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THE LEARNING CENTERS:

A Final Evaluation Report

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Program Services Section
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THE LEARNING CENTERS:
A FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the last in a series evaluating the effectiveness of the Learning Centers, alternative schools for juvenile offenders jointly funded by the Division of Juvenile Rehabilitation (DJR) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). There are five sections in the report: a review of the theoretical perspective that has influenced the Learning Centers; an overview of the Learning Center programs; highlights from previous evaluation reports in the series; findings from the analysis of recidivism performed for this report; and several recommendations for the improvement of the Learning Centers.

Theoretical Perspective

The control theory of delinquency proposes that youths are likely to become delinquent unless they are involved in conventional activities, attached to positive role models, and committed to nondelinquent goals. The theory specifically suggest that involvement in school activities, attachment to teachers, and commitment to education are strong factors in preventing delinquency. An ideal educational model for the development of commitment to education is described.

Overview of the Learning Center Programs

At the time data were collected for the evaluation, there were six Learning Centers in operation: one each in Everett, Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima, and two in Seattle. Learning Center clients are generally offenders referred from the local juvenile court or DJR; however, in some cases, non-offenders are also referred from the local school district. The primary focus of the curricula in the Learning Centers is basic education requirements; however, the individual Learning Centers offer a variety of electives, e.g., skills training, value clarification. Common objectives among the Learning Center programs include: increasing commitment to education, increasing cognitive skills, increasing academic success, increasing school attendance, improving employability, increasing internal locus of control and decision-making skills, and increasing commitment to non-delinquent behavior. The primary goal across the programs is the reduction of recidivism among program clients.

Summary of Previous Learning Center Reports

-An analysis of the Learning Center clients' perceptions of classroom environment indicated that significantly more classroom maintenance and affect was present in the Learning Centers relative to a traditional school.

-An analysis of changes in attitudes, from surveys assessing involvement in conventional activities, attachment to positive role models, social skills, and locus of control, indicated that,

in general, Learning Center students did not improve significantly over a three month period.

-An assessment of during-project offending found no significant differences between the Learning Center and comparison groups.

Recidivism Among Learning Center Clients

The Learning Centers as a whole did not have a significant impact on post-project offending. Youths from Everett appeared to have higher rates of recidivism if they also had extensive prior criminal histories, while youths from the Seattle I program had lower rates if they were male. The analysis also indicated that the following types of youths had a greater tendency to recidivate: younger students, youths with more extensive prior criminal records, males, youths who stayed in the program for a shorter period of time, youths who did not transfer to a public school after termination from the Learning Center, youths who were more highly involved with delinquent peers, and youths with less family involvement.

Recommendations

1. DJR should systematically re-examine the goals of the Learning Centers.
2. Greater efforts should be made to increase a client's length of stay in the Learning Center programs.
3. Where possible, Learning Center clients should be transferred back into traditional schools.
4. The fact that youths who have greater involvement with delinquent peers recidivate more often should be considered in program planning.
5. Program planning should consider the value of family involvement for delinquency reduction.
6. The Everett program, where recidivism was significantly greater than in the other Learning Centers, should be examined in further detail--especially in terms of the special difficulties among youths with extensive prior records.
7. The program activities that facilitated the Seattle I program's success with male clients should be replicated.
8. There should be less emphasis on social skill development as it is currently offered in the Learning Centers.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Division of Juvenile Rehabilitation (DJR), in conjunction with the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), funds several Learning Center programs across the state of Washington. The Learning Centers are small alternative schools for juvenile offenders with educational difficulties. This report is the last in a series of reports presenting findings from DJR's evaluation of the Learning Centers. The report both reviews previous evaluation reports in this series and includes the results from a recently completed analysis of recidivism among Learning Center clients.

Five sections follow in this report. First, the theoretical perspective that has influenced the development of the Learning Centers is reviewed. Next, an overview of the Learning Centers is presented. Third, highlights from four previous Learning Center evaluation reports are reviewed. Fourth, findings from the analysis of recidivism completed for this report are presented. Finally, a section with conclusions and recommendations regarding the Learning Centers is presented.

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The control theory of delinquency (Hirshi, 1969) proposes that youths are likely to become delinquent unless they are involved in conventional activities, attached to positive role models, and committed to nondelinquent goals. Involvement in and attachment to conventional activities, such as positive family and peer relationships, is a prerequisite for the development of the youth's bonds to the conventional order. Control theory specifically suggests that involvement in school activities, attachment to teachers, and commitment to education in general are strong factors in preventing delinquency. Conversely, negative school experiences, such as poor performance and poor relationships with teachers, lead to delinquent behavior.

The relationship between failure in school and delinquency has been documented by a number of research studies. The studies reviewed by Silberberg and Silberberg (1971), assessing academic achievement and delinquency, consistently produced a significant relationship. Elliott and Voss (1974) found that recent academic successes or failures were highly related to the probability of subsequent delinquent behavior. Sakumoto (1978) showed that both academic performance and the youth's attachment to school were independently related to delinquency. Hawkins and Wall (1980) recommended that schools should: "(1) increase students' experiences of academic success, (2) stimulate student attachment and commitment to school, and (3) stimulate attachments between students and non-delinquent peers as well as between students and teachers."

Hawkins and Wall also describe an educational environment conducive to student attachment and academic success. They suggest an alternative school with the following elements:

1. Individualized instruction with curricula tailored to students' learning needs and interests, clear learning goals, and an individually-paced learning program.
2. Clear rewards for individual improvement in academic competency.
3. A goal-oriented work and learning emphasis in the classroom.
4. Small student population in the program.
5. Low student-adult ratio in the classroom.
6. Caring, competent teachers.
7. A strong, supportive administrator.

