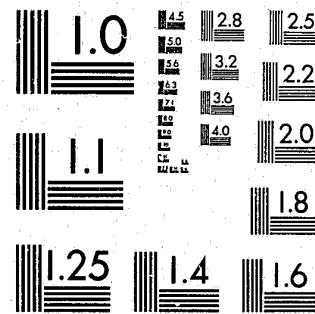


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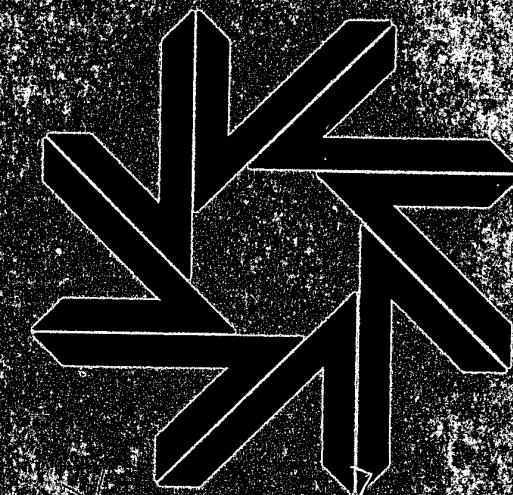
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JUVENILE LEARNING CENTER

POPULATION STUDY



VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
CORRECTIONS

MICROFICHE

DIVISION OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & EVALUATION  
RESEARCH AND REPORTING UNIT

AUGUST 1979

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ACQUISITIONS

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## Introduction

The Juvenile Population Study was initiated at the request of the Division of Institutional Services of the Department of Corrections. The study was to specifically address the paradoxical question - "Why are learning center populations increasing, when court commitments are decreasing?" Furthermore, the study was to identify general conditions or problems affecting juveniles confined to learning centers.

To accomplish this task, an analysis was first made of the commitment and release rates and average length of stay for children confined to learning centers. The available data covered a 19 month period for commitments and releases and a 12 month period for average length of stay. The data indicate that the commitment rate has exceeded the release rate by 5% for the overall 19 month data period. The average length of stay reflects a 2.1 month increase within the 12 month period. Thus, it can be said that the only way learning center populations can increase in the face of declining court commitments is for the release rate to decrease, thereby causing increases in the average length of stay. This will be documented later in the report but is offered here as the only plausible explanation for this anomalous condition to exist.

To complete the second part of the study on-site visits were made to the Reception and Diagnostic Center and Barrett, Hanover, Bon Air, Beaumont, Natural Bridge, and Appalachian learning centers. During each visit a staff survey was conducted. The responses to the survey questionnaire and additional comments supplied by respondents will be analyzed and presented in a separate section of the report. Likewise, general observations concerning staff, programs, statistical recordkeeping, and facilities will be presented in a separate section of the report.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the principal factors influencing population growth relative to the juvenile learning centers.

### Population Data

Commitment and release data as well as data on average length of stay were compiled from the automated Direct Care Information System (DCIS). Average daily population figures are from the Population Summary published monthly by the Department of Corrections.

The following table shows commitments, releases, and the percent/difference by which commitments exceed releases or, conversely, are exceeded by releases for each month of the 19 month data period. Also included are the combined average daily populations for the Reception and Diagnostic Center and the six learning centers.

TABLE 1: COMMITMENTS v. RELEASES

YEAR/MONTH	CONFINED POP. R&DC/LC	COMMITMENTS	RELEASES	DIFFERENCE	%
<u>1977</u>					
March	916	130	119	11	9%
April	895	113	87	26	30%
May	909	123	121	2	2%
June	898	134	147	-13	-9%
July	887	85	112	-27	-24%
August	867	86	123	-37	-30%
September	830	66	115	-49	-43%
October	805	93	104	-11	-11%
November	796	123	97	26	27%
December	824	101	104	-3	-3%
<u>1978</u>					
January	820	106	89	17	19%
February	854	96	73	23	32%
March	846	123	100	23	23%
April	853	105	92	13	14%
May	871	118	84	34	40%
June	893	114	89	25	28%
July	907	108	74	34	46%
August	925	97	103	-6	-6%
September	932	76	60	16	27%

The greatest number of commitments, as well as the greatest number of releases, occurred in June 1977. The table shows that both commitments and releases peaked during this month and thereafter began to decline. The high number of commitments during this month preceded the inception of legislation designed to preclude commitment for status offenses. The short-range impact of this legislation can be seen as commitments on the average declined thereafter by 34%. However, releases over the same period declined by 55%.

Overall, commitments exceeded releases by 5% for the 19 month data period. It is this disparity between the commitment and release rate that has influenced the population. Even though commitments reflect a decrease, the population has grown; due largely, but not exclusively, to a lagging release rate.

