Alternative 1.

Short-term adverse effects would be expected under Alternative 1 from construction activity and disturbance of contaminated soils and groundwater. In the short term, construction would require ground disturbance and demolition and would generate dust, the potential for erosion and stormwater runoff, hazardous material use and waste, noise, and traffic. This would result in short-term, negligible-to-less-than-significant adverse effects on most resources, including land use, air quality, noise, soils, water resources, biological resources, hazardous materials and waste, infrastructure and utilities, transportation and traffic, safety and health, and protection of children. Best management practices would be implemented to control and minimize those effects. In accordance with Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (42 U.S.C. § 9601 *et seq.*) and Department of the Air Force Instruction 32-1023, *Designing and Constructing Military Construction Projects*, the DAF retains ownership and responsibility for contaminated sites located on its installations. Short-term beneficial effects would be expected on socioeconomics from construction employment and expenditures, which would benefit the local economy.

In the long term, operation of the school would generate air emissions and traffic, which would have long-term, less-than-significant adverse effects on air quality and transportation and traffic. Beneficial effects also would be expected in the long term on several resources: hazardous materials and waste, infrastructure and utilities, safety and health, socioeconomics, and protection of children. Those benefits would be realized because the school would be new, contain no hazardous building materials commonly used in building construction in the past, be energy efficient, have modern educational and recreational facilities, and have sufficient capacity to accommodate the student population.

The operation of the new school would have long-term, significant-but-mitigable adverse effects on land use, noise, safety and health, and protection of children under Alternative 1, Cleveland Gate Site. The southeastern portion of the site is within a 75–80-decibel (-dB) day-night average sound level (-DNL) noise contour, which the DAF does not consider compatible with educational land uses according to Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 4165.57, *Air Installations Compatible Use Zones*. DoDI 4165.57 states that the program is intended to “discourage noise-sensitive land uses in areas of higher noise exposure” and identifies “educational facilities” as a noise-sensitive use whose compatibility can decline as DNL increases. Due to the noise levels at the Cleveland Gate Site, BDS and Tyndall AFB would implement mitigation measures to address the significant noise effects at the site, as described below under *Mitigation Measures*.

For safety in relation to how close the Alternative 1 site is to the airfield, while the probability of an accident affecting the school cannot be considered absolutely zero, it is sufficiently low to be regarded as minimal or near negligible in terms of potential harm based on the CZ and APZs.

Alternative 2: Youth Center Site Consequences. No effects would be expected on airspace, cultural resources, geology, visual resources, or water resources under Alternative 2.

Short-term, less-than-significant adverse effects would be expected under Alternative 2 from construction activity that would require ground disturbance and demolition and would generate dust, the potential for erosion, hazardous material use and waste, noise, and traffic. The adverse effects would be expected on most resources, including land use, air quality, noise, soils, biological resources, hazardous materials and waste, infrastructure and utilities, transportation and traffic, safety and health, and protection of children. Best management practices would be implemented to control and minimize those effects. Short-term beneficial effects would be expected on socioeconomics from construction employment and expenditures, which would benefit the local economy.

Alternative 2 would have long-term, less-than-significant adverse effects on several resources. Long-term, less-than-significant adverse noise effects would be expected because, although the site would be in a compatible air installation's compatible use zone noise contour, occasional speech interference from overflights would be possible at the Alternative 2 site. Long-term, less-than-significant effects on biological resources would occur because of the removal of longleaf pine trees. The operation of the school would generate air emissions and traffic, which would have long-term, less-than-significant adverse effects on air quality and transportation and traffic.

Long-term, significant-but-mitigable adverse effects on land use would result if the Alternative 2 site is selected. The site's location inside the base's security fence would create site access and base security issues. Tyndall AFB and BDS would address those effects by developing and implementing a site access plan, which would require additional cost and time.

Beneficial effects also would be expected under Alternative 2 in the long term on several resources: hazardous materials and waste, infrastructure and utilities, safety and health, socioeconomics, and protection of children. Those benefits would be realized because the school would be new, contain no hazardous building materials commonly used in building construction in the past, be energy efficient, have modern educational and recreational facilities, and have sufficient capacity to accommodate the student population.

