

Learning Centers: 2006-07

At-a-Glance

The Learning Centers were court-ordered efforts to provide quality educational programs in neighborhood schools for disadvantaged minority children. Upon release from the *Tasby v. Moses* desegregation order and supervision of the United States District Court, the Dallas Independent School District adopted a Declaration of Commitments and Covenants that states its desires to maintain certain programs and policies formerly mandated by that order. The Learning Centers is one of several programs that are included in the district's Declaration of Commitments and Covenants.

Student Demographics

The 12 intermediate and four middle Learning Centers enrolled 5,044 students as compared to 4,464 students for 2005-06. Total enrollment in the Learning Centers increased approximately 13% (580 students) over last year due primarily to the addition of Spence as a Learning Center. District enrollment over the same time period decreased approximately 3%. The general trend is that African American enrollment decreased while Hispanic enrollment increased.

Forty-six percent (46%) of all Learning Center students were African American, 52% were Hispanic, and less than 2% were from other ethnic groups, including White, Asian, and Native American. Districtwide, 30% of grades four through eight students were African American and 64% were Hispanic.

Budget

In 2006-07, pre-approved direct cost allocations totaled approximately \$14.8 million. Pre-approved indirect cost allocations totaled \$1.3 million. Total allocated costs for 2006-07 were approximately \$16.1 million. Total allocated costs for 2005-06 were approximately \$21.9 million.

Campus allocations averaged \$3,191 per pupil for 2006-07. However, per-pupil allocations varied by campus, as noted in past years.

Class Size

Previously, the goal for pupil-teacher ratios was 18:1 with a cap of 20:1. This has been changed to 22:1 for elementary Learning Centers and 20:1 for middle Learning Centers. The average class size for 108 elementary Learning Center classes was 17 students. The average middle Learning Centers' class size across grades six through eight was approximately 15

students per class. The average class size for grades six and seven was approximately 14 students per class and 16 students per class at grade eight. The majority of middle Learning Center classes in the 12 core courses had enrollments of less than 18 students.

Restructuring

Associate Principals formerly Deans of Instruction will continue on all elementary campuses, while Assistant Principals will remain on all elementary Learning Center campuses with a population between 500 and 749 students. A second Assistant Principal will be assigned to elementary Learning Centers with 750 or more students. Currently no elementary Learning Centers have more than 750 students. Assistant Principals were assigned to three of the four middle Learning Centers. The fourth middle Learning Center, Dade, has only 425 students.

Reading and mathematics demonstration teachers continued at Learning Centers with 500 or more students and several campuses with less than 500 students (Dade, Kennedy, and Chavez). Reading and mathematics demonstration teachers were assigned to three middle Learning Centers. Fine Arts teachers were continued with at least two per elementary Learning Center and at least four per middle Learning Center. The community liaisons were restructured by clusters with four serving East Dallas, five serving West Dallas, and six serving South Dallas. Clerical support was continued with one clerk at each campus.

Restructuring of the schools in 2006-07 resulted in Learning Center campuses being in three of the six areas. The Learning Center office in Area 3 was closed and the Fannie C. Harris building in Area 2 has become the home of the Learning Center central support staff. The central staff has been reduced to one area specialist (for oversight support), one Fine Arts specialist (for support of the Fine Arts program), and one clerical support.

Learning Center students in grade six were placed in middle schools. Billy E. Dade became a middle Learning Center, and Alex W. Spence middle school became the first new Learning Center since Caesar Chavez was opened in 1997. Daniel "Chappie" James, a South Dallas elementary Learning Center (grades four through six), was closed, and students were reassigned to Dade middle Learning Center and Dunbar elementary Learning Center.