Hawkins and Wall point out that it is the combination of these elements, rather than just one alone, that will produce the attachment and commitment to education necessary to reduce the likelihood of delinquent behavior.

Many of these elements were included in the development of the Learning Centers as they were originally designed in 1971. A report by the Bureau of School Service and Research (1973), prepared for OSPI to clarify and summarize the goals and objectives of DJR's education programs, alluded to a number of these concepts (e.g., "design an individual program for students", "have students commit themselves to an educational program"). In an early review of the Learning Centers, Schram (1974) notes that the Learning Centers were developed on the premise that a rewarding educational experience is an important factor enabling parolees to successfully return to society (i.e., refrain from committing new offenses).

III. AN OVERVIEW OF THE LEARNING CENTER PROGRAMS

The report entitled The Learning Centers: An Overview of Program Characteristics (Guthmann, 1983) presented an overview of the six Learning Center programs in operation during the 1982-83 school year. There have been only minor changes in the programs since that time. The major findings of that report are as follows:

- There are single Learning Centers in Everett, Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima and two in Seattle. (An additional Learning Center has since been implemented in Walla

Walla and one of the Seattle centers branched into several smaller programs. Only the six programs operating in 1982-83 were included in the various data analyses performed for this study.)

-While the programs were originally designed to serve primarily parolees and the more serious offenders in the community, the Learning Centers now enroll youths with a variety of offense backgrounds.

-Most of the programs receive referrals from either DJR or the local juvenile court, while the Yakima program receives referrals from the local school district.

-DJR provides the programs' facilities, equipment, and program supervisors, while OSPI funds the programs' teachers and additional operating costs.

-The primary focus of the curricula in the Learning Centers is basic education requirements. However, electives are also offered in accordance with the philosophy of the individual Learning Center; some programs offer pre-vocational courses, while others emphasize social skill building and value clarification.

-The figure included as Appendix A presents the general program model of the Learning Centers as described and agreed to by Learning Center staff in interviews. The primary impact of the program as proposed by the model is the reduction of delinquency among youths enrolled in the Learning Centers. The model specifies several objectives toward achieving that goal, including:

1. Improving attitudes toward school and teachers.
2. Increasing commitment to education.
3. Increasing outside support for educational attainment.
4. Increasing cognitive and affective skills.
5. Increasing academic success.
6. Increasing school attendance and length of stay.
7. Improving employability.
8. Increasing internal locus of control and

independent decision-making skills.

9. Decreasing amount of time "on the street".

10. Increasing commitment to non-delinquent behavior.

-Each of the Learning Centers, however, has at least one characteristic unique from the other programs. For example:

1. The Everett program is partially funded through DJR Consolidated Juvenile Services funds and therefore has an especially close relationship with the local juvenile court.

2. The Seattle I program has the greatest number of referrals directly from DJR; 67% of its clients are either parolees or group home residents.

3. The Seattle II program enrolls students who are at an especially low academic functioning level; no students were functioning at the high school level at the time of the report.

4. The Spokane program offers an especially wide variety of skills training courses.

5. The Tacoma program enrolls only youths who have been adjudicated.

6. The Yakima program clients are generally much older (62% are 17 or over as compared to 36% across all Learning Centers) and less likely to be offenders (only 25% compared to 95% in the other Learning Centers).

IV. SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS LEARNING CENTER EVALUATION REPORTS

There have been three major phases in the evaluation of the Learning Centers. First, the Classroom Environment Scale was administered to assess the nature of the environment at the Learning Centers. Second, a series of attitude surveys were administered and background data collected to describe changes in Learning Center clients during their stay in the programs. Finally, recidivism data were collected to assess whether the programs had a long-term effect on delinquent behavior.

For most of the analysis of the Learning Centers, Learning Center client attitudes and recidivism were compared to the performance of similar youths from counties without a Learning Center. (Students from a traditional high school were included as the comparison for the analysis of the Classroom Environment Scale only.) Probation and parole officers from Benton, Franklin, and Clark Counties were asked to identify likely program candidates if a Learning Center existed in their county. The comparison group "referrals" were then carefully screened to determine if their academic and criminal backgrounds were similar to Learning Center clients.

The following provides summaries of findings prior to this report:

Student Attitudes Toward Classroom Environment

Learning Center clients' perceptions of classroom environment were examined in the report entitled The Learning Centers: An Analysis of Student Attitudes Toward Classroom Environment (Guthmann, 1983). The Classroom Environment Scale (Trickett and Moos, 1973), after minor revision, was administered to Learning Center clients. Surveys that had been concurrently administered to 57 students from a traditional high school were used as a comparison. Table 1 summarizes the major findings of that analysis.