Other factors appear to have influenced the population as well. The data indicate some variation in the average length of stay for juveniles confined to learning centers. The following table provides a breakdown by race of the length of stay for the confined population.

TABLE 2: AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY

LENGTH OF STAY IN MONTHS	July thru December - 1977		January thru June - 1978	
	RACE = BLACK N = 41	RACE = WHITE N = 36	RACE = BLACK N = 119	RACE = WHITE N = 127
	NUMBER	NUMBER	NUMBER	NUMBER
0	-	-	1	1
1	3	3	3	1
2	1	1	1	2
3	2	2	2	2
4	3	2	11	8
5	9	10	24	26
6	0	11	17	24
7	5	2	16	18
8	1	1	14	12
9	5	3	9	9
10	-	-	12	9
11	-	-	6	6
12	-	1	-	5
13	-	-	1	3
14	-	-	2	1
19	1	-	-	-
23	1	-	-	-
	MEAN = 6.2	MEAN = 5.4	MEAN = 6.7	MEAN = 7.0

The table shows that both black and white offenders experienced a greater length of stay in the second half of fiscal year 1978, than in the first. The average length of stay for blacks increased from 6.2 months in July - December 1977, to 6.7 months during January - June 1978. The length of stay for white offenders increased from 5.4 months to 7.0 months. The total increase in the average stay for both black and white offenders was 2.1 months. However, it should be noted that there were a substantial number of missing cases in the data for 1977. For this reason, the conclusions that can be drawn are limited.

Together with the fluctuations in the release rate, the increase in the average length of stay has contributed to the growth in the juvenile population. However, it is not possible from the present analysis to determine the proportion of the population increase which is due to an increase in the average length of stay or to a decrease in the release rate. It can be said, though, that these factors exert a dynamic influence on the confined population.

#### Staff Survey

Youth Region personnel were interviewed to gather staff perceptions of the population under study. Interviews were conducted with administrative, supervisory, and cottage life personnel from the Reception and Diagnostic Center and the six learning centers. Personnel associated with the Rehabilitative School Authority (RSA) were also interviewed where possible.

During each interview respondents were asked to reply to a series of questions (see Appendix A). The questions were designed to focus attention on certain issues and were used primarily as a framework upon which further dialogue could be initiated. Therefore, responses and comments could be recorded and compared among the various institutions in the youth region.

The following tables contain the data recorded during the administration of the questionnaire. Additional comments offered by respondents are addressed in conjunction with the analysis of the questionnaire results. There were 136 personal interviews conducted.

The first table provides a breakdown by length of service in years for all respondents by sex.

TABLE 3: RESPONDENTS LENGTH OF SERVICE

N=136

	1-3 yrs.	4-6 yrs.	7-9 yrs.	10 yrs.-over	Total	% of N
Male	31	32	25	17	105	77%
Female	10	9	7	5	31	23%
Total	41	41	32	22	136	100%

The table shows that there were more male respondents than female. The majority of respondents had 1-3 and 4-6 years of service and each represented 30% of the total group. The remaining categories (7-9; 10-Over) represented 24% and 16% of the total group respectively.

The next table corresponds with questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 of the survey questionnaire (see Appendix A). The table deals with verbally and physically aggressive and assaultive behavior by juveniles. A distinction was made between aggressive and assaultive behavior. Verbal or physical aggression was defined as "hostile, destructive, or injurious behavior" directed toward staff and peers. Assaultive behavior was defined as a "violent verbal or physical attack."

TABLE 4: RESPONDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF AGGRESSIVE AND ASSAULTIVE BEHAVIOR

N=136

	More Verbally Aggressive		More Physically Aggressive		More Verbally Assaultive		More Physically Assaultive	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	106	78%	71	52%	100	74%	60	44%
Disagree	30	22%	64	47%	35	26%	76	56%
No Opinion	0	-	1	1%	1	1%	0	-
Total	136	100%	136	100%	136	100%	136	100%

The table shows that respondents perceive the current population as being more verbally and physically aggressive than past populations. However, the population is viewed as being more prone to verbal aggression (78% agree) than physical aggression (52% agree).

The current population is also viewed as being more verbally assaultive than former populations with 74% of the respondents in agreement. This is sharply contrasted with respondents perceptions regarding physically assaultive behavior. The majority of respondents (56%) disagreed with the notion that juveniles were more physically assaultive than past populations. However, it is interesting to note the breakdown by length of service for those respondents in agreement. Here, 66% of the respondents with less than 3 years of service, 44% with 4 to 6 years, and 28% with service over 7 years agreed that juveniles were more physically assaultive.



