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**Preliminary Report of
the
Learn & Earn
Graduation
Achievement Program**

**Report to the
Legislature
2002**

**As required by
M.S. §124D.32
Subdivision 9**

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Upon request, this report can be made available in alternative formats.

COST OF REPORT PREPARATION

Minnesota Statutes §3.197 requires the following:

“A report to the legislature must contain, at the beginning of the report, the cost of preparing the report, including any costs incurred by another agency or another level of government.”

The following provides estimated costs incurred in the preparation of this report.

This report required the collection of information which the Department of Children, Families & Learning does not collect as part of its normal business functions. It was therefore necessary to gather and analyze information in order to prepare this report. The cost of preparing this report includes estimates of the Department of Children, Families & Learning information collection costs as well as the estimated costs of the providers of this information.

Special funding was not appropriated to cover the costs of preparing this report.

The following is an estimate of the cost incurred by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning:

\$ 7,657.95

Staff from local program providers were also involved in the preparation of this report. The following is an estimate of the cost incurred by these agencies:

\$ 2,216.96

Total estimated cost for preparing this report:

\$ 9,874.91

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Executive Summary
Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program Preliminary Report
Years One through Three: July 1998 to June 2001.

The Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program, as stated in *Minnesota Statutes 2001*, 124D.32, provides individually tailored opportunities for academic enrichment, community service, and personal development to a cohort of at-risk youth who started as ninth graders in the 1998-1999 school year. The purpose of the program is to aid local communities to decrease youth crime by improving the secondary educational success and increasing the post-secondary educational opportunities of low-income high school students who reside in and attend schools in communities that have a high level of poverty and juvenile crime. Outcome data is being collected on four indicators: attendance, suspension and dropouts, academic achievement, and juvenile crime. A more complete report will be submitted at the conclusion of the program, when it is expected most students will graduate. The cohort will be followed for two years after graduation to determine longer-term impacts, including enrollment in post-secondary education and establishment of careers.

Highlights from the report covering the first three years:

Attendance:

- *Staying in school:* Students are staying in school with encouragement of program directors who act as advocates, facilitate positive peer groups, and help to ensure that students find appropriate educational placements suited to their developing career interests and educational needs.

Dropouts and Suspension Prevention:

- *Returning to school:* Directors seek to maintain regular contact with students who do leave school, further encouraging students to return to school and continue their education. Of students who have left school, three students have already completed their GED by year 3.
- *Dropout rate is lower:* Dropout rates positively compare to the dropout rates for similar subsets of the Minnesota student population. Six out of eight programs had a lower dropout rate, and several programs reported no dropouts.
- *Conflict resolution skills:* Conflict resolution skills are taught and practiced as students meet regularly with other participants for academic support and service projects.

Academic Achievement:

- Eleven students graduated in year three. At least three students have already gone on to post-secondary education and one is a National Merit Finalist. Forty-three percent of students earned more credits in year three than in year two. The greater number of

credits earned and the increased difficulty of the classes taken may account, in part, for a decline in Grade Point Average for 73% of students from year 2 to year 3.

Juvenile Crime Prevention:

- *School involvement:* Learn and Earn gives students encouragement to participate in the life of the school through extra-curricular and service activities. As an indirect result of increased involvement in the school, one of the students was elected homecoming king of his high school, which the director says “never would have happened without Learn and Earn.”
- *Community service:* Service projects in the school and communities give students the opportunity to learn how they can make positive contributions and experience a sense of belonging instead of alienation.
- *After-school programming:* Students are involved in enrichment and service opportunities supervised by a caring adult and in a positive peer-group setting. Without Learn and Earn, most students would be in unsupervised settings with a far greater potential for criminal activity.

Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program Preliminary Report

Years One through Three: July 1998 to June 2001.

I get to do things I've never done before. I like the people and you challenge me to be a better student and think about my future. (Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program student from the Minneapolis Urban League writing to the program leader).

Recipe for an at-risk youth: Take a young person growing up in a troubled family where schools may be mistrusted. Add learning disabilities, uncertain economics that make it hard to have a stable home life, poverty, deep-seated anger, frustration and alienation. Don't forget to consider the developmental stage of all teenagers – figuring out how to make good choices in the adult world of work and adult relationships.

While challenging, the rewards of working with at-risk youth are great, both for the students and for the wider community. The Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program offers the opportunity for dedicated adult staff to work closely with youth by helping them find avenues to success by identifying their strengths, addressing their weaknesses and helping them to find their callings in life.

Program Description:

The Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program

Modeled after the Ford Foundation's and U.S. Department of Labor's successful "Quantum Opportunities Program" (QOP) ninth grade students in the Learn and Earn program were selected in the first year and continue in the program for four years.

Eligibility criteria include:

- household income at or below federal poverty level, or
- recommendation by teacher, community or family member

Students are monitored for a total of six years in order to determine long-term impact, for example, if they continue into post-secondary education. Students must complete 250 hours per year in each of the following areas: academic enrichment, community service, and cultural/personal development. To encourage responsible participation, students receive stipends based on the number of hours worked in the three component areas. To encourage further post-secondary training, money is reserved for paying a portion of post-secondary education costs.

The longer-range outcomes of the Quantum Opportunity Program are impressive and, while Minnesota has only completed its third year, similar progress may be found in the Minnesota program. For example, already at the end of year 3, eleven out of 157 students have graduated from high school. Three from the Minneapolis Urban League, have continued directly into college.