Table 1: Average Classroom Environment Scale Index Scores for Learning Center Clients and Traditional School Students

<u>Index</u>	<u>Learning Centers</u>	<u>Traditional School</u>	<u>Statistically Significant?</u>
Affiliation to School	3.1	2.5	Yes
Student Competition	2.3	2.4	No
Innovative Curriculum	1.9	1.3	Yes
Student Participation	2.0	2.1	No
Rule Clarity	3.0	2.3	Yes
Task Orientation	2.9	2.8	No
Teacher Control	2.4	1.9	Yes
Teacher Relationship	2.5	2.5	No
Teacher Support	2.7	2.4	No
Classroom Maintenance	8.3	7.0	Yes
Classroom Affect	12.3	10.7	Yes

The results in table 1 indicate that a supportive classroom environment was implemented as proposed in the Learning Center program model. Learning Center students reported: greater affiliation to the school, more innovation in the school's curriculum, greater clarity in the school's rules, and more control of the classroom by teachers. Classroom maintenance and

classroom affect, indices developed to summarize the findings, indicated that Learning Centers students perceive significantly more classroom control and affect than traditional school students perceive. The findings from this analysis suggest that the Learning Centers have implemented a productive environment--aimed at increasing student attachment to the school, and ultimately commitment to education, while still maintaining a sufficiently high degree of classroom control and order.

Description of Student Characteristics

The third report in the Learning Center evaluation series, The Learning Centers: A Description of Student Characteristics (Guthmann, 1984) examined characteristics of Learning Center clients, youths from the comparison group, and students from a traditional school setting. The analysis was performed for three purposes: 1) to identify differences between Learning Center sites so that the programs can be better described, 2) to assess whether the Learning Center clients and the comparison group youths were similar enough to allow further comparison of the two groups, and 3) to assess the degree that Learning Center clients are deficient in academic and social functioning by comparing Learning Center clients with traditional school students.

Data were obtained from three survey instruments that were administered to the Learning Center clients, comparison group youths, and the traditional school students. The Involvement/Attachment Survey (Guthmann and Steiger, 1984) was developed to examine youth involvement in conventional activities and attachment to positive role models in five areas: school, work, family, peers, and other organized activities. The Adolescent Problems Inventory (Freedman et al., 1978) was administered to assess the youth's level of social skills. The Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Survey examined locus of control; i.e., the degree to which the youth feels that he/she can control his/her destiny. An external locus of control indicates that the youth feels powerless, while an internal locus of control indicates that the youth feels that he/she can control most situations with skill or hard work.

The results of the analysis indicated that, upon entry into a Learning Center program, Everett students were the least involved and Seattle II students the most involved in conventional activities. Tacoma students were the least attached and Spokane students the most attached to positive role models. Seattle I and Seattle II students were the most deficient in terms of social skills. Seattle II students had the most external locus of control, while Spokane students had the most internal locus of control.

The Learning Center group did not vary significantly from the comparison group for most of the survey scales. The school

involvement and attachment scales were significantly greater for the Learning Center clients; yet, this was a result of their enrollment in the Learning Centers. There was a slight tendency for the comparison group to have greater social skills, yet this difference was not significant. The two groups were nearly identical for the remaining scales.

The comparison with the traditional school students indicated that the Learning Center clients were significantly less likely to be involved in conventional activities and attached to positive role models. Learning Center youths demonstrated lower social skills--especially in the area of school/work relations. Learning Center clients also had a significantly more external locus of control.

Recidivism Among 1982-83 School Year Program Clients

The report entitled The Learning Centers: An Analysis of Patterns of Recidivism among Students Enrolled During the 82-83 School Year (Guthmann, 1985), examined recidivism by Learning Center students both during and after their stay in the program. During-project offending was examined to determine if the programs adequately maintained public safety during their operation; post-project recidivism was examined to determine if the programs had a long-term rehabilitative effect on program participants. Comparison data, i.e., information about recidivism among youths not enrolled in Learning Centers, were not available for this report; therefore, the findings were limited to a description of which Learning Center client characteristics were most predictive of recidivism. The study indicated that youths on parole or probation status and youths who had poor attendance records while in the program were more likely to recidivate during their Learning Center stay. Youths with an extensive prior criminal record, younger students, and youths who were enrolled in one of the Learning Centers other than Spokane or Yakima were more likely to recidivate after their stay in the program.

Attitudes and During-Project Offending Among 1983-84 Clients

The report entitled The Learning Centers: An Assessment of Changes in Attitudes among Students Enrolled During the 83-84 School Year (Guthmann, 1985), analyzed changes in attitudes among Learning Center clients relative to the comparison group youths. The Involvement/Attachment Survey, the Adolescent Problems Inventory (assessing social skills), and the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Survey were administered upon entry into the program and three months later to assess changes in attitudes as a result of Learning Center participation. A total of 62 Learning Center youths and 42 comparison group youths participated in both administrations of the surveys.

Table 2 presents the major findings from that analysis. The table indicates whether differences between the groups on the follow-up survey scores were statistically significant after controlling for scores on the surveys administered upon entry into the program. The six involvement scores and six attachment scores are from the Involvement/Attachment Survey; the six social skills scores are from the Adolescent Problems Inventory; and the locus of control score is from the Nowicki-Strickland survey.

Table 2: Before and After Involvement/Attachment, Social Skills, and Locus of Control Scores by Group

	<u>Learning Centers</u>		<u>Comparison Group</u>		<u>Statistically Significant?</u>
	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>	
School Involvement	3.1	2.7	2.2	1.9	No
Work Involvement	1.3	2.0	1.7	2.1	No
Family Involvement	3.4	3.4	3.3	3.4	No
Peer Involvement	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.3	No
Delinquent Peer Involvement	1.8	2.0	2.2	2.3	No
Total Involvement	10.6	10.8	9.5	8.7	Yes
School Attachment	6.8	6.9	5.5	4.6	Yes
Work Attachment	.9	.7	-.6	-1.0	No
Family Attachment	5.9	5.7	6.2	6.5	No
Peer Attachment	6.3	6.2	6.0	5.8	No
Delinquent Peer Attachment	4.2	4.4	4.1	3.7	No
Total Attachment	15.2	14.7	14.4	13.9	No
Peer Interaction Skills	95.7	97.8	97.9	98.0	No
Opposite Sex Interaction Skills	95.2	95.3	95.9	92.3	No
Staying Out of Trouble Skills	93.6	95.6	96.9	94.6	No
School/Work Relations	92.7	94.5	92.3	92.2	No
Family Interaction Skills	93.8	95.9	92.9	92.5	No
Total Social Skills	93.5	95.4	94.5	92.8	No
External Locus of Control	54.9	53.9	53.7	53.4	No

