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Evaluation of the Impact of Wisconsin's Learnfare Experiment on the School Attendance of Teenagers Receiving AFDC (1992)

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**EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF WISCONSIN'S LEARNFARE EXPERIMENT
ON THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OF TEENAGERS RECEIVING
AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN**

submitted to the
Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services
and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

by the Employment and Training Institute
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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Executive Summary

The Wisconsin Learnfare experiment requires teenagers in all families receiving AFDC to attend school regularly until graduation or face the threat of financial sanctions for their families. The Learnfare policy was enforced for younger teens and teen parents in March, 1988 and fully implemented in the Fall of the 1988-89 school year. The stated goals of the experiment were to increase self-sufficiency through participation in education and to ensure that more teenagers on AFDC complete high school. On June 1, 1990, the federal government required that the State provide an impact analysis on the effect of Learnfare on the school attendance of AFDC teens by September 1, 1991. Delays on the part of the state Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) resulted in a thirteen month delay in securing the state and local records required for the evaluation. On January 25, 1991, the federal government granted an extension on the required study until December 31, 1991. In July of 1991, the state contracted with the Employment and Training Institute to provide the required evaluation.

Evaluation Issues

A major strength of the evaluation is in its creation and use of a data base detailing the school experience of all AFDC teens and former AFDC teens enrolled in six representative school districts of the state over a six year period, and including the entire school population of teenagers subject to the Learnfare requirement in the districts. In Milwaukee school attendance patterns were examined for over 50,000 teens. The Milwaukee study represents the largest analysis of the AFDC teen student population in the city and provides first-time data on patterns of school attendance and high school graduation rates for AFDC and former AFDC teens. In the five representative school districts outside Milwaukee the school performance of nearly 6,000 teens was studied. The five schools representative of the balance of the state are designated by size as Schools A through E, with School A representing the largest.

Prior to entering into contract with the evaluators, state officials were faced with serious data limitations due to missing attendance files for Milwaukee Public Schools in the year before Learnfare, and definition of an adequate comparison group. The approved research design addresses these limitations by extending the pre-Learnfare period to include the 1984-85 and 1985-86 school years in Milwaukee to provide sufficient pre-Learnfare experience. In the balance of the state the pre-Learnfare period begins with the 1985-86 school year. Differences in attendance reporting practices for Milwaukee regular high schools and alternative education programs required a separate analysis of these populations, and hypothesis testing could not be conducted for the Learnfare teen parent population.

A variety of methods were used to assess the impact of Learnfare on the school attendance of AFDC teens. These methods included descriptions of attendance patterns over a five to six year period before and during Learnfare, analysis of the performance of Learnfare students one year after participation in the program, a statistical regression model to test for improvements in attendance controlling for changes in the population over time, and a cohort survival analysis on the Class of 1991 in high school for three years of Learnfare.

Description of Outcomes

Using lagged regression models which controlled for differences in age, grade level, sex, race, and months on AFDC, the school attendance of AFDC teens under the Learnfare policy was compared to school attendance of former AFDC teens and teens receiving AFDC prior to the Learnfare experiment. In all six school districts the models used did not show improvement in student attendance which could be attributed to the Learnfare requirement. Similarly, the regression models used did not show any impact of the Learnfare requirement on reducing semester absences among eighth grade Learnfare students in Milwaukee or School A, where middle school records were available.

Given the limitations of the control group populations and problems of identifying AFDC and non-AFDC teen parents, the Learnfare hypothesis testing lacks the strength of an experimental design using random assignment. Descriptive statistics support, however, the basic conclusion that AFDC teens have not shown improved attendance under the Learnfare experiment. After one year of Learnfare about one-third of Learnfare students had improved their attendance while over half showed poorer attendance. In each year the two largest school districts showed dropout rates well over 20 percent. After a second year of Learnfare the percentage of students with worse attendance increased in three of the four districts studied.

The percentage of Milwaukee high school students with excessive absences continued to increase during the three years of Learnfare. Over 30 percent of Milwaukee AFDC teens subject to Learnfare missed more than 20 out of 90 days of school in the fall semesters and over 40 percent had excessive absences in the spring semesters. School A showed similar patterns. In School B, which had the lowest absentee rates in the pre-Learnfare period of the districts studied, increases in absenteeism were still noted during the Learnfare period. In School C the percentage of Learnfare teens with more than 20 absences a semester exceeded 30 percent in four of the six Learnfare semesters. Schools D and E recorded transcript attendance by the school year. In School D the percentage of Learnfare teens with excessive absences climbed dramatically during the three years studied. By the third year of Learnfare over 60 percent of AFDC teens studied had more than forty absences a year. In School E, 23 percent of Learnfare teens in 1988-89 had more than 40 days absent and 16 percent had excessive absences in 1990-91.

The Senior Class of 1991 was examined throughout its high school experience to assess school enrollment and completion rates. Graduation rates for Milwaukee teens subject to Learnfare who entered high school as Freshmen in the 1987-88 school year and a control group of their classmates were the same with 18 percent of each group actually finishing their senior year and graduating. The graduation rates for School A, the next largest district studied, were 48 percent for the Learnfare group and 49 percent for the control group.

Nearly half of teen parent non-graduates in Milwaukee were never required to attend school under threat of Learnfare sanctioning. Of Milwaukee Public School teen parents required to attend school under the Learnfare policy and threatened with financial sanctions, less than half were enrolled in school. Subsequently, well over half (51 to 57 percent) of this population was sanctioned each semester.

I. INTRODUCTION

In July, 1987 the State of Wisconsin enacted legislation implementing a "Learnfare" policy for families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). As a condition for receiving AFDC for each teen, the law requires that teenagers attend school regularly until high school completion. The families of teens who fail to enroll in school or who have absences beyond the established limits are denied AFDC benefits for these teenagers, i.e. "sanctioned." Teen parents who fail to meet the Learnfare school requirements are denied AFDC benefits for themselves, although they may receive benefits for their child(ren). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services granted a waiver to the Social Security Act to allow Wisconsin to conduct the Learnfare experiment. The Learnfare school attendance requirement was first imposed on thirteen and fourteen-year-old teen dependents and all teen parents in March of 1988. In September, 1988 all remaining AFDC dependent teens were subject to the policy.