The next table corresponds to questions 6, 7, and 8 of the survey questionnaire (see Appendix A). The table deals with staff control over the population, awareness of legal rights by juveniles and the impact of reorganization on the population. Control relates to the reaction by juveniles to positive staff supervision. Legal rights refer to an awareness of formal procedures such as due process hearings.

TABLE 5: RESPONDENTS PERCEPTIONS ON CONTROL, AWARENESS OF LEGAL RIGHTS, AND EFFECTS OF REORGANIZATION

N=136

	More Difficult To Control		More Aware of Legal Rights		Population Affected By Department Reorganization	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agree	92	68%	103	76%	32	24%
Disagree	42	31%	29	21%	62	46%
No Opinion	2	1%	4	3%	42	31%
Total	136	100%	136	100%	136	100%

The table shows that the majority of respondents (68%) perceive the current population as being more difficult to control than past populations. Many respondents lamented the fact that they could no longer 'physically' touch a juvenile except in dire self-defense. As one project supervisor noted, "...they (the juveniles) know you can't touch them so they just keep cussing

you and daring you. They know that if you touch them they can get you fired." This comment was also offered to support the responses dealing with verbal aggression and assault. Also the removal of the "special force" or work detail from the staff's arsenal of treatment alternatives was frequently given as a reason for difficulty in controlling the population.

Next, the table shows that 76% of the respondents agree that juveniles are becoming more aware of their legal rights as compared to former populations. However, this appears to be more of an awareness on the part of the juveniles as to what they can do and what can be done to them, rather than any specific legal knowledge. Many respondents commented that the juveniles were becoming more "system-wise," rather than aware of their legal rights.

Lastly, the table shows that the majority of respondents (46%) disagreed that the departmental reorganization had affected the juvenile population. This question produced the greatest range of disparity among respondents with 24% in agreement, 46% in disagreement, and 31% with no opinion. It should be noted that in some cases respondents were not aware that a departmental reorganization had taken place.



### General Observations

The juvenile population study included on-site visits to Barrett, Hanover, Bon Air, Beaumont, Natural Bridge, and Appalachian learning centers. General observations concerning staff, programs, facilities, and statistical recordkeeping were recorded at each of the learning centers. This was done in an effort to identify general conditions or problems affecting the learning center population.

One problem observed at most centers was that the staff-to-student ratio was disproportionately low in the housing units or cottages. This generally amounted to single-coverage in a dormitory situation with one project supervisor attempting to oversee the activities of usually between 20 to 30 students. In these instances activity was generally restricted to the television area where the supervisor could maintain visual surveillance over the entire group.

Closely related to this was the problem of staff turnover. The turnover rate is suspected as being highest in the "Training School Project Supervisor" position. This position is roughly equivalent to that of a "correctional officer" in the adult system. Personnel in this position have the greatest degree of contact with the juveniles and, therefore, often the highest degree of frustration. This is particularly evident when housing unit populations rise above manageable levels. Moreover, those learning centers experiencing the highest turnover rates also complained of having the greatest difficulty with the population.

Another problem found to be affecting the learning center population was overcrowding in programs. All of the learning centers have various types of behavior modification programs as well as academic and vocational programs operated by the Rehabilitative School Authority (RSA).

Program effectiveness is reduced when overcrowding occurs often adversely affecting the participants and increasing their length of stay. For example, students with "identification" problems may be staffed to a personal interaction active/passive program. If overcrowding occurs the identification problem can be heightened in response to the increased pressures and competition for attention.

The overcrowding problem is not limited to cottage programs. In some RSA programs overcrowding was observed to be affecting program effectiveness. For instance, in one vocational shop there were 23 students being supervised by one RSA instructor. The majority of the instructor's time was spent not in teaching, but in making constant head counts and attempting to prevent students from leaving their assigned areas.

Overcrowding in some of the learning center housing units can be directly traced to the renovation of existing facilities. Learning centers undergoing various renovations have been forced to diffuse the displaced students throughout the general population. This, of course, may have a disruptive influence on the continuity of the affected cottages which must absorb

the displaced students. However, it is recognized that the renovation of facilities will impact housing unit populations until all such projects are completed.

Problems regarding statistical recordkeeping were also noted throughout the Youth Region. Although statistical recordkeeping does not directly affect the juvenile learning center population, it does affect any attempts at studying that population.

Problems relating to the Direct Care Information System are currently being addressed and therefore will not be mentioned here. However, a survey of institutional records, notably the population registers or "big books," showed sizeable gaps and/or inconsistencies in the figures. These books are supposed to be maintained daily to show all in/out action occurring at the institution. Also, the daily population is supposed to be recorded and the figures tallied at the end of each month to compute the average daily population for the institution.