Alternative 3: Beacon Beach Site Consequences. Effects—including those on land use requiring a site access plan—would be similar to those under Alternative 2, except for differences in biological resources, cultural resources, and protection of children.

Alternative 3 would have short-term, negligible adverse effects on biological resources from the removal of the landscaping trees and ground cover that remain from the residential neighborhood that used to be on the Beacon Beach Site.

Alternative 3 would have short- and long-term, significant-but-mitigable adverse effects on cultural resources because of the presence of National Register of Historic Places- (NRHP-) eligible archaeological Site 8BY00154 at the Beacon Beach Site. The short-term ground disturbance from construction activity and the long-term development and increased use of the

Beacon Beach Site would increase the risk of erosion and the risk of looting and vandalism at the archaeological site. Mitigation measures would be required and implemented to reduce cultural effects to less than significant.

Alternative 3 would have long-term, less-than-significant adverse effects on the protection of children because of the site's proximity to the beach and Saint Andrew Bay; however, a security fence would be placed around the perimeter of the school campus and students would be limited to school grounds for their protection and for operational security.

No Action Alternative Consequences. No effects would be expected under the No Action Alternative on airspace, land use, visual resources, noise, geology, soils, water resources, biological resources, cultural resources, hazardous materials and waste, or infrastructure and utilities.

Long-term, less-than-significant adverse effects may or may not occur under the No Action Alternative on air quality, transportation and traffic, safety and health, socioeconomic, and protection of children. Long-term effects may or may not occur depending upon BDS decisions concerning alternative school placement. Long-term effects may occur because benefits of a new school may not be realized. Long-term effects could be expected if students would be relocated to off-base BDS schools, which could have potentially longer commutes to school for the students, or potentially attending a school without sufficient student capacity.

Mitigation Measures. BDS and the DAF would implement mitigation measures for resources with significant adverse effects. BDS and the DAF would determine the responsibility for implementing and monitoring the mitigation measures listed below and stipulated in the attached EA to ensure they are carried out.

Alternative 1: Cleveland Gate Site Mitigation. Mitigation measures have been identified for Alternative 1 for land use, noise, safety and health, and protection of children. Those measures include implementing architectural-acoustical design measures in the building envelope to achieve a 30-dB noise level reduction (NLR), which BDS estimates would increase school construction cost by 25–40 percent over a school not needing those design measures as well as construction time. Tyndall AFB would alter the Runway 14R flight track to have all aircraft making westbound departures climb to an altitude of 1,600 feet above ground level as they pass the site, except during flight-safety operations. Another mitigation measure is siting the school buildings containing classrooms and other instructional spaces more than 600 feet from the site's southeasternmost property boundary, which would be outside the 75-dB DNL noise contour. Noise contours, however, shift with environmental changes (e.g., air pressure, temperature, and wind) and are not absolute boundaries; therefore, the higher noise contour would sometimes still apply to the site. It is also noted that the outside noise level cannot be mitigated. The noise at times would be disruptive to conversation during outdoor educational and recreational activity, potentially hindering instruction during critical moments. DoDI 4165.57 also emphasizes, however, that it “does not impose any requirements” and “does not prescribe any specific course of action” for land use decisions and that the compatibility recommendations “do not constitute a federal determination” of acceptability. Therefore, while the Cleveland Gate Site lies partially within an area the DAF considers not normally recommended for noise-sensitive uses under DoDI 4165.57, mitigation would preclude construction of educational facilities on those portions of the site. In this context, the EA and mitigated FONSI reflect the DAF's acknowledgement and

acceptance of the compatibility concern. The following mitigation measures have been identified for Alternative 1 for land use, noise, safety and health, and protection of children.