At the end of its six-year period, comparison of QOP participants with a control group shows:

- QOP members are more likely to be high school graduates: 63% of QOP members have graduated from high school compared to 42% of the control group.
- QOP members are more likely to go on to post-secondary schools: 42% compared to 16% of the control group.
- QOP members are less likely to be high school dropouts: 23% compared to 50% of the control group.
- QOP members are less likely to become teen parents: 24% compared to 38% of the control group.

Cost-benefit analysis of QOP is impressive. Based on projected increased earnings (resulting from attaining a degree from either a two or four-year college), reduced child-bearing and welfare costs and reduced criminal costs, the QOP evaluators determined that taxpayers save \$3.68 for each dollar invested in QOP. If only one third of the students

attain post-secondary degrees, the benefit-cost ratio is \$3.04 for each program dollar spent. (Hahn, A. *The Quantum Opportunities Program*. Brandeis University, 1995:9).

The Minnesota Grantees:

The eight grantees include both schools and community organizations in rural, suburban and urban areas. Because of the areas served, certain grantees involve primarily members belonging to a specific ethnic group. For example, the African American Mentoring program at St. Paul Central High School focuses on African Americans and recent Asian immigrants. Cloquet and Red Lake programs focus on Native Americans. In West St. Paul, the Guadalupe Alternative Program (GAP) serves predominately Hispanic youth. The YMCA of Metropolitan Minneapolis is the largest program – with three different sites. One of these sites is predominately European-American and two are predominately African-American. The YMCA had an additional site serving predominantly East African immigrants which was closed in year two. Students from that site were accommodated into other YMCA programs.

Program Activities:

(1) Academic enrichment (basic education competency skills)

Help with school-work is the primary activity for all programs, usually scheduled for two- to three-hour blocks every day after school. After-school sessions provide help with homework, study skills and preparation for standard tests. Students are encouraged to think of themselves as future post-secondary students through periodic visits to post-secondary institutions and through the development of mentor relationships with college students who assist them in understanding their homework. Exposure to a wide variety of career possibilities inspires students and serves to further encourage them to take their

Chart 1: # academic hours (total numbers, population, average per student)

	YMCA	Carver Scott Coop	African American Mentoring	GAP	Mpls Urban League	Blackduck High School	Cloquet Public Schools	Red Lake High School
By the end of Year One	9837 n=93 avg. = 105.8	3368 n=30 avg. = 112.3	3620 n=29 avg. = 124.8	1609 n=25 avg. = 64.4	2497 n=25 avg. = 99.9	1371.5 n=9 avg. = 152.4	4830 n=23 avg. = 210.0	1695 n=25 avg. = 67.8
End Year Two	13010 n=87 avg. = 149.5	4424 n=23 avg. = 192.3	6780 n=29 avg. = 233.8	2497 n=15 avg. = 166.5	3392 n=21 avg. = 161.5	1175 n=7 avg. = 167.9	3701 n=25 avg. = 148.0	1948 n=17 avg. = 114.5
End Year Three	6933 n=57 avg. = 121.6	4210 n=20 avg. = 210.5	2980 n=26 avg. = 114.6	1522 n=15 avg. = 101.5	727 n=17 avg. = 42.8	2712 n=7 avg. = 387.4	3701 n=19 avg. = 194.8	1971 n=18 avg. = 109.5

studies seriously. In year three, a core part of the after-school enrichment component was to prepare students for the ACT and SAT tests.

(1) Service to the community

Learn and Earn has brought community service to the forefront. It is a return to an old practice in Native American culture of giving service, especially to elders. (interview with Red Lake program director.)

Among the many challenges facing at-risk youth are attitudinal ones including having no hope for the future, lacking a positive connection with their community and not believing in their ability to make a positive impact. Through the service component, students are discovering the joy of giving and of feeling that they have a positive role to play in their communities. In the survey questions “what do you like best about Learn and Earn” a common response was that they liked to help others.

The range of service opportunities is wide. Students tutor younger children and educate their peers on public health issues such as chemical dependency and violence prevention. They assist the elderly, build houses with Habitat for Humanity and serve at

Chart 2: # service hours (total numbers, population, average per student)

	YMCA	Carver Scott Coop	African American Mentoring	GAP	Mpls Urban League	Blackduck High School	Cloquet Public Schools	Red Lake High School
By the end of Year One	7753 n=93 av = 83.4	2853 n=30 avg.= 95.1	2132 n=29 avg.= 73.5	1143 n=25 avg.= 45.7	3571 n=25 avg.= 142.8	1001.5 n=9 avg.= 111.3	3191 n=23 avg.= 138.7	1205 n=25 avg.= 48.2
End Year Two	10390 n=87 avg.= 119.4	3747 n=23 avg.= 162.9	7160 n=29 avg.= 246.9	1136 n=15 avg.= 75.7	4869 n=21 avg.= 231.9	709 n=7 avg.= 101.3	2445 n=25 avg.= 97.8	3008 n=17 avg.= 177.0
End Year Three	5556 n=57 avg.= 97.5	3573 n=20 avg.= 178.7	4378 n=26 avg.= 168.4	647 n=15 avg.= 43.1	3500 n=17 avg.= 205.9	1529 n=7 avg.= 218.4	955 n=19 avg.= 50.3	3173 n=18 avg.= 176.3

shelters for the homeless and for victims of domestic abuse. One program reports that their group no longer has to search for opportunities to serve. Instead, they are often called upon by community organizations because of their good reputation for helping others. Students are becoming known in their communities as resources and have begun to receive recognition for their efforts. At the Northwest YMCA, one student was awarded the Youth Citizen of the Year Award by her local YMCA

Blackduck mentions that their students have become accustomed to volunteering on an annual basis at community events. Their volunteer role has apparently become part of their self-identity and the director suspects that they will continue to participate in these events well beyond their graduation from high school. As we look forward to

monitoring the students for all six years, continued integration into the community through voluntary service may well be one of the outcomes.