The stated objectives of Learnfare and the other Wisconsin waivers requested May 1, 1987 included:

- To create a program in which both the state and AFDC recipients have clear responsibilities: the state to provide assistance to recipients in getting off welfare, and recipients to participate in education, training and job search that will enable them to become self-sufficient.
- To ensure that more teenagers on AFDC complete high school or its equivalent, thus providing them with the minimum level of education needed to become productive citizens. ("Wisconsin Welfare Reform Package, Section 1115(a) Waiver Application," May 1, 1987, page 1)

These objectives of Learnfare are a major focus of the evaluation of the Learnfare experiment being conducted by the Employment and Training Institute of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and will be reported in the evaluators' final report to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Wisconsin Legislature by June 30, 1993. In mid-1990, however, the federal government required that an accelerated evaluation study be completed in 1991 to determine the Learnfare experiment's impact on the school attendance of AFDC recipient teens. On July 17, 1991, having received the Milwaukee Public Schools and Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) data necessary for the study, the Employment and Training Institute of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee entered into contract with DHSS to conduct this accelerated evaluation study of student attendance. The results are reported herein.

II. Study Population

The federal government allowed the state to initiate the Learnfare experiment without a randomly assigned control group of AFDC teens not subject to the experiment. Rather, the state was allowed to place all AFDC teens in the state under the Learnfare policy.¹ Absent a randomly assigned control group, the evaluators were required to conduct a quasi-experimental evaluation using a lagged regression analysis with a non-equivalent comparison group to help control for historical and population changes unrelated to the Learnfare experiment. In addition to teens from families receiving AFDC for a six-year study period, the evaluators collected records on a control group population of youth who were teenagers during the study period and whose families were former AFDC recipients but not on AFDC during Learnfare.

Teenagers in six school districts in the state were selected for study. The study included the Milwaukee Public Schools, the state's largest school district and the district which includes over forty percent of teens under the Learnfare requirement. Cluster analysis was used to identify five school districts which are representative of the balance of the state. (See the technical notes in Appendix A.) The five school districts studied in the balance of the state are designated by size as Schools A through E, with School A representing the largest. The schools studied are representative of the following groups of Wisconsin schools:

School A typifies the set of large school districts with relatively high minority student enrollments, high enrollments of teens under the Learnfare requirement, and higher dropout rates.

School B represents those school districts in the state close to "average" on all nine characteristics.

School C represents school districts in the state which are close to "average" on most characteristics, but which have a lower percentage of students who are minorities and a lower percentage of births in the community to young teen mothers.

School D typifies relatively smaller districts with weaker tax bases, higher unemployment, a higher percentage of births in the community to young teen mothers, and a high rate of Learnfare sanctions.

School E is representative of those very small school districts in the state which enrolled at least ten but fewer than fifty teens under the Learnfare requirement in December, 1989.

School records were collected from the six school districts for all teens from the community in the study population who were enrolled in school for one or more semesters. In Milwaukee this population included 32,561 high school students and 24,178 middle school students enrolled from 1984-85 through 1990-91. Individual student records were collected on 5,926 high school and middle school students enrolled from 1985-86 through 1990-91 in the five other school districts studied. Samples were not used. In each school district the entire AFDC and former AFDC teen population was studied. Data

were collected for all semesters from 1985-86 through 1990-91. In Milwaukee where attendance data was not retrievable for the 1986-87 school year, student records were also collected for the 1984-85 school year. For alternative education programs in Milwaukee Public Schools period attendance was missing for the first semester of the 1987-88 school year. The school data were secured under provisions of the state law requiring the evaluation of Learnfare; all student records have been protected to insure that individual student data is not disclosed during the course of the study. The schools, except for Milwaukee, are identified by letter to insure confidentiality of individual student records and because the districts are analyzed as representative samples of clusters of school districts rather than as individual case studies.²

III. Methodology

Several methods were used in this evaluation to describe attendance outcomes under the Learnfare experiment for teens in families receiving AFDC.

- * Descriptive statistics were provided to track changes in student attendance over time. These examine the percentage of students including dropouts absent for more than twenty days in a semester. This measure was selected because it shows how many teens missed an average of more than one day of school a week.
- * The school experience of AFDC teenagers sanctioned under the Learnfare policy was tracked to determine how many teens remained in school or dropped out after sanctioning and how many improved their attendance patterns. School attendance was also compared for Learnfare students in good standing and under monthly monitoring.
- * A cohort survival analysis was conducted to describe the impact of Learnfare on continued enrollment over time. The study population for this analysis was the "Class of 1991," students enrolled as freshmen in the Fall of 1987 and on AFDC that school year, controlling for students who transferred to other schools during the study period.
- * A series of analyses of student absences using lagged regression models were conducted using variables to statistically control for differences in the AFDC and control group populations over time, including the age, sex, race or ethnic background of students or their parents, year in school, length of time on AFDC, whether the student was overage for his or her grade, and the student's exceptional education status, if available. Learnfare variables included the Learnfare status of the teen for the semester and whether the teen had been sanctioned in prior semesters.
- * To test whether the lack of improvement in attendance attributable to the Learnfare requirement was resulting from the retention of

poorer attending students, a second series of lagged regression analyses included dropouts as absent for the entire semester.