The Learning Centers have discontinued the awarding of money for attendance. Also discontinued was the awarding of monetary incentives for campuses achieving in the top 25% of identified achievement areas. Learning Centers have begun to utilize districtwide incentives. In addition, teacher sign-up and resign bonuses have been eliminated.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills

Grade four Learning Center students were outperformed by other district students on the TAKS Reading test. Grade five Learning Center students performed at a level comparable to other district students on the TAKS Reading test. At grades six and eight, district students outperformed Learning Center students. A higher percentage of Learning Center students met standard on the TAKS Reading test at grade seven than other district students. See Figure 1.

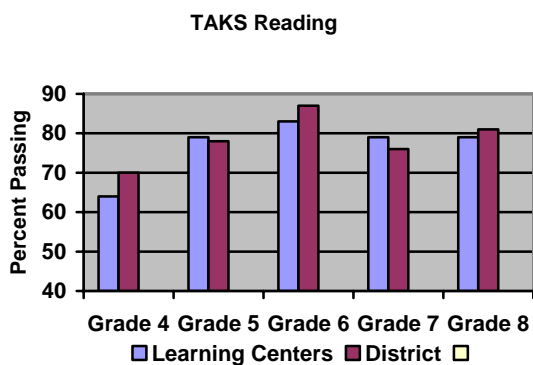


Figure 1 – Learning Centers and District students’ percent passing TAKS Reading by grade

Learning Center students in grades four and five performed comparably to other district students on the TAKS Mathematics test. Middle Learning Center students (grades six through eight) also performed at a level comparable (within two percentage points) to district students. See Figure 2.

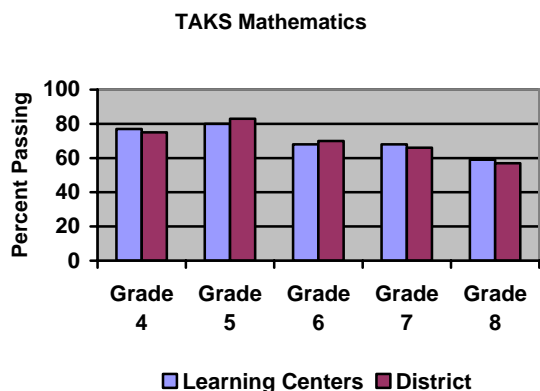


Figure 2 – Learning Centers and District students’ percent passing TAKS Mathematics by grade

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the grade four Learning Center students met standard on TAKS Writing, compared to the district’s average of 86%. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of Learning Center and other district students met standard on the 2007 TAKS Writing test at the seventh grade.

Grade five TAKS Science test results indicated that the percent of Learning Center students (66%) who met standard was greater than other district students (62%). This year was the first year that the TAKS Science test was given to grade eight students. Fifty-two percent (52%) of grade eight district students met standard, compared to 50% of Learning Center students.

On the eighth grade TAKS Social Studies test, 78% of Learning Center students met standard, compared to 79% of other district students.

Conclusion

Since 1984, Learning Centers have been part of the Dallas ISD philosophy that a history of educational deprivation under conditions of poverty can be overcome. Learning Centers were a central part of the desegregation effort and the district Commitments and Covenants agreements with the Dallas community. The Learning Centers program has changed drastically over the last two years. Almost six million dollars have been cut from the budget despite the addition of new schools resulting in increased enrollment. Caps have been increased on class size, incentives’ for new and returning teachers have been eliminated and sixth grade Learning Center students were placed in middle schools resulting in lower TAKS scores. Few vestiges of the original Learning Centers remain.

Recommendations

Elementary sixth grade students had higher TAKS achievement levels than middle school sixth graders (See **TAKS Reading and Mathematics Results of Grade Six Students in Elementary and Middle Schools**). Given these findings, higher TAKS scores may be achieved by returning middle school sixth graders to elementary schools.

The Learning Center Management Manual outline the qualifications and incentives to attract teachers that would be best at eradicating the under education of a predominately minority population. The elimination of these incentives will limit the quantity and quality of teachers available. Consideration should be given to reinstating some portions of the incentives or the development of additional incentives to attract highly qualified Learning Center teachers as they undertake the challenges of teaching a continually increasing minority population.