Cultural enrichment and personal development, (includes adult mentoring; participation in community events; developing life skills for use in the home, workplace, and community; and learning to set goals, manage time, and make appropriate behavior choices in various social situations.)

The programs offer students opportunities to become aware of their rich cultural heritage and to become involved in its perpetuation through participation in cultural events

Chart 3: # cultural/personal development hours (total numbers, population, average per student)

	YMCA	Carver Scott Coop	African American Mentoring	GAP	Mpls Urban League	Blackduck High School	Cloquet Public Schools	Red Lake High School
By the end of Year One	8115 n=93 avg. = 87.3	3190 n=30 avg.= 106.3	652 n=29 avg.= 22.5	3571 n=25 avg.= 142.8	3571 n=25 avg.= 142.8	1802 n=9 avg.= 200.2	3191 n=23 avg.= 138.7	4472 n=25 avg.= 178.9
End Year Two	14558 n=87 avg.= 167.3	4189 n=23 avg.= 182.2	3232 n=29 avg.= 111.4	2634 n=15 avg.= 175.6	4869 n=21 avg.= 231.9	469 n=7 avg.= 67.0	2445 n=25 avg.= 97.8	5466 n=17 avg.= 321.6
End Year Three	8594 n=57 avg.= 150.8	4605 n=20 avg.= 230.3	4658 n=26 avg.= 179.2	1566 n=15 avg.= 104.4	3500 n=17 avg.= 205.9	1184 n=7 avg.= 169.1	2148 n=19 avg.= 113.1	4330 n=18 avg.= 240.6

such as pow-wows and annual community events. Cloquet students went to Seattle to attend a five-day national conference for Native American youth where they learned about different Native American cultures and attended training in leadership and conflict resolution. Upon their return, they gave a presentation on the conference to the Cloquet School Board.

Another aspect of the cultural enrichment/personal development activities involves teaching students financial management skills which they are putting to use in managing their stipends. A program in North Minneapolis has begun mentoring relationships with the adult members of an African American investment club. Members of the club encourage the students to believe in a future and to make investments based on careful research. Minneapolis Urban League students planned a retreat this past year on topics of their own choosing including time management, test taking, identifying your learning style, and career development assessment.

Program outcomes:

Methodology:

Data on program outcomes for the Minnesota program come primarily from grantee biannual reports supplemented by site visits and interviews. At the end of year two, an evaluator was contracted to create a common tool for the monitoring of each participant's progress, and to analyze the data (see appendix). Thus, comparative data exists for years two and three. Programs are responsible for collecting data on the four major outcomes (attendance, suspensions/expulsions, academic achievement, and crime prevention). However, the ability of grantees to collect data using a control group varies according to the degree to which they have access to general school records. Thus, while all programs should have submitted control group data along with data on their Learn and Earn students, this was not done on a systematic basis across all programs. Therefore, information from the CFL database, in particular the most recent high school completion study, data on at-risk youth, and data from the high schools which host Learn and Earn programs, were used as sources for comparison.

Key outcome in the first three years: the consistency of a caring adult

A key outcome of the first three years of the grant is how Learn and Earn program directors contribute to the maturing process by being a consistent source of support to students. In essence, they supply what the Search Institute describes in its research on resilient youth: a caring adult. In the student comment section of the yearly student progress report form, the question is asked, “what do you like best about Learn and Earn?” The responses are, overwhelmingly, that they like their director.

The program directors are able to “go the mile” helping students to learn how to get along with each other, manage anger, resolve conflicts respectfully. They work with the students to find ways to nurture their budding career interests, help teach social skills, and may mediate conflicts between students and their classroom teachers, etc. In the few cases where students have children, the directors have arranged baby showers (2 cases) and have driven students to their children’s medical appointments. There is some evidence suggesting less positive impact in programs where the director position changed.

More exciting results are expected next year when we know how many students have graduated and have gone on to post-secondary institutions. For those who do not follow the anticipated path of high school graduation, it will be interesting to see what “seeds” may have been planted that might emerge at a later date. Already, we have some indications from those students whose circumstances have caused them to leave Learn and Earn. For example, three former Learn and Earn students who left (one because of having a baby, and two due to incarceration) have not forsaken their education and have

received their GEDs – which suggests that, somewhere along the way, they were impressed with the importance of receiving an education.

The Quantum Opportunities Project evaluation noted that improvements in students' academic and social behavior begin to be apparent only by about the third year. They write that it is in the first three years that the trusting relationship is built between the director and the students (*Evaluation of the Quantum Opportunities Program: Did the program work?* Hahn, et al. 1994:3-4). The story of one student suggests this dynamic is true for the Minnesota program as well: in his student progress reflection form for year two, the student reports that his grade point average is “not good,” he missed a lot of school (45 days), and that he had lost credits for being late to class. However, he also writes that, by the end of year two:

I started getting up earlier for school so I could be on time. And I enrolled in a new school for a fresh start during third trimester. (Notice the adoption of learning readiness skills (learning to get up early), and the behind-the-scenes work of the program director in finding a more appropriate educational placement.)