The semester analysis of the experience of teens under Learnfare included all AFDC teens with one or more months in which they were required to attend school under the policy, that is, students in good standing, students on monthly monitoring, and teens who were sanctioned. Teenagers who were exempt from Learnfare for all months on AFDC in the semester or whose records were not reviewed under the income maintenance system were not included as "Learnfare teens."³ The evaluation considers all AFDC teens subject to the policy whether they are long-term or short-term recipients of AFDC, since the Learnfare policy imposes an immediate and harsh punishment regardless of the length of time the youth is under the policy. Sanctions average \$100 for families with more than one child and \$220 for teen parents living alone with a child.⁴

Learnfare was first enforced in March of the 1987-88 school year for thirteen and fourteen year olds and teen parents. State data was not provided on the Learnfare codes for this period, given problems of identifying which teens were sanctioned in this semester. In the 1988-89 fall semester, several thousand Milwaukee teens were coded as "not found" because of missing or mismatched school records. These teens were excluded from the semester analysis unless they had a month or more as a student in good standing, on monthly monitoring, or sanctioning during the semester. Beginning in July of 1990 AFDC teens were expected to comply with the Learnfare requirements but Learnfare sanctioning was suspended for four months by a federal court injunction. In the balance of state, Learnfare sanctioning continued uninterrupted during this period.

Teenagers on AFDC before the Learnfare experiment as well as the control group populations included all teens regardless of whether they might have been exempted from the Learnfare school attendance requirement. Consequently, teens who were credit deficient and deemed unable to graduate by age 20 were excluded from the experimental population but remained in the control group. Likewise, teen parents caring for their infants or lacking day care were excluded from the Learnfare group, but included in the non-Learnfare groups. It is likely that these inclusions bias the study in favor of the Learnfare population.⁵ This is one of several limitations of a non-randomized quasi-experimental approach.

IV. Trends in AFDC Student Attendance Over Time

School absences and enrollment data were used to describe changes in attendance for AFDC teen recipients before and during the Learnfare experiment. Each local school district's definition of full day and half day absences was used for the analysis.⁶ In all school districts studied, the school semester was typically ninety days in length.

A. Students With More Than Twenty Absences a Semester

This analysis examined the percentage of AFDC teens with excessive absences as defined by more than twenty out of ninety days absent a semester, i.e. with an average of more than one day absent a week. In the semesters from 1984-85 through 1987-88, the rates are shown for all teenagers in families on AFDC. For each semester in the 1988-89, 1989-90, and 1990-91 school years rates are shown only for AFDC teens under the Learnfare requirement and subject to sanctioning.

High School

In the regular Milwaukee high schools the percentages of AFDC teens including dropouts under the Learnfare requirement with more than twenty out of ninety days absent a semester has increased. Throughout Learnfare over 30 percent of AFDC Learnfare teens had excessive absences in the fall semesters and 40 percent or more had excessive absences in the spring semesters. For Milwaukee the analysis excluded students ever enrolled in alternative schools, because of the lack of computerized daily attendance records for these schools. These students were analyzed separately to compensate for the lack of comparable attendance data.

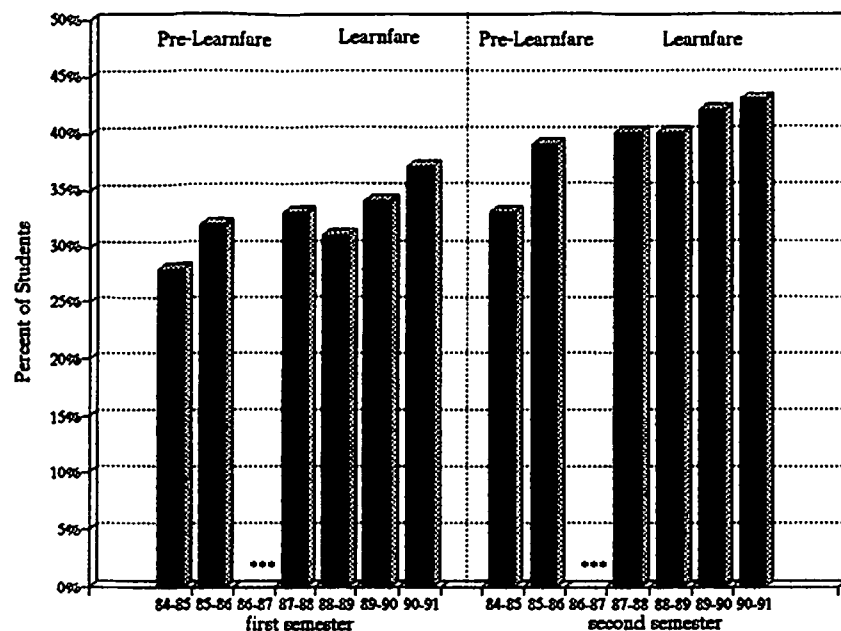
School A showed similar patterns to Milwaukee with over 30 percent of high school teens subject to Learnfare missing more than twenty days a semester in the fall, and more than 40 percent of Learnfare teens missing more than twenty days of school in two of the Learnfare spring semesters. In School B, which had the lowest absentee rates in the pre-Learnfare period of the districts studied, increases in absenteeism were still noted during the Learnfare period. In School C the percentage of Learnfare teens with more than 20 absences a semester exceeded 30 percent in four of the six Learnfare semesters.

Schools D and E recorded transcript attendance by the school year. Here, the measure for excessive absences was more than forty days a year, again an average of more than a day absent per week. In School D the percentage of Learnfare teens with excessive absences climbed dramatically over the three year period. By the third year of Learnfare over 60 percent of AFDC teens studied had more than forty absences a year. In School E, 23 percent of teens subject to Learnfare in 1988-89 had more than 40 days absent and 16 percent had excessive absences in 1990-91, comparable to the rates for AFDC teens in the pre-Learnfare period.