The results in table 2 indicate that, for most of the survey scores, the Learning Centers did not have a significant impact relative to the comparison group. There were significant differences in terms of total involvement in conventional activities and attachment to school role models; the comparison

group youths decreased during the three-month period, while the Learning Center youths maintained their level of total involvement and school attachment. None of the other scores, including the indicators of social skills and locus of control, were significantly different across groups. The results suggest that major changes in attitudes among Learning Center youths are unlikely--especially given the relatively short stay of most Learning Center clients.

Additionally, the report compared during-project offending of Learning Center and comparison group youths. (Post-project offending was not examined because a sufficient post-project period had not yet occurred for these youths.) Table 3 presents during-project offense rates and average summary scores (calculated by combining the seriousness of each offense during the youth's stay in the program, divided by the youth's length of stay), and whether differences between the Learning Center and comparison groups were significant.

Table 3: During-Project Offending by Group

	<u>During-Project Offense Rate</u>	<u>During-Project Offense Score</u>
Learning Center Group (N=617)	31.1%	.02
Comparison Group (N=60)	42.2%	.02
Significant Difference Between Groups?	No	No

The results in table 3 indicate that Learning Center youths were no less likely to recidivate during their stay in the program than comparison group youths during a similar length of time.

Summary of Findings from Previous Reports

An analysis of the Learning Center clients' perceptions of classroom environment indicated that significantly more classroom maintenance and affect was present in the Learning Centers relative to a traditional school. The Learning Center program model proposes that greater classroom affect be implemented to increase attachment and commitment to school among program clients. The offense background of the Learning Center population necessitates greater classroom maintenance and control as compared to a traditional classroom. The results of the Classroom Environment Scale analysis indicated that the Learning Centers were successful on both accounts.

Results from surveys assessing involvement in conventional activities, attachment to positive role models, social skills, and locus of control indicated that Learning Center students demonstrated significant deficiencies in each of those areas.

Learning Center students were less involved in conventional activities, were less attached to positive role models, had fewer social skills, and had an external locus of control as compared to their traditional school counterparts.

A preliminary analysis of recidivism among youths enrolled during the 1982-83 school year found that parolees, probationers, and youths with poor attendance records offended most often while in the program. Youths with greater prior criminal records, younger students, and youths in the Everett, Seattle, and Tacoma programs were more likely to recidivate after their stay in the program.

An analysis of changes in attitudes indicated that, in general, Learning Center students did not improve significantly over a three month period. There was some indication that Learning Center students were less likely to decrease in terms of involvement in general positive activities and attachment to school; yet, the other involvement/attachment scales, the social skills scales, and the locus of control score did not significantly change over the testing period. The results indicate that the Learning Centers do not currently impact student attitudes over a period of time similar to the average length of stay for Learning Center clients (i.e., 14 weeks).

An assessment of during-project offending found no significant differences between the Learning Center and comparison groups. Learning Center youths appear to offend during their stay in the project at the same level of seriousness as youths not enrolled in the project during a similar period of time.

V. RECIDIVISM AMONG LEARNING CENTER CLIENTS

Research Methodology

As in the previous analyses, two groups of youths are included in the recidivism analysis: Learning Center clients and comparison group youths from three counties with no Learning Centers. The Learning Center group includes 1017 youths who were enrolled at one of the Learning Centers during either the 1982-83 or 1983-84 school year. Survey data were available for 255 of the 1983-84 youths; therefore, findings regarding the ability of the survey results to predict post-project offending include only that subset of youths.

The comparison group, developed from a list of "Learning Center candidates" suggested by probation and parole counselors in Benton, Franklin, and Clark Counties, originally included 77 youths who were "referred". Of those, 60 youths completed surveys and are included in the analysis.

Post-project offending includes all adjudicated or diverted offenses committed between project termination and one year

later. (All youths in the analysis were out of the program for at least one year when the data were collected in late 1985.) Offense information was collected from three sources: JUVIS, the King County Offense Information System, and the Washington State Patrol.

A post-project offense rate is presented in the analysis, representing the percentage of youths with at least one offense during the one-year post-project period. However, a more comprehensive indicator of post-project offending was also used. Summary scores were calculated, combining the seriousness of all offenses during the post-project period. Each recidivism during the post-project period was assigned a numerical score according to its seriousness (i.e., a score of one for an "E" offense, two for a "D" offense, and so forth). In effect, a recidivism summary score of 5 is approximately two "E" offenses, or one "D" offense, worse than a score of 3.

Data Analysis

Table 4 presents recidivism rates and average summary scores for the Learning Center group and the comparison group. Though recidivism appeared to be slightly greater among the comparison group youths, differences between the groups were not statistically significant.