The problems with the population registers most probably coincide with turnovers in the clerical position normally responsible for maintaining the information. Nevertheless, the point here is that the information should be maintained accurately and consistently and office personnel made aware of its importance.

### Summary and Conclusions

The juvenile population was analyzed in terms of commitment and release rates and average length of stay for children confined to learning centers. The analysis demonstrated how the population had experienced growth despite declining court commitments.

The data which were presented covered a 19 month period for commitments and releases and a 12 month period for average length of stay. The data indicated that the commitment rate has exceeded the release rate by 5% for the overall 19 month data period. The average length of stay reflects a 2.1 month increase within the 12 month period. These factors working in concert were identified as being primarily responsible for increased learning center populations.

A staff survey conducted during the population study included 136 personal interviews with personnel throughout the youth region. During each interview respondents replied to a series of questions. Additional comments regarding the survey questionnaire were also recorded.

The results of the survey indicate that the juvenile population is perceived as being more verbally and physically aggressive than former populations. The juveniles were also perceived to be more verbally assaultive, but less physically assaultive (prone to violent physical attacks) than past populations. Furthermore, the juveniles were held to be more difficult to control and more aware of their legal rights. Lastly, the Department's reorganization was felt to have had no effect on the confined population.

Additional comments supplied by respondents indicate general dissatisfaction with the "hands off" policy on juveniles. The removal of the "special force" or work detail as a treatment alternative was noted as contributing to control problems in the learning centers. Although not specifically documented, it was widely held that the influx of emotionally and mentally disturbed juveniles had significantly affected the learning centers population. Finally, there was general praise throughout the Youth region for the ongoing implementation of the Learning Environments Action Plan (L.E.A.P.) programs.

General observations concerning conditions or problems affecting the juvenile population were also noted. Staff-to-student ratios in housing units and staff turnover were noted as specific problems. Program overcrowding and renovation of facilities were considered closely related. Routine statistical recordkeeping and reporting was generally found to be in need of attention and improvement.

As regards specific recommendations, it is suggested that the commitment and release rate for the confined learning center population be monitored on a monthly basis. Dramatic changes in either rate could thus draw immediate attention and impacts on the system could then be calculated. Similarly, the average length of stay for juveniles should be monitored at the learning center level. When it is found that a student is remaining beyond the normal program period the underlying causes should be identified and the case prioritized with emphasis on moving the student through the system.

Concerning staff related problems it is recommended that double-coverage be maintained in all housing units during prime evening hours. This could permit an increase in structured activities and ease the burden placed on project supervisors. Furthermore, it is suggested that the staff turnover rate for the entire youth region be specifically addressed in a separate study. Such a study should include a comprehensive review of training requirements for all personnel, especially those employed as Training School Project Supervisors. It was noted that in some cases Youth Region personnel complained of not receiving adequate "restraint training" which should be included in an overall training program.

Concerning program overcrowding it is recognized that this is an inevitable fall-out of institutional overcrowding. Therefore, any reductions experienced in the learning center population will have a similar affect on program overcrowding.

It may be possible to slightly improve program overcrowding in some learning centers by interrupting the transfer of juveniles pending special placements. It was generally observed that students in this category demonstrated a somewhat "laissez-faire" attitude toward confinement and appeared less motivated in the learning and behavior programs than regular students. However, it is recommended that this be thoroughly studied as some drawbacks are evident, e.g. many placements are never realized.



As noted in the text, program overcrowding in housing units at some learning centers can be traced to the renovation of existing facilities. This occurs when the displaced students are diffused throughout the general population. This is recognized as an ongoing problem that will impact housing unit populations until the projects are completed. Therefore, no specific remedy is offered.

Regarding statistical recordkeeping, it is suggested that field clerical personnel receive written procedures for the maintenance and reporting of routine statistical tabulations. The procedures should be uniform throughout the youth region and backup personnel trained to maintain the information in the absence of regularly assigned personnel. Furthermore, all production reports should be catalogued with a description of each report and the source of the information contained therein. A distinction should also be made between the statistical requirements necessary to accommodate and support the Department's published reports and those necessary for routine institutional affairs.

/gfc/9/79

#### APPENDIX A

#### Staff Survey Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1). How long have you been employed with the Department of Corrections?
- 2). Are children committed to learning centers now becoming more verbally aggressive toward staff and peers?
- 3). Are children committed to learning centers now becoming more physically aggressive toward staff and peers?
- 4). Are children committed to learning centers now becoming more verbally assaultive toward staff and peers?
- 5). Are children committed to learning centers now becoming more physically assaultive toward staff and peers?
- 6). Are children committed to learning centers now becoming more difficult to control?
- 7). Are children committed to learning centers now becoming more aware of their legal rights?
- 8). Has the Department's reorganization affected the population problem as previously defined?

**END**