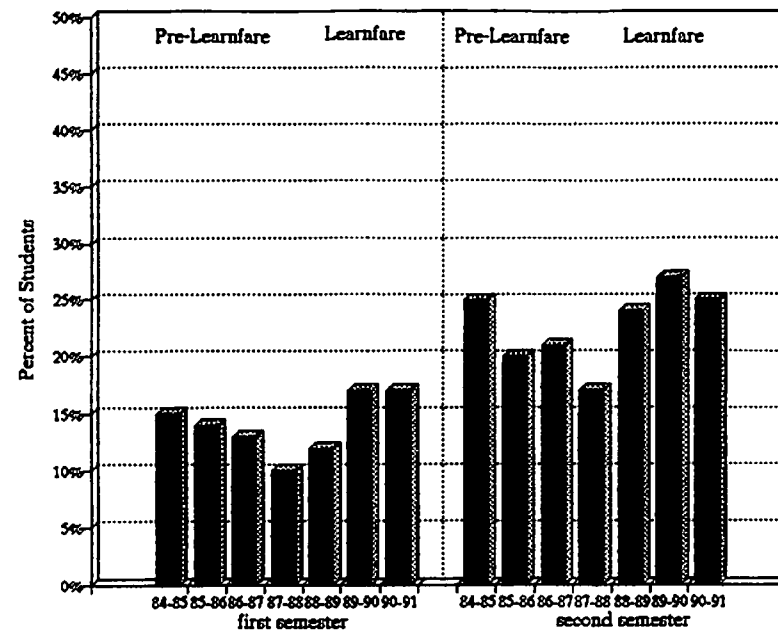
Middle School

Since few 7th graders were monitored under the Learnfare policy, the 8th grade experience was used to track attendance over time for middle schools.⁷ In Milwaukee 12 to 17 percent of eighth graders under Learnfare missed more than one day of school a week on average in the fall, while a fourth of the teens showed more than twenty days of absences in two of the spring semesters. Again, AFDC students in School A showed similar patterns. The numbers of eighth graders in the other two districts with historical middle school attendance records were too small for individual district trend analysis.

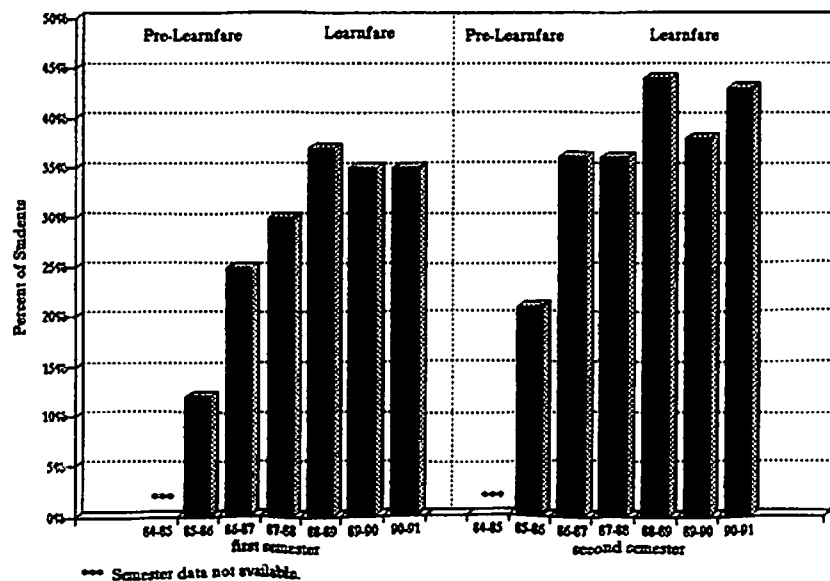
High School Attendance In Milwaukee
More Than 20 Absences Per Semester



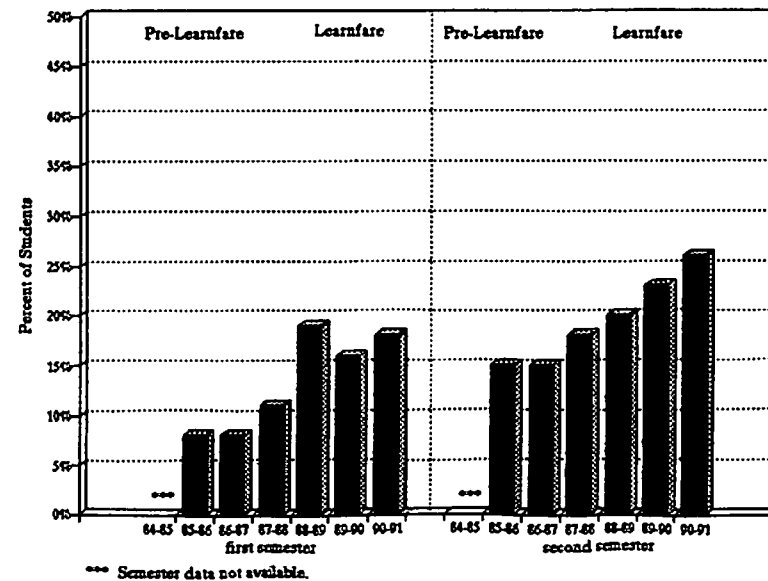
Middle School Attendance In Milwaukee
More Than 20 Absences Per Semester



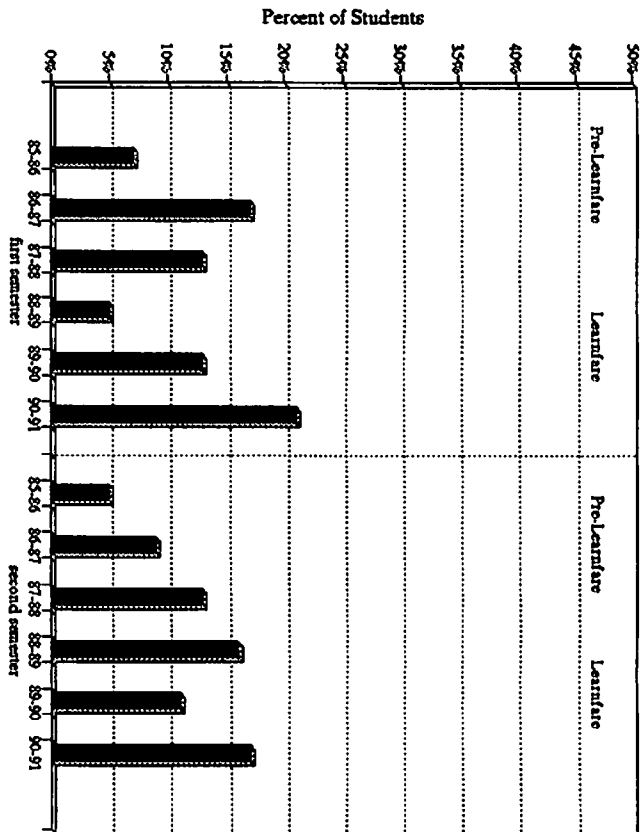
High School Attendance In School A
More Than 20 Absences Per Semester