Table 4: Post-Project Offending by Group

	<u>Post-Project Offense Rate</u>	<u>Post-Project Offense Score</u>
Learning Center Group (N=1017)	45.4%	5.4
Comparison Group (N=60)	53.3%	5.9
Significant Difference Between Groups?	No	No

Recidivism rates and summary scores were compared across a number of client characteristics to assess which characteristics were related to post-project offending. Table 5 includes post-project offense rates and summary scores for only those characteristics where differences were found to be statistically significant. The table indicates that several client characteristics, such as age, sex, race, prior criminal record, etc., appear to be related to a youth's likelihood of recidivating.

The relationship between responses on the attitude surveys and recidivism were also examined. The results of that analysis are presented in table 6; post-project offense rates and average summary scores are compared for low and high scores on the various involvement/attachment, social skill, and locus of control scales. The findings suggest several factors that may be

Table 5: Post-Project Offending by Client Characteristics

	<u>Post-Project Offense Rate</u>	<u>Post-Project Offense Score</u>
Age:		
13 or Less (N=47)	85.1%	14.4
14 (N=139)	61.2%	8.4
15 (N=242)	57.0%	8.0
16 (N=334)	46.7%	4.3
17 (N=212)	29.2%	2.2
18 or Older (N=103)	12.6%	1.1
Sex:		
Male (N=859)	50.5%	6.3
Female (N=218)	27.5%	1.9
Race:		
Non-White (N=248)	52.8%	6.3
White (N=768)	43.0%	5.1
Legal Status:		
Parolee (N=192)	63.5%	8.4
Group Home Resident (N=148)	42.6%	4.9
Probationer (N=411)	45.2%	6.7
Divertee (N=52)	38.5%	3.3
Former Offender (N=91)	31.9%	4.1
Non-Offender (N=183)	18.0%	1.0
Prior Offenses:		
0 (N=154)	18.8%	1.0
1 to 4 (N=326)	37.7%	3.7
5 to 11 (N=416)	53.6%	6.6
12 or More (N=181)	65.7%	9.4
Grade Levels Behind:		
0 (N=302)	52.0%	6.9
1 to 2 (N=676)	45.9%	4.9
3 or More (N=99)	27.3%	4.0
Learning Center Status:		
Returning Student (N=230)	37.8%	4.3
New to Program (N=847)	48.1%	5.7
Length of Stay:		
Less than 2 Months (N=404)	52.2%	6.6
2 to 6 Months (N=420)	45.2%	4.9
More than 6 Months (N=253)	36.8%	4.4
Credits Earned:		
0 (N=103)	66.0%	9.4
1 to 4 (N=93)	32.3%	2.5
5 or More (N=128)	29.7%	3.3
Termination Reason:		
Behavior Problem (N=36)	50.0%	6.6
Lack of Attendance (N=259)	49.0%	5.5
Court Action (N=74)	63.5%	8.4
Personal Reason (N=99)	37.4%	4.1
Return to School (N=157)	36.9%	4.1
Completed G.E.D. (N=47)	55.3%	5.3
Received Diploma (N=27)	3.7%	.1
School Year Ended (N=356)	46.9%	6.0
Site:		
Everett (N=259)	51.4%	7.2
Seattle I (N=185)	38.4%	3.5
Seattle II (N=70)	61.4%	7.6
Spokane (N=73)	42.5%	4.6
Tacoma (N=203)	58.1%	7.1
Yakima (N=227)	29.1%	2.8

Table 6: Post-Project Offending by Level of Involvement/Attachment, Social Skills, and Locus of Control

	<u>Post-Project Offense Rate</u>	<u>Post-Project Offense Score</u>
Low School Involvement	47.0%	5.7
High School Involvement	32.2% *	4.2
Low Work Involvement	40.3%	5.4
High Work Involvement	41.1%	4.6
Low Family Involvement	40.1%	6.0
High Family Involvement	42.1%	4.0 *
Low Peer Involvement	37.7%	4.4
High Peer Involvement	43.7%	5.7
Low Delinquent Peer Involvement	34.3%	3.4
High Delinquent Peer Involvement	52.7% *	8.1 *
Low Total Positive Involvement	46.2%	6.4
High Total Positive Involvement	35.3% *	3.8 *
Low School Attachment	55.5%	7.4
High School Attachment	27.9% *	3.0 *
Low Work Attachment	44.9%	5.5
High Work Attachment	39.1%	4.9
Low Family Attachment	41.7%	5.0
High Family Attachment	41.3%	5.3
Low Peer Attachment	41.7%	4.8
High Peer Attachment	40.8%	5.5
Low Delinquent Peer Attachment	38.1%	4.6
High Delinquent Peer Attachment	45.8%	5.9
Low Total Positive Attachment	49.3%	6.4
High Total Positive Attachment	32.8% *	3.9 *
Low Peer Interaction Skills	45.0%	4.4
High Peer Interaction Skills	40.4%	5.6
Low School/Work Relations Skills	44.8%	4.7
High School Work Relations Skills	40.8%	5.6
Low Staying Out of Trouble Skills	46.6%	5.6
High Staying Out of Trouble Skills	35.8%	4.4
Low Opposite Sex Interaction Skills	43.4%	6.2
High Opposite Sex Interaction Skills	41.3%	3.7 *
Low Family Interaction Skills	43.5%	5.8
High Family Interaction Skills	42.1%	4.6
Low Total Social Skills	44.9%	5.7
High Total Social Skills	39.8%	4.4
External Locus of Control	41.6%	5.8
Internal Locus of Control	39.5%	4.4

*=Differences in recidivism rates or summary scores were statistically significant at .05 level for this scale.

related to lower recidivism scores: involvement in family activities and positive activities in general, less involvement with delinquent peers, attachment to school and positive activities in general, and high social skills when interacting with the opposite sex.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the independent effects of the variables analyzed in tables 4 through 6 on post-project offending, controlling for each of the other variables in the analysis. For example, it is possible that more recidivism occurred at one of the program sites because more students enrolled in that program had a characteristic associated with recidivism, e.g., greater prior criminal records. Regression analysis can determine if enrollment at that program site is actually related to greater recidivism, controlling for differences in criminal record.