- Except during flight-safety operations, all aircraft based at Tyndall AFB making westbound departures from Runway 14R would climb to an altitude of 1,600 feet AGL as they pass the site, and permanently update those measures in the local flying rules and base-wide standard operating procedures.
- Site school buildings containing classrooms or other instructional spaces more than 600 feet from the site's southeasternmost property boundary, so they are outside the 75-dB DNL noise contour.
- Implement architectural-acoustical design measures in the building envelope to achieve a 30-dB NLR.
- The lease shall either designate any portion of the parcel located within 600 feet of the site's southeastern boundary as an exclusion area to be reserved exclusively as greenspace, with no facilities, buildings, classrooms, instructional spaces, or other improvements permitted. The southeastern portion of the Alternative 1 site that is excluded under this provision shall be securely fenced off to prevent inadvertent access by students or staff. In the event that future changes to the mission result in a measurable reduction in noise levels and the area is determined to be suitable for BDS use, the lease could be amended as necessary to reflect the changed circumstances and to permit BDS occupancy or operations—subject to any required approvals and compliance with applicable regulations.

Alternative 2: Youth Center Site Mitigation. BDS and Tyndall AFB would mitigate the security concerns by establishing a site access plan. The plan would address gate access, movement between the gate and the school, and limiting school students, faculty, staff, and visitors to within the school grounds.

Alternative 3: Beacon Beach Site Mitigation. The following mitigation measures have been identified for Alternative 3:

- Land Use: BDS and Tyndall AFB would mitigate the security concerns by establishing a site access plan. The plan would address gate access, movement between the gate and the school, and limiting school students, faculty, staff, and visitors to within the school grounds.
- Cultural Resources
 - Adapt the proposed plans to avoid the NRHP-eligible resource.
 - Alter construction designs with stakeholder consultation to include other site protection measures.
 - Conduct a Phase III archaeological investigation to salvage the site prior to development. Investigation would be performed subject to Florida archaeological standards and would require an Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) permit.
 - Conduct additional consultation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Florida Division of Historical Resources, and additional government-to-government consultation with Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, Seminole Tribe of Florida, and Thlopthlocco Tribal Town prior to initiating action.
 - Develop mitigation measures in consultation with all parties, which could include creative mitigation measures (e.g., public education or interpretive design).

- Have a qualified archaeologist apply and receive an ARPA permit to conduct monitoring or excavations within the area of potential effect (APE).
- Have an archaeological monitor on-site during ground-disturbing activities and follow the Tyndall AFB Integrated Cultural Resources Management Plan standard operating procedures.
- Place temporary fencing around the boundary of NRHP-eligible archaeological Site 8BY00154 during construction.

No Action Alternative Mitigation. No mitigation measures would be required for any resources under the No Action Alternative.

Permit Requirements. Regardless of which Action Alternative is selected, the project proponent would be required to obtain the following permits for the resource areas of land use, air quality, soils, water resources, cultural resources, and infrastructure and utilities. BDS would need to approve the site selection, estimated construction and mitigation costs, and lease terms before moving forward with permitting. No permits would be required for the No Action Alternative.

- Air Quality Permits: Air permits for new construction from Bay County and/or Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP).
- ARPA: An ARPA permit from the DAF for any archaeological testing on federal lands to conduct excavation and monitoring within the APE.
- Dig Permit: A permit from 325 CES Operations to identify the location of and prevent damage to underground utilities.
- Environmental Resource Permit Program Individual Permit per Rule 62-330.020, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.): A permit from FDEP for creating a total of more than 9,000 square feet of impervious surface.
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit: A permit from FDEP for stormwater discharge from large and small construction activities; also known as the Construction Generic Permit.
- Wastewater Permit per Rule 62-620, F.A.C.: A permit from FDEP for wastewater facilities and activities.
- Water Main Extension Permit per Rule 62-555, F.A.C.: A permit from FDEP for construction of a water main extension to the new school.

Required Consultations. The 325 CES completed Interagency and Intergovernmental Planning in accordance with EO 12372, *Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs*, as amended by EO 12416, also titled *Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs*; Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. § 1531 *et seq.*); and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA) (54 U.S.C. § 300101 *et seq.*); NHPA implementing regulations in Title 36 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 800; DoDI 4710.02, *DoD Interactions with Federally Recognized Tribes*; Department of the Air Force Instruction 90-2002, *Interactions with Federally Recognized Tribes*; and Department of the Air Force Manual 32-7003, *Environmental Conservation*.