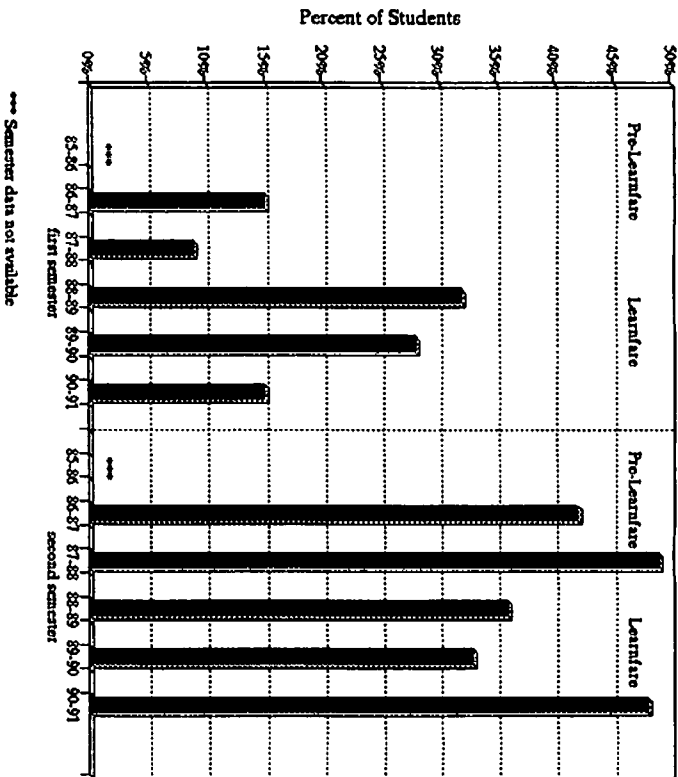
Middle School Attendance In School A
More Than 20 Absences Per Semester



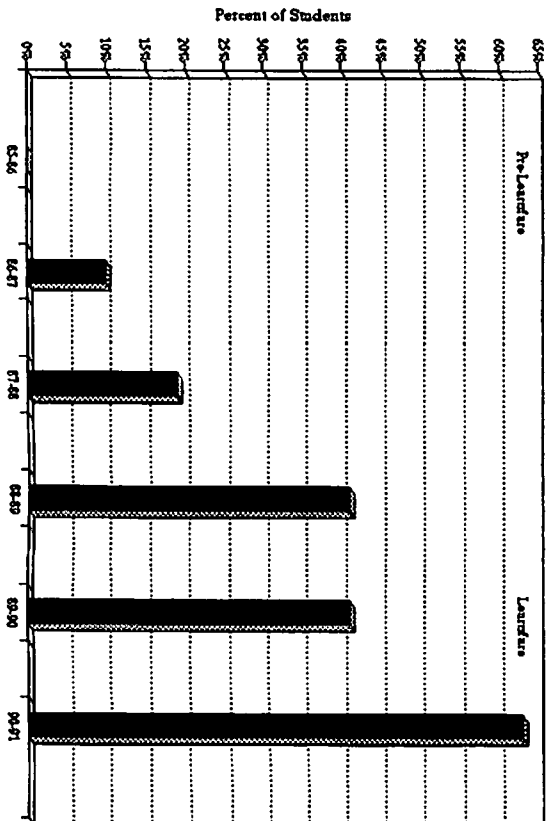
High School Attendance In School B
More Than 20 Absences Per Semester



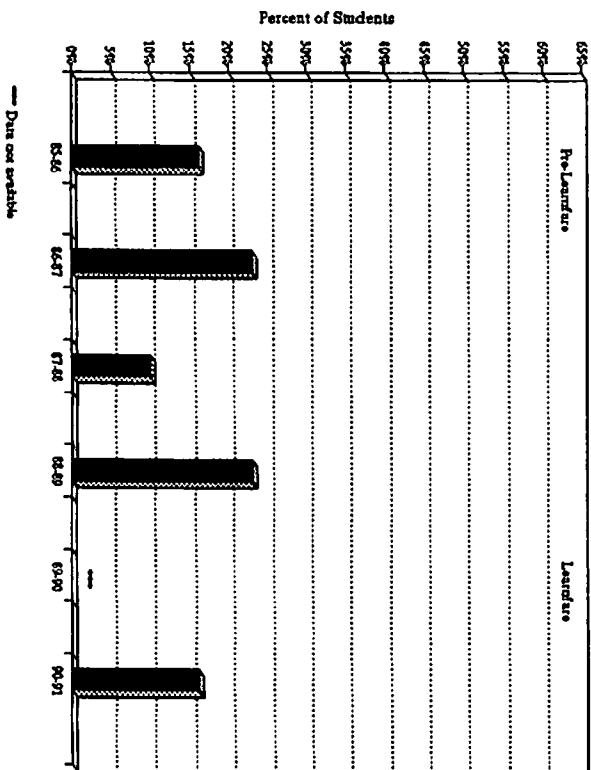
High School Attendance In School C
More Than 20 Absences Per Semester



High School Attendance In School D
More Than 20 Absences Per Semester



High School Attendance In School E
More Than 20 Absences Per Semester



B. Results of Learnfare on Attendance the Following Year

An expectation of the Learnfare policy was that AFDC students who were sanctioned or threatened with a sanction would improve their attendance or return to school if they had previously dropped out. The table, "High School Students in Year One of Learnfare," compared the attendance of enrolled students under the Learnfare requirement in Spring of 1988-89 with their attendance the following spring semester in order to gauge whether the attendance of Learnfare subjects improved over time.⁸ Changes in the number of days absent per semester were used to measure improvement in the four districts with semester absence data. The two districts maintaining only yearly absence data were not included in this analysis. Generally, about one-third of Learnfare students improved their attendance and over half of the students had poorer attendance.