Table 7 presents the results of the regression analysis. The table provides two pieces of information: 1) the percent, out of 100%, that the variable is able to predict the youth's post-project offense summary score, and 2) the degree that changes in the variable increment the recidivism summary score. For example, for each additional year the youth is older, the youth's summary score is likely to decrease by 2.1 units--the equivalent of two "E" offenses or one "D" offense. Only those factors that were significantly related to recidivism, after controlling for all other variables in the analysis, are included in the table.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis - Factors that Significantly Predict Post-Project Offending

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Percent Factor Predicts Post-Project Offending</u>	<u>Degree One Unit of Factor Changes Recidivism Score</u>
Age of the Youth	7.1%	-2.1
Prior Offense Summary Score	1.8%	.7
Sex of the Youth (Female=0; Male=1)	1.3%	3.2
Length of Stay in the Program (in Months)	.7%	-0.3
Whether Youth Transferred to Public School	.4%	-1.9
Youth's Involvement with Delinquent Peers	.4%	1.0
Youth's Involvement in Family Activities	.4%	-1.1
Whether Youth was Enrolled in Seattle I Program	.4%	-2.2
Whether Youth was Enrolled in Everett Program	.3%	1.4

The results in table 7 indicate that the age of the youth is the strongest predictor of whether the youth will recidivate after enrollment in the program; older youths recidivate significantly less often. (The average 14 year old has a recidivism score that is 6.3 units, or six "E" offenses, greater than the score for the average 17 year old.) The table also indicates several other factors that were less strongly, yet significantly, related to post-project offending. The fact that the youth had a prior record, was male, had delinquent peers, or was in the Everett program increased the youth's recidivism score; staying in a Learning Center program longer, transferring to a public school after termination from a Learning Center, or being in the Seattle I program decreased the youth's recidivism score.

The finding that enrollment at two program sites had a significant impact on a youth's likelihood of recidivating suggests a closer look at those programs. Further multiple regression analysis was performed, assessing the impact of "interaction effects" on recidivism. An interaction effect is present when the impact of an independent variable (e.g., age) on a dependent variable (e.g., delinquency) changes depending on different values of a second independent variable (e.g., whites versus non-whites). Specifically, if the relationship between age and delinquency is different for non-whites as compared to whites, then an interaction effect between age and race exists. Two such effects relevant to the two Learning Centers were found. First, youths with greater prior criminal histories recidivated more than expected if enrolled in the Everett program. Where the typical offender with five or more prior offenses had a recidivism summary score of 6.6, Everett offenders with similar offense histories had an average recidivism score of 11.1. Second, males recidivated less than expected if enrolled in the Seattle I program. While the average recidivism score for males was 6.3, Seattle I males had an average score of 3.7.

Summary of Recidivism Findings

The Learning Centers did not have a significant impact on post-project offending. While the rate of recidivism was slightly lower at the Learning Centers relative to the comparison group, neither the post-project offense rate nor the average post-project offense summary score was significantly lower for the Learning Centers. At least in terms of the year following Learning Center enrollment, it appears that the programs do not have a rehabilitative effect.

The analysis of post-project offense rates by program site indicated that recidivism varies from program to program. Some of the Learning Centers appeared to have less recidivism than the comparison group, while other programs had greater recidivism. However, because certain Learning Centers may enroll more students with a greater tendency towards recidivating (e.g.,

Tacoma enrolls more students with prior criminal records than the other programs), a multiple regression analysis was used to determine the independent effects of certain factors, such as program site, on post-project offending. That analysis indicated that enrollment at two programs, Everett and Seattle I, significantly affected the youth's likelihood of recidivating, even after controlling for other variables. Everett students appeared to be more likely to recidivate than youths from other Learning Centers or from the comparison counties, while youths enrolled at the Seattle I program recidivated less than expected.

An analysis of "interaction" effects indicated that the greater recidivism at the Everett program occurred among youths with greater prior records, while the Seattle I program had especially low recidivism among male clients. These findings suggest that: 1) those youths were treated differentially at those programs, or 2) there was something different, yet unmeasured, about the Everett clients with extensive prior records and the Seattle I males.

The regression analysis also revealed other factors that are predictive of greater recidivism. Specifically, younger students, youths with more extensive prior criminal records, males, youths who stayed in the project for a shorter period of time, youths who did not transfer to a public school after termination from the Learning Center, youths who were more highly involved with delinquent peers, and youths with less family involvement had a greater tendency to recidivate after their stay in the program.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final results of the Learning Center evaluation are not generally positive. Though the programs did appear to implement classroom environments that featured both greater control and stronger teacher-student relationships, the programs were unable to significantly impact student attitudes, during-project offending, and post-project offending. Given the primary program goal of recidivism reduction as proposed by the Learning Center program model, the evaluation's findings do not support the concept of the Learning Centers as they are currently operative.