The student said that what he appreciated the most about the program was:

The experience, and the help I get. And I like that I didn't get kick[ed] out of the program, even though I didn't do everything. (Notice the references to the opportunities for experience offered through Learn and Earn, and the unconditional support by the program director)

The program director comments:

School/academic achievement has been very challenging for this student. Yet, this student has decided to continue to go to school, earn his high school diploma and go to college. He is enrolled in a new school and is looking forward to a more positive experience and outcome. I have offered this student the opportunity to attend the Urban League's annual college tour and he declined both last year and this year. However, the student stated to me several times, that he is going on the college tour next year (spring 2001). He reminds me almost each time I see him.

By the end of year three, this same student not only went on the college tour, but had earned enough credits to graduate early. He continues to stay in contact with the program as he works full-time and explores further study for a career in health education. The director continues to be a source of support and encouragement for this young man whose life continues to be difficult through no fault of his own: this past summer his younger brother was killed in a drive-by shooting.

Hopefully the above remarks introduce the reader of this report to a sense of how Learn and Earn is touching the lives of its participants in positive ways that are difficult to enumerate.

The specific goals for the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program include the following:

(1) Increase school attendance:

As mentioned earlier, control group data is not available for all programs. However, Guadalupe Alternative Program (GAP) was able to report that 82% of Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program students maintained an 80% average daily attendance vs. 46% of their control group.

The attendance rate chart indicates that the Learn in Earn program is successful at keeping students in school. The data show that the Learn and Earn students at least match and in some cases *exceed* the attendance rate for the general Minnesota student population. The *2001 Minnesota Education Yearbook* writes that for the general (which includes all students, not just “at-risk”) student population, attendance rates are highest in the early grades and drop slightly in the higher grades:

Rates stay at or above 93% through grade ten, but are lower in 11th and 12 grades.
2001 Minnesota Education Yearbook :42.

The Learn and Earn attendance data show a similar tendency to decline in the higher grades. Why did attendance decline from year two to year three? A closer look reveals

Chart 4: Attendance¹

	YMCA	Carver Scott Coop	African American Mentoring	GAP	Mpls Urban League	Blackduck High School	Cloquet Public Schools	Red Lake High School
By the end of Year One	26 class periods per student	88.1%	Not available	75% of students at 80% or higher	Not available	96.8%	95%	90.1%
End Year Two	46 class periods per student	82.2%	95%	82% of students at 80% or higher	80.2%	87.9%	93.4%	94.4%
End Year Three	34 class periods per student	93.8% ¹	92%	50% of students at 80% or higher		86.0%	89.5%	95.1%

that as students become older, they begin work related to their career interests. Indeed, a focus of the program is helping students to learn how to balance their work, school and social activities. Also, students with low attendance were usually in the process of working with staff to find a school that best suited their educational needs and career interests. Thus, the hope is that attendance for these students will improve in year four. In describing one young man in the African American Mentor Program, whose attendance declined from year two (3 absences in the second semester) to year three (99 absences for the entire year three) the director writes:

¹ This figure is for 12 students where absences were recorded. For remaining students data is not available. For six students, attendance was so low that they were dropped from school. For the remaining student, attendance was not recorded because the student moved.

[The Student] is a very bright, intelligent level-headed young man. This year he has grown into a mature, responsible young adult. He has set his priorities straight, exhibiting a strong focus on school and taking action in planning for his future. He accepted an internship position with 3M through a school-related program which has given him the opportunity to do some career exploration. When he first began his internship with 3M, he had difficulty balancing work and school as his social studies grade began to drop a bit. However we were able to come up with a system that worked well for him and got him back on track.

While attendance declined overall, the number of students with better attendance in year 3 than in year 2 actually *increased*.

Chart 5: Comparison of attendance Year 2 to Year 3 (n=126)

worsened (decreased)	no change	improved (increased)
33%	10%	57%

(2) Decrease school dropouts and suspensions

The following chart shows the numbers of dropouts for years 2 and 3.

Technically, students don't "drop out" until they are 16, and therefore year 1 data are not included. The dropout rate for year 2 is 7.9%. The dropout rate for year 3 is 9.3%. Please note that the decrease in total number of participants from year 2 to year 3 is due primarily, not to dropouts, but to students who transfer to different schools.

With the exception of a few programs, control group data was not collected in a systematic fashion in the early years of the program. This restricts the ability to compare Learn and Earn results to students in the same schools with similar risk factors who did not participate. Blackduck was able to make the following comparison between its Learn and Earn students and their 98-99 9th grade classmates. Out of 75 of those 9th grade students enrolled in 1998-99, 14 (18.6%) have dropped out by the end of year 3. None of these students were Learn and Earn students.