The size of the study population in Milwaukee and School A permitted analysis by subgroups within Learnfare. Three Learnfare subpopulations were analyzed:

1. Sanctioned teens. This group includes students with a demonstrated record of attendance problems as defined by having ten or more days of unexcused absences the previous semester and sanctioned for missing more than two days of school without adequate excuse in at least one month in the semester.
2. Teens on monthly monitoring of attendance. This group includes AFDC teens who had more than ten days of unexcused absences the previous semester and whose attendance was monitored monthly, but who were not sanctioned during the semester.
3. Students in good standing. The third group includes those students whose attendance was reviewed for Learnfare but who did not have ten or more days of unexcused absences the previous semester and as a result who were not subject to monthly monitoring or to sanctioning.

In both years of Learnfare the percentage of students with improved attendance was lowest for students who were sanctioned or on monthly monitoring, while students in good standing consistently performed best. In Year Two students in almost all Learnfare subpopulations showed a higher percentage active in school as compared to Year One.

High school dropout rates after a year of Learnfare varied widely. Milwaukee alternative schools showed a 43.0 percent dropout rate followed by School A with 28.9 percent, Milwaukee regular high schools with 23.6 percent, School B with 21.7 percent, and finally School C with 18.2 percent of its Learnfare students dropping out. Among in-school Learnfare subpopulations studied, sanctioned students showed the highest dropout rates with about half dropping out after one year of the Learnfare experiment.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN YEAR ONE OF LEARNFARE

SCHOOLS STUDIED	STUDENTS ENROLLED IN SPRING 1988-89					
	ATTENDANCE		STATUS AFTER ONE YEAR			N=
	Better	Worse	Dropped Out	Graduated	Still Active	
MPS H.S.						
Sanctioned	36.4%	59.3%	47.1%	11.9%	41.0%	1,483
Monthly Monitoring	29.6	62.9	16.9	23.7	59.4	372
In Good Standing	38.0	54.3	10.9	28.7	60.4	2,636
Learnfare Total	36.7	56.6	23.6	22.5	53.9	4,491
SCHOOL A						
Sanctioned	28.6	68.3	53.9	6.4	39.7	63
Monthly Monitoring	37.2	55.8	27.9	20.9	51.2	43
In Good Standing	41.4	52.7	24.1	24.8	51.1	319
Learnfare Total	39.0	55.3	28.9	21.7	49.4	425
SCHOOL B						
Learnfare Total	34.8	56.5	21.7	23.9	54.4	46
SCHOOL C						
Learnfare Total	36.4	54.5	18.2	40.9	40.9	22
MPS ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS						
	Better	Worse				
Sanctioned	21.6	48.6	46.7	5.8	47.5	570
Monthly Monitoring	14.2	52.6	42.3	17.5	40.2	97
In Good Standing	24.6	47.1	34.5	9.2	56.3	240
Learnfare Total	21.2	48.6	43.0	7.9	49.1	907

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN YEAR TWO OF LEARNFARE

SCHOOLS STUDIED	STUDENTS ENROLLED IN SPRING 1989-90					N=
	ATTENDANCE		STATUS AFTER ONE YEAR			
	Better	Worse	Dropped Out	Graduated	Still Active	
MPS H.S.						
Sanctioned	30.6%	68.7%	45.6%	7.9%	46.5%	1,226
Monthly Monitoring	30.3	62.3	23.6	18.3	58.1	284
In Good Standing	39.5	54.1	12.0	18.5	69.5	3,036
Learnfare Total	36.5	57.8	21.8	15.6	62.6	4,546
SCHOOL A						
Sanctioned	20.2	78.6	53.5	4.8	41.7	84
Monthly Monitoring	27.8	70.4	38.9	18.5	42.6	54
In Good Standing	34.6	61.6	15.2	24.1	60.7	341
Learnfare Total	31.3	65.6	24.7	20.0	55.3	479
SCHOOL B						
Learnfare Total	22.4	71.4	16.3	22.5	61.2	49
SCHOOL C						
Learnfare Total	37.9	51.7	6.9	34.5	58.6	29
MPS ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS						
	Better	Worse				
Sanctioned	14.4	45.3	46.5	2.2	51.3	446
Monthly Monitoring	24.8	33.3	42.8	12.4	44.8	105
In Good Standing	27.8	29.1	29.9	9.0	61.1	288
Learnfare Total	20.1	38.2	40.3	5.8	53.9	839

The small number of sanctions in the four smallest school districts precluded the presentation of the attendance patterns by school district Learnfare subpopulations. A review of individual student records in these districts showed that thirty-seven teens were sanctioned in the 1988-89 and 1989-90 school years, excluding teens who subsequently transferred to schools outside the districts. By the end of the 1990-91 school year, 26 teens (70 percent of the total) were dropouts, 5 teens (13.5 percent) were in regular school attendance, 5 teens (13.5 percent) had excessive absences (more than one day a week absent on average), and one of the sanctioned teens (3 percent) had graduated.