However, more specific results from the analyses suggest a number of program considerations and modifications that could be integral in the improvement of the Learning Centers. Recommendations for the improvement of the Learning Centers are as follows:

1. DJR should systematically re-examine the goals of the Learning Centers. Specifically, the goal of recidivism reduction should be questioned in detail. The value of the programs is in doubt given recidivism

reduction as a primary program goal. DJR may determine that failure to meet the goal of recidivism reduction is not sufficient in itself to decide the programs' fate. A new set of goals, that if met would justify the existence of the Learning Centers, should then be developed. For example, DJR may determine that the primary purpose of the programs is to increase educational attainment as an end in itself. A finding of this report was that Learning Center students are indeed more likely to remain involved in and attached to school than their comparison group counterparts.

On the other hand, DJR may decide that recidivism reduction is still a primary purpose for the existence of the Learning Centers. A next step should then be the development of new program methods that are more likely to have an impact on client recidivism. Ideally, these methods should be based on previous research that has demonstrated how recidivism can be reduced through education programs.

For example, DJR's recent implementation of offense-specific case management, which has not yet been extended to the Learning Centers, is based on current research on the reduction of recidivism. That model proposes that the offender's behavior patterns which lead to illegal activities should be identified, and those patterns should then be treated through the implementation of specific action steps. A key setting for the implementation of many of those action steps (e.g., increase emotional attachment to pro-social institutions) is the offender's school. At a minimum, the Learning Centers can serve as vehicles for the implementation of action steps already developed for offenders paroled from DJR institutions. Full development of a offense-specific case management plan for other program clients is also a reasonable goal. The inclusion of the Learning Centers in a divisionwide focus on the youth's offense behavior would serve as an integral step in the youth's transition, and potential rehabilitation, in the community. It is recommended that, at a minimum, selected Learning Center staff be enrolled in future offense-specific case management training sessions offered by DJR.

Additionally, a number of specific successful educational strategies for impacting delinquency have been reviewed in the research literature. (See, for example, the literature review in Steiger and Guthmann, 1985.) It is recommended that research findings, such as those of Hawkins and Wall (1980), be closely examined in terms of their utility for program

improvement. In a similar vein, the recommendations that follow in this section are based on the findings in this report and may prove useful in program development.

Whichever option DJR selects in terms of program goals (recidivism reduction or a new set of goals), a comprehensive re-consideration of the Learning Centers' policy and practices will serve a valuable role in the programs' improvement. Approximately fifteen years have passed since the Learning Center concept was carefully studied in the early 1970's. DJR standards specifically for Learning Centers have never been developed. A systematic review of the programs is long overdue.

The preparation of program standards, and other efforts to re-examine the Learning Center policy and procedures, can take a number of directions in addition to central office review. A correctional education administrator's group, which includes mostly Learning Center supervisors and institutional superintendents, currently meets on a regular basis to consider a variety of academic and fiscal issues. That group, or a subcommittee of the group, could be an effective vehicle for the consideration of the Learning Centers' goals and objectives. Other DJR treatment staff, perhaps including individuals who developed and taught in the division's academy for training of offense-specific case management, or members of DJR's transition issues analysis task force, could be valuable additions to a group to examine the Learning Center programs, and to develop program standards.

2. Greater efforts should be made to increase a client's length of stay in the Learning Center program. Even after statistically controlling for other factors, such as the youth's academic and criminal background, a youth's recidivism score decreases by one (i.e., one "E" offense) with each additional three months in the program. Certainly not all situations allow for a client to remain in the program for a long period of time (e.g., a large number of youths terminate as their parole contract or probation court order expires); yet, approximately 30% of Learning Center clients are terminated for either "behavior reasons" or "lack of attendance". When controlling for the youth's length of stay, youths terminated for these reasons do not recidivate more than other youths in the program. Fewer terminations for these reasons may impact the average length of stay, and, in turn, Learning Center recidivism.

3. Where possible, Learning Center clients should be transferred back into traditional schools. Youths who terminated from the program for this reason recidivated significantly less often, even after controlling for the youth's academic and criminal background. Conversely, youths receiving a G.E.D. had high rates of recidivism. It is overly optimistic to suggest that many of the Learning Center clients can be successfully transferred back into a traditional school--many of the public schools are extremely reluctant to enroll youths with extensive criminal backgrounds when a Learning Center is available. Yet, a program objective should be, at a minimum, to increase the number of youths returning to traditional schools.

The University of Washington's Networking and Evaluation Team (NET), after several years of research and program development, has recently completed a model for the transition of juvenile offenders between corrections programs and public schools (Webb, Maddox, and Edgar, 1986). The model identifies specific strategies aimed at improving interagency awareness, communication, cooperation, and transfer of school records. The strategies are relevant both for the transfer of institutional youths to Learning Centers, and Learning Center youths to public schools. It is recommended that the model be reviewed and integrated into Learning Center policy and procedures where possible.

4. The fact that youths who have greater involvement with delinquent peers recidivate more often should be considered in program planning. Previous alternative education research has suggested that the most effective programs have a combination of offenders and non-offenders. Control theory (Hirschi, 1969) proposes that involvement with positive peer activities will reduce the likelihood of delinquency. Involvement with a mostly delinquent peer group is not an optimal method for minimizing subsequent delinquent acts. Yet, the Learning Centers have not been able to impact the level of delinquent peer involvement among program clients. For most of the Learning Centers, referrals are received predominately from juvenile court or parole. Consideration should be given to the practice at the Yakima program, where referrals are received from the school district, allowing several non-offenders to enter the program.