Chart 6: Dropouts in Years 2 and 3

	YMCA	Carver Scott Coop	African American Mentoring	GAP	Mpls Urban League	Blackduck High School	Cloquet Public Schools	Red Lake High School
Total # students at start of Year 2	87	23	29	15	21	7	25	25
Year 2 dropouts (dropped and did not return in same year)	3 3.4%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	5 23.8%	0 0%	2 8.0%	8 ² 32.0%
Year 2 returns in same year	1		2	0	1	0	0	0
Students GED			1					
Total # students at start of Year 3³	57	20	26	15	17	7	19	16
Year Three dropouts	4 7.0%	3 15%	0 0%	0 0%	2 11.8%	0 0%	1 5.3%	7 38.9%
Year 3 returns in same year	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0
GED		1	1	1				

Most students leaving Learn and Earn did not also leave school. Students transferred to other schools because of family reasons or in order to seek a more appropriate educational setting (for example treatment or area learning center programs). The director makes an attempt to stay in regular contact with those leaving the program for any reason. This contact helps encourage those that do drop out to return. In year 2, 18 students dropped out and did not return, while 4 students dropped out only temporarily, returning within the same year. In year 3, 17 students dropped out and did not return and

² Of the 8 Red Lake students who dropped in year 2, 1 returned in year 3 and 3 more returned in year 4.

5 dropped out temporarily. Three more, while not returning, have stayed in touch with Learn and Earn staff and have completed a GED program. In Red Lake, half the students who dropped out in year 2 ended up returning in later years – one in year 3 and three in year 4.

Data on dropout rates is typically reported at the end of the four-year period of high school, and therefore we can't know for certain how Learn and Earn rates compare with other similar subpopulations until the end of year four. However, our preliminary data on years 2 and 3, suggest that at least some of the programs will compare favorably against similar subpopulations described for the Minnesota class of 2000⁴. Below is a chart that uses the figures for the populations most closely describing the year 3 Learn and Earn populations at the different sites:

Chart 7: Comparing subpopulations

	YMCA (White and Black)	Carver Scott Coop (White)	African American Mentoring (Black)	GAP (Hispanic)	Mpls Urban League (Black)	Blackduck High School (White)	Cloquet Public Schools (American Indian)	Red Lake High School (American Indian)
Year Three dropouts	4 7.0%	3 15%	0 0%	0 0%	2 5.8%	0 0%	1 5.3%	7 38.9%
General 7-12 population comparison	9.69% (Minneapolis Black and White)	1.04% (total Carver and Scott schools)	8.37% (St. Paul Black)	10.29% (St. Paul Hispanic)	11.89% (Minneapolis Black)	1.58% (total Blackduck)	6.36% (Cloquet American Indian)	11.43% (Red Lake American Indian)

³ Numbers may not calculate because other students transferred or left the program for other reasons besides dropping out of school.

⁴ Data taken from Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning District Data Center at <http://cfl.state.mn.us/datactr/>.

Suspensions and expulsions

While suspensions were noted among many members of the Learn & Earn population, only two incidences of expulsion were noted in the first three years of the program.

Chart 8: Suspensions

	YMCA	Carver Scott Coop	African American Mentoring	GAP	Mpls Urban League	Blackduck High School	Cloquet Public Schools	Red Lake High School
Year 1	n=93	n=27	n=29	n=25	n=25	n=9	n=23	n=4
Students with suspensions	30	0	not available	0	not available	0	6	not available
# Suspensions	85	0	not available	0	not available	0	22	2
Year 2	n=87	n=23	n=29	n=15	n=21	n=7	n=25	n=23
Students with suspensions	24	6	not available	0	4	1	9	not available
# Suspensions	44	6	not available	0	8	0	39	not available
Year 3	n=57	n=20	n=26	n=15	n=17	n=7	n=19	n=18
Students with suspensions	12	6	5	1	4	1	4	not available
# Suspensions	29	6	14	1	6	1	22	not available

**Chart 9: Comparison of Year 2 and Year 3 Students with Suspensions (34% of students):
(n=38)**

worsened (more)	no change	improved (fewer)
11	12	15

Strategies for prevention of dropouts and attendance

The above data indicate that the programs are working, but how and why? Data collected through the narrative portions of the semi-annual reports and through interviews indicate the following:

The creation of a “sense of family” discourages students from dropping out

It's made a big difference, I've made my best friends here. [The program leader] is always there for you. She's like an older sister. You learn a lot, it's not only fun. We're a family. I don't think I could quit. (Girl at the Northwest YMCA program.)

“We are a family” was a phrase often heard by students during site visit interviews. A common characteristic of the program participants is that they lack sources of stability in their lives. They often are compelled to move as family and income circumstances fluctuate. Because the program never gives up on students, students who do drop out are contacted regularly to remind them that they are always welcome to return.

Without this program, and the relationships which the program engenders, they would be much less likely to return to school. Nearly every program has an example of a student who left due to family instability. One such student moved to Chicago after she was no longer allowed to live with relatives in the Twin Cities. She has since returned and, after a period of homelessness, found a place to live quite far away from the school. However, she continues to come, despite the long bus rides. With the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program, and in particular the sense of community it engenders among the students and staff, there really is something for students to come back to.

Educational Advocacy: helping the students to determine their educational needs and finding appropriate placement

Another way the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program helps prevent dropouts is by working with the students to determine their learning style needs and to

help them to find appropriate educational placements. In getting to know each student, staff and student may come to the decision that the student's educational needs are better suited to another school. At Carver-Scott Educational Cooperative, a program that includes three sites spread over a wide area, academic performance in year 2 did not significantly improve. However, students have, in conjunction with staff, become aware of their academic needs and learning styles. In three cases, students have transferred to an area learning center where the teaching style is more suited to their learning needs. Preliminary reports from the 2001-2002 school indicate that these students are thriving in their new setting. They continue to participate in Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program meetings and events, and also continue to see each other at their job sites.