C. Survival Analysis - The Class of 1991

A cohort survival analysis was conducted to describe the impact of Learnfare on continued school enrollment over time. The study population for this analysis included only those students who were enrolled as first semester freshmen in Fall of 1987 (the "Class of 1991"), who received AFDC during the 1987-88 school year, and who did not transfer out of the district during the next four years. These were students who could have been expected to graduate in June, 1991. Their attendance and enrollment were tracked throughout their four years of high school, which included three years of the Learnfare experiment. Three populations were studied: 1) students enrolled in regular Milwaukee public high schools, 2) students ever enrolled in alternative schools in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), and 3) students enrolled in School A. The four other school districts in the balance of the state did not have sufficient records to conduct this type of analysis. The Learnfare group included only AFDC teens who were required to attend school one or more months as students in good standing, students on monthly monitoring, or sanctioned teens. The control group included teens who left AFDC after the 1987-88 school year and who were never subject to the Learnfare attendance requirement in the 1988-89, 1989-90 or 1990-91 school years.

Milwaukee Regular High Schools

In Milwaukee regular schools the enrollment and graduation rates for the Learnfare group (N=1,341) and the control group (N=266) were similar. By second semester of their senior year (Spring of 1991), only 60 percent of the Learnfare group and 65 percent of the control group were still enrolled in school. Two non-parametric tests were used to test the homogeneity of the survival functions across strata -- the Log-Rank (Savage) test and the Wilcoxon test. Neither test showed a significant difference between the groups, at the .05 level.

June, 1991 graduation data was examined to determine the numbers in the two groups who graduated with the Class of 1991. The graduation rates were 22 percent for both the Learnfare group and the control group.

Milwaukee Alternative School Students

Milwaukee alternative schools are not required to report daily attendance using the MPS computerized record keeping system. They are, however, included in the system grade file which records enrollment, credits and period attendance. Since the MPS grade files were missing for the first semester of the 1987-88 school year, the cohort survival analysis for students ever enrolled in alternative schools began with freshmen enrolled in the second (rather than first) semester of the 1987-88 school year and on AFDC during the 1987-88 school year. Because of data limitations, the alternative schools were analyzed separately here and throughout this evaluation.

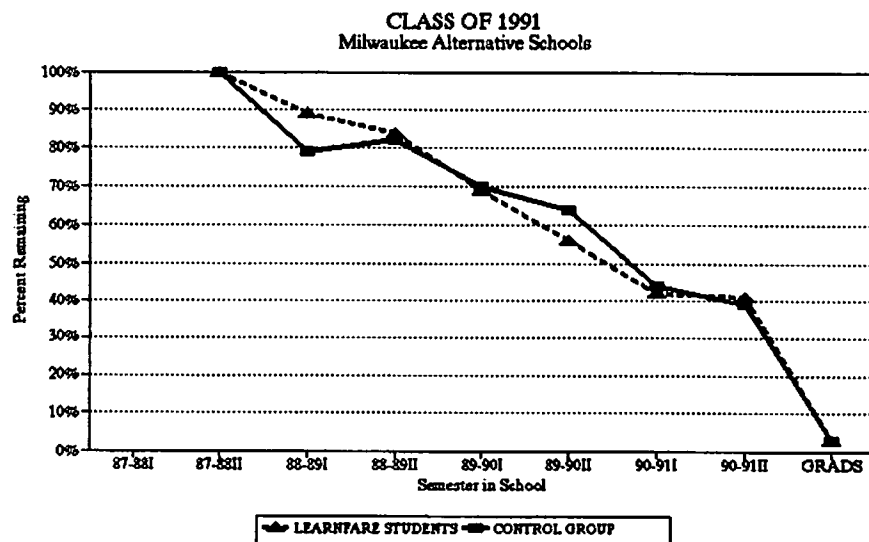
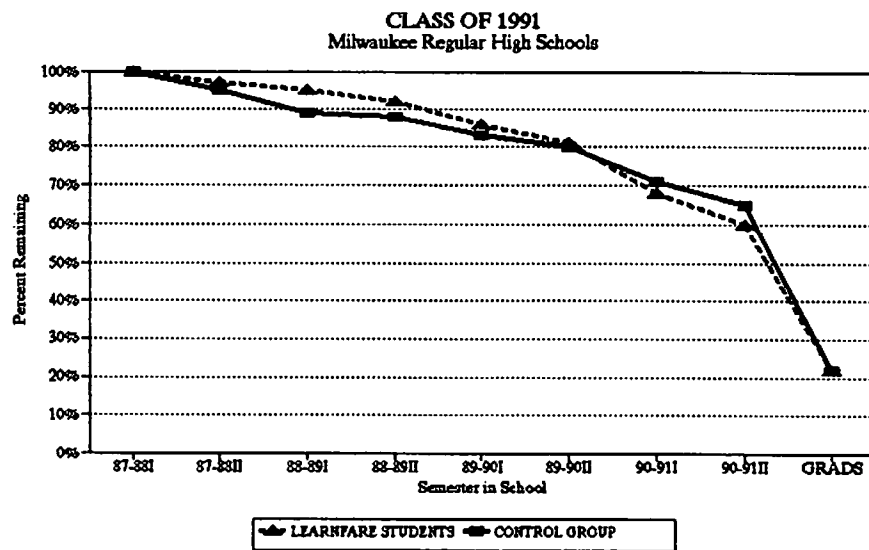
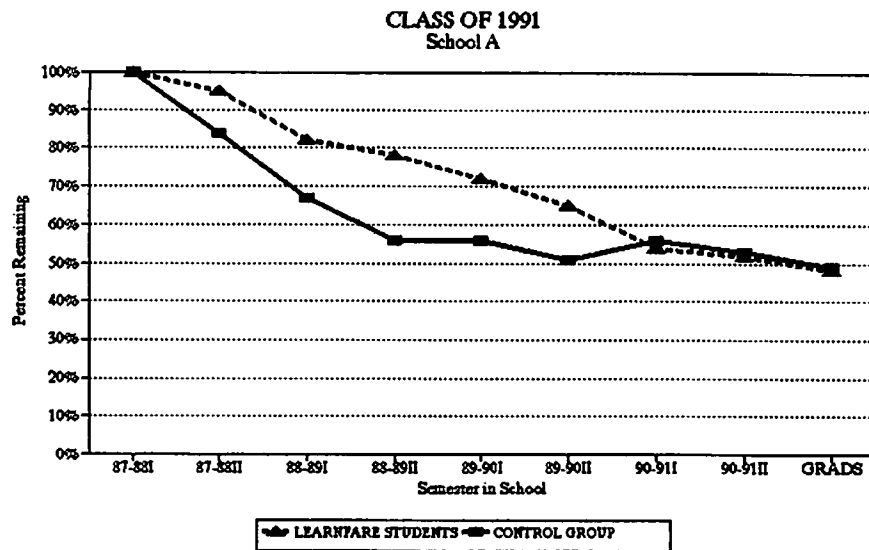
Enrollment and graduation rates were lower for students ever enrolled in alternative schools than for students remaining in regular Milwaukee high schools. However, the Learnfare group (N=314) and control group (n=61) populations in alternative education showed similar rates, with 41 percent of students subject to Learnfare and 39 percent of the control group still enrolled in school in Spring of 1991. The Log-Rank (Savage) and Wilcoxon tests were used to test the homogeneity of the survival functions across strata. Neither test showed a significant difference between the groups, at the .05 level.

