Final Evaluation of the Learning Centers: 2004-05

At a Glance

The Learning Centers were court-ordered efforts to provide quality educational programs for disadvantaged children. Upon release from the Tasby v. Moses desegregation order the 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.

The Learning Centers offer a unique combination of programs and staffing including: (a) reduced pupil-teacher ratio, (b) extended school day, (c) extensive before/after school programs, (d) increased pay for teachers, (e) specially selected and trained teachers and administrators, (f) additional mathematics and reading instruction, (g) on-going staff development activities for faculty members, (h) summer staff development for new faculty members, (i) Learning Center management council, and (j) special incentives.

Student Demographics
The 14 intermediate and two middle Learning Centers enrolled 4,501 students as compared to 4,783 students for 2003-04. Fifty-six percent of all Learning Center students were African American, 42% were Hispanic, and less than 3% were from other ethnic groups. African American students made up 88% of Area 2 Learning Centers and 30% of Area 3 Learning Centers. Hispanic students made up 11% of Area 2 Learning Centers and 66% of Area 3 Learning Centers. Overall, the Learning Centers served the same percentage of district students over the last two years.

Teacher Demographics
African American teachers made up 64% of the 4-6 Learning Center faculty. The remainder consisted of 8% Hispanic teachers and 28% of teachers from other ethnic groups. School year 2004-05 had the highest percent of Hispanic teachers since the beginning of the Learning Centers and the lowest percent of Other teachers.

Budget
In 2004-05, pre-approved direct cost allocations totaled approximately $20.3 million, or approximately $0.9 million more than direct cost allocations of $20.2 million budgeted for 2003-04. Pre-approved indirect cost allocations totaled $1.6 million, approximately $30,000 more than the allocation for 2003-04. Total allocated costs for 2004-05 were $21.8 million. Campus allocations averaged $4,301 per pupil for 2004-05. Campus expenditures averaged $4,080 per pupil. However, per-pupil allocations varied by campus, as noted in past years.

Class Size
The class size goal for the Learning Centers is a maximum pupil-teacher ratio of 20:1 with a reduced pupil-teacher ratio of 18:1. Of 209 non-special education intermediate Learning Center classes, only 3 classes, or 2%, were larger than 20. Overall, intermediate Learning Center classes averaged 15 students, while other district Grades 4-6 classes averaged 18 students. Five middle Learning Center classes exceeded the cap of 20 students per class. The remaining middle Learning Center classes in the eight core courses had enrollments of fewer than 18 students. The average Learning Center middle school class size, was 15 students per class, while middle school class size in other district schools was 18 students.

Incentive and Supplemental Pay
The incentive and supplemental pay currently being implemented by the Learning Centers include (a) an administrative incentive of $3,600 for principals and $3,000 for deans and assistant principals, (b) a signing incentive of up to $1,500 for professional staff, (c) a re-sign incentive of up to $500, (d) before/after school program supplemental pay of $20 per hour, and (e) extra pay for the added 45 minutes in the instructional day for Learning Center teachers ($20 per hour) and counselors ($1,500 per year). The Learning Centers also have a performance incentive pay goal system. This plan provides for both student
attendance goals and academic goal. In order to achieve the academic and student attendance goals, a school must fall within the top 25% of all schools at each grade level in each goal area. For the 2003-04 school year, the sixteen Learning Centers attained 71 of a possible 246 goals (28.9%), and 80 of 246 goals (32.5%) in 2004-05.

**Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills**

Learning Center students exceeded district passing levels on all TAKS tests at Grades 4, 5, and 6. At Grade 7, Learning Center passing rate totals for reading and writing were the same as district passing rates. Edison exceeded district passing rates in reading, mathematics and writing. District passing rates exceeded Learning Center passing rate totals for reading and social studies at Grade 8. Learning Centers outperformed district students in mathematics.

At Grades 4, 5, and 6 in reading, mathematics, writing, and science, passing rates of Learning Center African American and Hispanic students exceeded passing rates of African American and Hispanic district students.

Across Grades 4-6, Economically Disadvantaged, Special Education and Limited English Proficient Learning Center students outperformed their district counterparts in reading, mathematics, writing and science.

Across Grades 4-6, Limited English Proficient Learning Center students outperformed their district counterparts in reading, mathematics, writing and science, while economically disadvantaged Learning Center students performed at a higher level in mathematics, writing, and science than similar district students. Grades 7-8 special education students performed at a lower level than district special education students in reading, mathematics, writing, and science.

Learning Center students enrolled in the same Learning Centers for Grades 4, 5, and 6 outperformed similar non-continuously enrolled Learning Center students on the Grade 6 TAKS Reading and Mathematics tests.

**Iowa Tests of Basic Skills**

Learning Center students’ adjusted mean NCE scores exceeded other district students’ scores on the ITBS Mathematics Total at Grade 4, and on the Reading Comprehension, Reading Total and Mathematics Total subtests at Grade 5. At Grade 6, district students outperformed Learning Center students on the ITBS subtests.

Across Grades 4-6, Learning Center students scored 0.1 NCE unit higher than other district students on the Reading Comprehension subtest; and 3.6 NCE units higher on the Mathematics Total subtest. District students exceeded Learning Center students on the Reading Total by 0.3 NCE units.

A significant difference was found between Learning Center students and other district students on the adjusted mean NCE Reading Comprehension scores and NCE Reading Total scores for Grades 4-6. Analyses revealed that differences were due primarily to high NCE scores at Dade and low NCE scores at Sequoyah.

A significant difference was found between the Learning Centers and other district students on the ITBS Mathematics Total for Grades 4-6. Differences were found between the following Learning Centers: Carver, Dade, Dunbar, Earhart, Rhoads, and other district students favoring the Learning Centers.

The adjusted mean NCE scores of Anderson and Edison exceeded the districts scores on the ITBS Reading Comprehension, Reading Total and Mathematics Total subtests at Grade 7. At Grade 8, Edison adjusted mean NCE Reading Comprehension, Reading Total, and Mathematics Total subtest scores exceeded district scores. Anderson exceeded the district score on the Mathematics Total.

**Recommendation**

Based on the findings from this evaluation, the following recommendation is made:

- All 4-6 Learning Centers should become K-6 Learning Centers. The lack of Learning Center funding for Grades K-3 causes the problem for principals of running a school within a school. Principals tended to redistribute Title I funds and other program funds to pay teachers extra time for extended day or after- and before-school programs. However, administrators are unable to significantly reduce pupil-teacher ratios, award incentive pay, increase teachers' salaries, and award re-sign bonuses for teachers in Grades K-3.