Alternatives to suspension and expulsion

Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Programs cut down on the number of suspensions by helping to moderate conflicts between students and their teachers and by offering training in conflict resolution and anger management. The African American Mentoring Program at St. Paul Central High School opens its after-school study skills program as an alternative for in-school suspension for *any* student, not just for program participants. The YMCA reports that, for those youth who were suspended in year one, 83% have had fewer suspensions in year two, and 4% have had more. 61% of students have never been suspended.

- (3) Increase youth academic achievement, measured by graduation rates and post-secondary enrollment.**

The measures for academic achievement required by the statute, graduation rates and post-secondary enrollment, will be available by the end of year 4. However, we can use Grade Point Average and Credits Earned to get an indication of academic achievement at this point in the program.

GAP reports that Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program students average nearly twice as many credits as did members of the control group. However, for the total Learn and Earn population, both the GPA and the credits earned declined from year 2 to year 3. GPA improved for 23 students, stayed the same for five students, and decreased for 76 students. Fifty-three students earned more credits, two earned the same amount in both years, and 69 students earned less in year 3.

Chart 10: Grade Point Average

GPA	YMCA	Carver Scott Coop	African American Mentoring	GAP ⁵	Mpls Urban League	Blackduck High School	Cloquet Public Schools	Red Lake High School
By the end of Year One	2.15	2.91	not available	not applicable	not available	2.23	1.95	6.28
End Year Two	2.19	1.65	1.80	not applicable	2.48	1.86	2.10	6.41
End Year Three	2.15	not available	2.86	not applicable	2.45	1.72	2.26	6.71

Increased demands on student time may be linked to lower attendance and grades in year Three

The third year saw students becoming more serious about their jobs, career interests and acquiring more adult responsibilities, such as cars and driver's licenses.

⁵ Non-graded program

Staff worked hard to help youth to balance and prioritize jobs, schooling and social activities, as well as the demands of personal problems related to the health and well-being of family members.

At this point, it is perhaps useful to echo the comments of one program director who reminded the evaluator that, for at-risk youth, “simply staying in school is success in itself.”

Chart 11: Comparison of Grade Point Average from Year 2 to Year 3:

lower G.P.A. in Year 3	stayed the same	higher G.P.A. in Year 3
73%	5%	22%

Chart 12: Comparison of Credits Earned from Year 2 to Year 3:

earned fewer credits in Year 3	stayed the same	earned more credits in Year 3
55%	2%	43%

Students graduated earlier than expected.

Perhaps the most favorable indication of academic achievement is that eleven students earned enough credits to graduate in June of 2001 - a full year earlier than expected. At least two from the Minneapolis Urban League have begun their university studies – one at Moorhead State University and the other at Howard University in Washington D.C. Two students are taking classes under post-secondary enrollment options. Nearly all students have taken advantage of opportunities to take the “next step” of post-secondary education by participating in college tours and in taking special classes to prepare for the ACT and SAT.

While we can't know yet how many students will graduate and move on to college or other post-secondary training, we do know that students are developing career interests and are exploring post-graduate opportunities. The Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program encourages this by promoting as many opportunities as possible for participating students to visit colleges and for college students to tutor the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program students. At the Blaisdell YMCA, based at Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, University of Minnesota students tutor Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program students. The program director notes that the Learn and Earn students view their time with the university students as a highlight in their weekly program activities. It serves to both improve the student's academic success, as well as give them role models of students who are in college.

At least two students are taking advantage of the post-secondary enrollment options program as juniors. Students are discovering career interests through the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program and are being given opportunities to pursue these blossoming interests through post-secondary classes, community service and internships.

(4) Decrease in juvenile crime.

*Some people need a place to go. At least half of us would be in trouble otherwise.
(Girl from the Northwest YMCA)*

Chart 13: # students with court involvement for criminal activities (arrested and/or convicted)

Data on juvenile crime is not uniformly available. Two students were incarcerated in year three. However, it is interesting to note that both students continued their contact with their program directors and used the "opportunity" of incarceration to earn their

GED. In year two, at the Guadalupe Alternative Program, none of the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement students were involved or re-involved in the juvenile justice system. In comparison, 20% of their control group were involved or re-involved in the juvenile justice system. In year 3 of the African American Mentoring Program, only two Learn and Earn students had court involvement (1 arrest-only and 1 conviction) compared to 10 (4 arrest-only and 6 convictions) in their control group.

Crime	YMCA	Carver Scott Coop	African American Mentoring	GAP	Mpls Urban League	Blackduck High School	Cloquet Public Schools	Red Lake High School
By the end of Year One	not available	0	not available	0	not available	0	not available	0
End Year Two	7	6	4	0	2	0	4	not available
End Year Three	3	3	2	1	2	0	2	0

There are several programmatic aspects that work to promote citizenship and discourage criminal activity. For example, the YMCA views its work to promote a sense of social responsibility, leadership skills and helping students learn behaviors of self-control all of which help to prevent juvenile crime. In year three, students involved in YMCA Leadership programs have become prominent youth leaders in the communities, schools and YMCAs. One such student is on the board of Robbinsdale Redesign. Thirteen YMCA program students were involved in the Government Model Assembly, eight in the model United Nations program and five in Minnesota's youth "Speak Out" with the governor. Three YMCA students received the "Youth Citizen of the Year" award for their community service work. The YMCA reports that 90% of students have improved in their leadership skills, and that 85% have increased their number of "assets" determined by the Search Institute to lead to the development of productive citizens.

