

## Overview of Learning Centers—Guide for Principals

### **Definition of a Learning Center**

Learning Centers are established within existing DOE schools. Each Center is a specialized program organized around a single theme or subject area. Each Center is expected to provide innovative and excellent opportunities for learning, using existing resources at the host school and tapping additional resources in the surrounding community. Learning Centers are open to all public school students regardless of district or school boundaries. The sole criterion for admission is an interest in acquiring or developing particular talents and skills available at the Learning Center.

Programs offered at each Learning Center are expected to enrich and expand learning experiences by introducing new or formerly unavailable courses or sets of activities: by providing adjunct enrichment experiences through community involvement; and/or by providing new and expanded experiences by integrating existing courses to form a program of study.

Learning Centers are expected to provide equal educational opportunity through truly open choices for public school parents and their children. The Centers are not to serve as special programs for students who do not succeed in regular schools, nor are they intended to serve only the very bright or most gifted students. Centers are further prohibited from excluding or segregating students because of race, financial or social status, academic achievement, or previous educational experience. Admission to entry level courses must be open to all, based only on interest and space. There may be exceptions to this open admission standard that depend on the theme of a Center. For example, a performing arts Center may hold theatrical auditions or a foreign languages Center may require a prerequisite language course for advanced language courses. Learning Centers are expected to provide automatic geographic exceptions (GE) to students who request them. Final decisions for GE are at the discretion of the school's principal.

### **Philosophy**

A Center's primary strength is its ability to stimulate and bring together students, parents, staff, and principals around a common theme. This bond is expected to produce high levels of student achievement, parent participation, and administrative support. This close association should also foster increased student motivation. Teachers are also highly motivated with increased levels of job satisfaction.

### **Vision**

Expand educational opportunities to those with special talents and interests, provide public school parents with new choices on the kinds and quality of education they want for their children, and serve as models of educational excellence in the community

### **Mission**

Learning Centers will equalize as well as expand educational choices, concentrating specialized equipment and skilled teachers on a single campus, in order to broaden opportunities for students with rare tastes and talents to choose from the specialized offerings of the Centers.

### **Description of a Learning Center**

1. A Center will be organized by subject area, career, or special interest theme, taught in a distinctive way, and open to all students who qualify and want to enroll.
2. A Center will feature programs that are tailored to students whose needs, under the existing structure, would not be met because of unavailability of specialized staff, facilities or other resources, and are uneven year-to-year due to student demands for the programs.
3. A Center will offer programs to enrich as well as expand the learning experiences of students. Enrichment means providing new experiences to students wanting to step up their knowledge and skills in a course (e.g., Beginning Acting) while still enrolled in it. Expansion means offering advanced-level courses to students wanting to extend their range of knowledge and skills after successfully completing all of the basic courses offered by the school. It may also mean introducing a

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course, not now offered by the school, through standard course exception procedures. Programs may consist of credit and/or non-credit courses and activities.

4. A Center will feature innovative teaching, supplementary resources, community collaboration, and students with particular talents and interests.
5. A Center will stress excellence and innovation as appropriate and expect students, parents, and staff to commit themselves to those qualities.
6. A Center will develop strong ties and actively work with high-quality and technologically advanced resources in the community (e.g., theaters, community colleges, organizations, and businesses).
7. A Center will collaborate with other LC to share resources efficiently. Needless duplication of resources will be avoided while every effort will be made to reach the highest level of student use.
8. A Center will provide students and parents alike with choices that are truly free and open. It will not exclude or segregate students because of race, financial or social status, ability, and/or previous educational experiences for entry level courses.

### **Quality Program**

An exemplary LC has curriculum and classrooms that serve as a model as indicated by such things as:

1. Effective teaching that treats students as active learners
2. Infusion of up-to-date technology, high tech learning activities and projects appropriate to theme/program
3. Multi-disciplinary, integrative activities and approach both between disciplines and within disciplines in the design of the program and courses
4. Courses which form a coherent program in their range and variety
5. Use of subject area standards that pertain to the theme/program
6. Use of multiple classroom assessment strategies
7. Excellent facilities and resources suited to theme/program or use of excellent facilities and resources off the school campus where necessary to maximize the use of existing facilities and resources
8. Sufficient space, equipment, and materials.

### **Positive Impact on Host School**

An exemplary LCs should demonstrate a positive impact on the host school by:

1. School's acceptance and support of Learning Center's program
2. Integration of the center's program with the school's course offerings

### **Expanded Educational Choices**

An exemplary LC expands and enriches educational choices as shown by:

1. Program offerings that do not duplicate mainstream curriculum in the school
2. Learning experiences which are not already being offered via existing or traditional means and are unique learning experiences that go beyond that of traditional curriculum
3. Innovative teaching strategies and approaches.

### **Active School/Community Collaboration**

An exemplary LC actively pursues school/community collaboration by:

1. Use of high quality and/or technologically advanced community resources
2. Participation of other public schools/students (e.g. number of schools, geographic exceptions) given geographic constraints
3. Services offered to the community
4. Articulation within the school, complex, and/or complex area
5. Articulation with community colleges, businesses, community professionals and professional associations relevant to the theme/program of the center
6. Establishment of good working relationships indicated by parents and/or community people who willingly volunteer.