Consistent with these laws and regulations, on February 20, 21, and 22, 2024, the 325 CES and 325 FW consulted with federal and state agencies and conducted government-to-government consultation with federally recognized Native American tribes. The 325 CES notified the agencies and the 325 FW conducted the government-to-government consultation with the tribes about the Proposed Action and the two alternative sites on Tyndall AFB under consideration for the new Tyndall Academy. The 325 CES and 325 FW invited them to identify their concerns regarding the Proposed Action that should be considered in the EA. On April 22, 2024, FDEP's Florida State Clearinghouse (FSC) responded that they had no objections to the Proposed Action but noted that Environmental Resource Permit Program Individual Permits might be required for stormwater, surface water, or wetlands. The Muscogee (Creek) Nation responded on March 25, 2024, that no historic properties would be affected, but requested stop work and immediate contact in case of inadvertent discoveries. The Seminole Tribe of Florida responded on March 15, 2024, that the project is within the tribe's area of interest, but after further review of requested information, stated on March 28, 2024, that they had no objections, but also requested contact in case of inadvertent discoveries.

In April 2024, the 325 CES, 325 FW, and BDS identified a third alternative site for the Proposed Action. The 325 CES sent updated coordination letters to the agencies on April 21 and 22, 2025, and the 325 FW sent updated government-to-government consultation letters to the tribes on May 6, 2025, to advise them of the additional site.

The 325 CES received a response from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Florida Ecological Services Office on April 22, 2025, stating they have no concerns about listed species for this project. An autoreply email also was received from USFWS on April 23, 2025, confirming the request for consultation and assigning to it the USFWS ECOSphere Project Code Number 2025-0087551.

The 325 CES received a reply from FDEP FSC on June 4, 2025, stating no objection to the Proposed Action and noting what to do in the case of an inadvertent discovery of a cultural resource, when permits would be required, and that the State's final concurrence on the project's consistency with the Florida Coastal Management Program would be determined during the environmental permitting process.

The 325 CES and 325 FW received responses from the Muscogee (Creek) Nation on May 6, 2025, and the Seminole Tribe of Florida on May 21, 2025, both requesting additional information, which the 325 CES provided via government-to-government consultation. After reviewing the additional information, the Seminole Tribe of Florida replied on May 21, 2025, that they had no objections, but requested their office be notified if any archaeological, burial, or historical resources are inadvertently discovered during project implementation. No further response was received from the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.

Copies of the agency and tribe distribution list and correspondence are included in Appendix C of the EA.

Public Review and Stakeholder Coordination. The Draft EA and Mitigated FONSI are available for public review and comment for 30 days, beginning with the publication of the Notice of Availability in the *Panama City News Herald* on March 29, 2026. The Draft EA and Mitigated FONSI are available on the publicly accessible Tyndall AFB website at <https://www.tyndall.af.mil/About/> and a public notice was posted on the Bay County website at <https://publicnoticesbaycountyfl.gov>. The Draft EA and Mitigated FONSI also are available at the Bay County Public Library, 898 West 11th Street, Panama City, FL 32401. The public is invited to submit comments to the DAF by email at edwin.wallace.1@us.af.mil or by the U.S. Postal Service to Edwin Wallace, NEPA Program Manager, 325 CES/CEIEC, 100 Checkertail Way, B36233, Tyndall AFB, FL 32403. Please submit comments no later than April 28, 2026.

Finding of No Significant Impact. Based on my review of the facts and analyses presented in the attached EA, I conclude that, with the implementation and monitoring of the mitigation measures outlined above and in the attached EA, the Proposed Action would result in long-term, significant-but-mitigable adverse effects on land use, noise, safety and health, and protection of children under Alternative 1; on land use under Alternative 2; and on land use and cultural resources under Alternative 3. The requirements of NEPA and the DoD NEPA Procedures have been fulfilled. An Environmental Impact Statement is not required and will not be prepared.

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Date