Additional Outcomes

Increased self-knowledge of students' interests and special learning needs leads staff to help them find more appropriate educational placements

Participation in Learn and Earn helps both student and staff to get to know what will work best for the student. Staff spend time helping students to identify their career interests and their special learning needs. Once determined, the staff assists students in finding educational placements that better suit their learning styles and develop career interests.

The creation of a caring community and the use of conflict resolution skills to maintain it

The group has really grown together over the year. We're not only learning about the "real world" and our lives, we also work out our fights and love each other. (Boy from the Northwest YMCA)

After the initial organizing involved in the first year, grantees have settled into routines and a sense of shared expectations. In nearly every program, students mention how they have improved in their ability to resolve conflicts peacefully and to trust their group.

It's intense, very intense. But it's worth it. It's a challenge to learn how to be able to work as a team without being angry and having a bad attitude...It's almost like a family. We're together fourteen hours a week. For the most part it's positive, but we do get sick of each other... (Girl from the Washburn YMCA)

They apply their conflict management skills to the maintenance of the group and also outside of their group – with their peers, employers and teachers. In so doing they are practicing skills of leadership including negotiation and advocacy.

For many students, having a sense of belonging to a trusting, supportive community is a new, or at least uncommon, experience. A classroom "climate" that

students experience as physically and emotionally safe is an essential foundation for learning. Maslow's theory concerning the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, A. *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper) suggests that young people seek this sense of community and safety wherever they can find it, and for at-risk youth this often results in gang involvement and subsequent criminal activity. Evidence of the importance students place on the sense of community they find with their group is suggested in the attitude of students in a focus group conducted in year 2. The students indicated that, while the stipends and money for college were aspects of the program that attracted them initially, it is the sense of "family"/community they find in their group that *keeps* them participating. Parents too, who sometimes shared with their children a sense of alienation from schools and schooling, are beginning to become comfortable participating in school activities.

Helping students to discover their "niche"

At a gathering of program directors at the end of year three, directors discussed their roles in helping students to find the "niche." The Guadalupe Alternative Program director gave an example: a student, who was awkward socially, has "blossomed" in the program as he discovered his ability as a photographer. He now has a role valued by his fellow students as the "official" program photographer. His comfort with the group has led to his more active participation in the program and in the wider school community.

Becoming a resource for the entire school

The Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program has, for some schools, become a school-wide resource. Its after-school study sessions are sometimes able to accommodate additional students. At St. Paul Central High School the administration uses the after-school program as an alternative to suspension – providing a more positive

and productive approach for misbehaving students. The capacity of this program for helping to moderate conflicts between teachers and students through the creation of behavior contracts also helps the school. Another aspect of the program are the forms developed by the African American Mentor Program that are now used school-wide by guidance counselors to keep track of credits earned toward the fulfillment of graduation standards. Because of the effectiveness of the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program, St. Paul Central planned to provide resources to expand the program to enable 100 additional students to participate in all aspects of the program.

The Minneapolis Urban League notes that their students have a positive impact on their classmates, as well as on younger and older students in their communities. They also note an increase in student-led initiatives which indicate improvement in leadership and social skills. For example, one Minneapolis Urban League student started a homework group for herself and her classmates

Becoming a resource for the larger community:

Programs note that they are becoming known as a source of reliable volunteers for community projects. Blackduck reports that they no longer have to find opportunities to serve, because the community knows about them and requests their help.

Addressing the incidence of teen pregnancy:

There are teen mothers and fathers in the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program, which is not surprising given the focus of the program on at-risk youth. In programs with teenage parents, the children are welcomed and accepted by the group. In year two, a teenage mother in GAP was invited to attend a conference in Washington D.C. based on her experiences in a Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program

internship. The teen mother was given guidance for raising funds for her transportation costs and how to responsibly arrange childcare during her absence. By the end of year three, the young mother had completed all of the credits necessary for graduation and was on the Honor Roll the entire year. At the Northwest YMCA, one student has become a mother since the start of the program and remains very active with the support of staff and the other students. A student in The African American Mentoring Program became pregnant in year three. Staff have been successful in encouraging the young woman not to drop out of school but to attend a special school for teen mothers. As her parents are not actively involved in her life, staff and students have become, in the words of a staff member, “her surrogate family” and organized a shower for her.

In Blackduck, there is an intergenerational success story: the daughter and grandmother (who helps care for the daughter) also attend Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program activities along with the teenage mother. The program director sees this as very encouraging – because of a long-held sense of mistrust and alienation towards schools and schooling by this family. The teen mother is becoming comfortable with the school and asks staff for advice. The grandmother is now able to trust school staff, allowing, for example, staff to take her daughter to the doctor.

Addressing the need for family involvement:

Parental involvement is a challenge for schools in general, but particularly when dealing with families of “at-risk” students who may feel disconnected and mistrustful of schools. The sense of community engendered by the Learn and Earn Graduation Achievement Program helps parents to connect “naturally” as their children make friends with other students and visit their homes. Each grantee program has multiple strategies

for reaching out to parents, with opportunities for youth to improve their relationships with their parents and to encourage intergenerational learning. For example, the YMCA holds regular parent information sessions on topics including “Living with your teenager” and planning for post-secondary education. The YMCA reports that 80% of families improved support of their children’s education – both with an improved home environment and in their contacts with their children’s schools. GAP has social nights for parents and students which are well attended. Learn and Earn programs, in particular the African American Mentoring Program, do home visits to parents. The Minneapolis Urban League writes:

Many of the parents are supportive and have expressed their appreciation of the Learn and Earn Program. They have stated that their child is experiencing many opportunities that may not have been or were not available to them without the Learn and Earn Program. Some parents have stated that they have noticed positive changes in their child’s attitude and behavior towards school and post-secondary options. There is a partnership between the parents and the Learn and Earn Program.