The enrollment of non-offenders, however, is not without its problems. Most of the Learning Centers

report that the non-offenders in their program are equally or more troublesome than the offenders. They are referred by the school district specifically because the present the greatest problems in the public schools. Though not legally considered an offender, many of these youths have a history of "status offenses", e.g., truancies, runaways. The Yakima program reports that problems among its client population have actually decreased as the non-offender population decreased over the last two years. The research literature suggests that successful, prosocial peers will have a positive influence on offenders in a school setting. It is recommended, then, that if the Learning Center client population can indeed be altered, the programs should include more positive role models, rather than non-offenders in name only.

5. Program planning should consider the value of family involvement for delinquency reduction. Again, control theory proposes that youths who are highly involved with family activities are less likely to recidivate. The analysis indicated that the Learning Centers have not been successful at increasing family involvement. Methods for integrating parents into program activities, and instilling greater pro-family attitudes among program clients, should be reviewed for possible program implementation.

The Spokane program has recently hired a part-time social worker through Eastern Washington University so that communication and integration with the youth's family can be increased. The Tacoma Learning Center now mails weekly progress reports to all parents. These and other ideas should be considered in program development if family involvement, and recidivism, are to be impacted.

6. The Everett program, where recidivism was significantly greater than in the other Learning Centers, should be examined in further detail--especially in terms of the special difficulties among youths with extensive prior records. Program review should assess whether these students are handled differentially. The Everett Learning Center youths with no or average criminal backgrounds demonstrated typical patterns of recidivism. A solution to this problem (i.e., high recidivism among those clients with greater prior records), such as greater involvement among these students in school planning or greater attention to their involvement with positive role models, might provide the necessary impact for lowering recidivism at the Everett program.

An additional factor impacting recidivism in Everett may be the size of that program. Hawkins and Wall (1980) note that small school size is an essential element in reducing delinquency in an alternative setting. Both the Everett and Yakima programs were larger programs (40 and 50 students, respectively) compared to the other Learning Centers (approximately 25 students each) during the 1982-83 school year. The majority of Everett's recidivism problems occurred among students enrolled during the 1983-84 school year when that program's population began to increase dramatically (towards a current population of over 90). The program may have simply grown too large to provide the individualized, positive environment necessary to impact youths with a history of academic failure. (Large program size may have an especially negative impact on youths with extensive criminal records; those youths may require even greater individualized attention to develop the school commitment necessary to reduce recidivism.)

Further, the physical layout of the Everett program appears to be insufficient to handle a large population. The program has attempted to acquire additional space in buildings located on the same block; yet the scattering of classes across different locations runs counter to the research-supported recommendation of maintaining a small, cohesive program. There has been discussion within the Everett program regarding the development of a "satellite" operation, i.e., four smaller programs of approximately twenty students each; yet, this alignment would provide an advantage over the current program structure only if the smaller programs could establish their own cohesive identities.

An additional concern with the increasing size of the Everett program is the joint administrative structure under which the program currently operates. Unlike the other Learning Centers which are administered by the school district and DJR only, the Everett program is additionally directed by the Snohomish County Juvenile Court as part of DJR Consolidated Juvenile Services funds. As the program expands and locates at different sites, program accountability becomes a greater issue. The juvenile court has primary responsibility for monitoring program operations, yet the program is located at or near DJR facilities. It is recommended that the current administrative agreement be reviewed to assure that the Everett program, given its rapid growth, can still be adequately monitored.

7. The program activities that facilitated the Seattle I program's success with male clients should be replicated. Though females in the program were no more successful than females from the comparison group, Seattle I males had especially low rates of recidivism. Since there is little indication that males from that program were treated any differently, the success that program had with males is likely attributable to a number of program elements in operation at the Seattle I program. Many of those elements are supported by the research literature and would likely lead to success if implemented elsewhere.

Specifically, the Seattle I program directed a number of program activities towards increasing the offender's commitment to education, and, in turn, the offender's chances of returning to a regular school program. First, the program placed a greater emphasis on behavior management, including goal setting and constant feedback (e.g., wall charts describing progress towards goal attainment). Second, the program's curriculum placed a greater focus on basic academic requirements (as opposed to the other Learning Centers which each offered a number of elective courses). Third, parole staff maintained high interest and a high profile in the program, supporting the successful transition of parolees in the program. Finally, the Learning Center's relatively older building, was open in nature (i.e., classes took place in connected open living room settings as opposed to closed door classrooms), and was therefore more conducive to the promotion of cohesiveness and a common school goal of academic progress and transition back to a regular school.

An unfortunate circumstance is that the Seattle I program was altered significantly after the evaluation data were collected for the 1982-83 and 1983-84 school years. The program's building was in such poor condition that the students were assigned to a number of other Seattle School District programs beginning with the 1984-85 school year. Though the other school district programs have attempted to maintain the same behavioral orientation, the effectiveness that the original program offered in terms of cohesiveness may have been compromised. There are current efforts, however, to locate a new building for the regional parole office in Seattle which would include space for a single Seattle I program.

8. There should be less emphasis on social skill development as it is currently offered in the Learning Centers. The analyses in the evaluation consistently demonstrated that the Learning Centers were not able to impact social skills, and that higher social skill levels have little or no impact on recidivism. It is possible that the social skills currently emphasized in the Learning Center curricula are not related to the causes of delinquency. Promising program options include greater individualization of skills training and application of skills training specifically to school survival. However, additional program development in this area should only be performed after additional research identifies and validates a specific social skills training program that is effective in impacting offenders in the State of Washington.

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Appendix A

D J R LEARNING CENTERS PROGRAM MODEL