Challenges:

Competition for students’ time was mentioned by three programs. Scheduling times when everyone can meet as a group becomes challenging as the students become older, become more mobile and work at jobs after school. Also, students are becoming more involved in mainstream school extra-curricular activities and in community work. For these students of limited income, the possibility of working a paying job is particularly compelling as it is the only way they can obtain clothing and personal items even though this often means leaving the Learn and Earn program. That students are working and involved in their communities could be construed as an indication that the

program is working: students are already finding and keeping employment, are engaged in their schools and communities.

Another challenge is the wide variation in academic needs. While some students have already blossomed academically, others still struggle. The YMCA plans to have special interest groups which will involve students in meeting across their program sites. In this way, they hope to address both the needs of students who are struggling academically and also to encourage students who are ready to go the next step in preparing themselves for higher education and careers.

Family challenges that interfere with student attendance and where students locate were mentioned by two programs. Students faced with extreme hardships constantly relocate and drop out of school.

Appendices:

1. Program Director letter
2. Progress Reflection Form for Year 3 (prepared annually)
3. Narrative Description of the Program (prepared semi-annually)

Dear Program Director:

The first page is a student reflection form. The purpose of this form is to track progress in individual students in the four areas required by the State Legislature: attendance, academic achievement, in-school behavior (suspensions/expulsions), and in behavior that gets the attention of the police/criminal justice system.

This form is intended to be filled out by each student, in consultation with the Program Director, who may be needed to assist the student in finding the information requested concerning attendance, GPA, etc. The thought here is that the student should engage in documenting and reflecting upon their progress in these areas BUT that they may need a little help by the Program Director. The Program Director should review the student answers and check them against school records.

Since this is a “reflection form,” we added a “student feedback on program improvement section.” Here, two questions ask students to reflect on the program. If, after this current reporting period, we find that this section seems not to fit with the other questions, we will find an alternative way to obtain student input on the program.

The third part of the reflection form is for Program Director’s input concerning the student in question. After the Program Director reads #1-9, he or she might feel that there is some missing information that needs to be added in order for the evaluator to properly interpret the data. For example, a student has had a crisis that has prevented him or her from improving GPA, etc. Thus, the third part of the reflection form could also be, time permitting, an opportunity for dialog with the student, and could be completed in partnership with the student.

Notes:

- a. Please assign a code name or number to each student. We want to track individual student progress over time, but we want to protect the confidentiality of the students. Please find a way to ensure that this code is used on all subsequent reflection forms throughout the years. Otherwise, we won’t be able to track student progress.
- b. Note that we are asking only about hours earned in year three and not an accumulated amount that would include year one and two information.
 - For answers to questions 8 and 10, which ask the students to reflect on indicators: the word “indicator” means “evidence that suggests/indicates something.” The “something” is improvement, improvement in the areas of citizenship and academics.
 - These are open-ended questions and tell the students not to worry too much about whether something is indicative of improvements in “citizenship” vs. “academics.” Obviously there are gray areas and the evaluator will probably combine the answers to these two questions in the analysis.
 - Furthermore, the word “citizenship” is used instead of behavior. This is because sometimes the word “behavior” is used in a disrespectful manner, assuming that students have had “bad” behavior. The word “citizenship” is used here because it

has a better chance of being interpreted as an emergent quality (like improved academic performance) that takes time to develop (instead of going from being a “bad” person with “bad” behavior to a “good” person with “good behavior”).

The second page is the program narrative. This is a simplified version of what has been done before. Please use additional pages if needed.

Student Progress Reflection Form for Year Three

Program: _____ Student Code Number: _____

Please fill out the following information for Year Three:

1. Number of service hours completed in Year Three: _____
2. Number of cultural/personal hours completed in Year Three: _____
3. Number of academic hours completed in Year Three: _____
4. Attendance in the 1999-2000 school year in Year Three: _____
5. Number of expulsions/suspension from school in Year Three: _____
6. Any arrests in Year Three? Yes, w/conviction, Yes, no conviction, No
7. Did you have a child born to you in Year Three? Yes No
8. Indicators of good citizenship (*taking initiative and responsibility on projects, improved ability to get along with others and resolve conflicts respectfully, service awards, etc.*):

9. Academic achievement

- grade point average at the end of Year Three : _____
- credits earned during Year Three : _____

10. Other indicators of academic achievement in Year Three? (*developing career interests, pursuit of career interests, completion of special projects, awards, honor roll, etc.*).

Student feedback on program improvement section:

11. What do you (the student) like best about Learn and Earn?

12. What suggestions do you (the student) have about how to improve Learn and Earn?

Director comment section:

13. Is there anything you as director, would like to add to help us understand this student and how the student is progressing?

Narrative Description of the Program

1. Briefly list the activities of your students during this reporting period in the 3 component areas (academic, personal/cultural, and service).

Academic	Personal/Cultural	Service

2. Please share any “success stories” with us. Indicate whether we can *not* share with your stories with Legislature, the media and other stakeholders (we will share such stories with your approval only, and with confidentiality protected).

3. What are your challenges and future plans?

4. What are your technical assistance needs, how are you addressing these needs? How could CFL help?

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