June, 1991 graduation data was examined to determine the numbers in the two groups who graduated with the Class of 1991. Graduation rates for both groups were 3 percent.

School A

By second semester of the 1990-91 school year, 54 percent of the School A "Class of 1991" Learnfare group and 56 percent of the control group were still enrolled in school. Two non-parametric tests were used to test the homogeneity of the survival functions across strata -- the Log-Rank (Savage) test and the Wilcoxon test. Neither test showed a significant difference between the groups, at the .05 level.

Again, June, 1991 graduation data was examined to determine the numbers in the two groups who graduated with the Class of 1991. The graduation rates in School A were 48 percent for the Learnfare group and 49 percent for the control group.



D. Analysis of the Teen Parent Population

The population of teen parents on AFDC who have not yet graduated from high school is of particular importance to policy makers. This population has been shown to be very likely to become long-term welfare dependent. This population is also very different from the non-parent teen population on AFDC. Generally, non-parents are eligible for AFDC only up to age eighteen, with the exception of those eighteen year olds who can demonstrate that they will complete their school program before they are nineteen. The teen parent population includes many eighteen and nineteen year olds whose high school classmates have already graduated.

The effect of Learnfare on the teen parent population could not be studied separately as proposed. While teen parents who had not graduated from high school were expected to be a prime target group for Learnfare, nearly half of this population were never required to attend school under Learnfare. Learnfare policy allows AFDC recipients monthly or permanent exemptions from being subject to Learnfare sanctioning for a variety of reasons. Generally, very few dependents were given exemptions during the first two years of Learnfare. The reasons for these exemptions included not being able to graduate from high school by age twenty, caring for an infant, lack of day care for their child(ren), etc.. Most older teen parents were exempt from the Learnfare policy and were not enrolled in school.

A method of constructing a pre-Learnfare group or comparison group in which one-half of the population is exempt could not be found. In addition, state welfare officials did not maintain reliable teen parent status codes prior to Learnfare, nor was it possible to identify teen parents in the comparison group. DHSS maintains computerized birth records on births in Wisconsin. However, prior to calendar year 1989 these records did not include the first name of the mother or her date of birth. Only the mother's maiden name, initial of her first name, and age at the time of the birth was entered. Attempts to match the maiden names of teen mothers against school rosters in order to construct a comparison group and to identify AFDC teen parents in the pre-Learnfare period appeared highly error prone lacking the teen's date of birth, first name, or current last name.

The percentages of teen parents enrolled in school during the first two years of Learnfare and the percent exempt are shown below for Milwaukee Public Schools.⁹ About a third of the AFDC teen parent population were enrolled in school, and between 40 to 49 percent were exempt from the Learnfare policy.

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEEN PARENTS ON AFDC

<u>Semester</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>Percent Enrolled</u>	<u>Percent Not Enrolled</u>	<u>% Exempt from Learnfare</u>	<u>% Required to Attend School Under Threat of Learnfare Sanction</u>
1988-89 I	1,059	33%	67%	49%	51%
1988-89 II	1,284	39	61	43	57
1989-90 I	1,314	34	66	49	51
1989-90 II	1,468	35	65	44	56

Of those MPS teen parents who were required to attend school under the Learnfare policy and threatened with financial sanctions, less than half were enrolled in school. Subsequently, well over half of this population was sanctioned each semester.

MPS TEEN PARENTS REQUIRED TO ATTEND SCHOOL UNDER LEARNFARE

<u>Semester</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent Enrolled</u>	<u>Percent Sanctioned</u>
1988-89 I	539	47%	56%
1988-89 II	728	48	63
1989-90 I	675	48	57
1989-90 II	822	48	64

V. Lagged Regression Analysis of Enrolled AFDC Students

Overall trends in the attendance of AFDC teens and teens subject to the Learnfare attendance requirements reflect not only the impact of the Learnfare experiment but also changes in the composition of the AFDC population over time. For instance, in high school a disproportionate number of male dependents "age out" of AFDC while teenage females may enter AFDC (but not necessarily Learnfare) with the birth of a child. By definition the population on AFDC selects out those families who for whatever reason leave AFDC. Regression analyses were used to control wherever possible for differences between the students under the Learnfare experiment and those of the quasi-experimental control groups and for changes in the AFDC population over time. The regression analyses test the hypothesis that "Learnfare increases the total school attendance of teenage AFDC recipients."

School district records provided a rich data base on the experience of AFDC teens in the past by age, race, sex and grade level. In each district at least five years of data were available on the attendance patterns of AFDC teens and former AFDC teens who were ages 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 in any given semester. The regression analyses examined the data as a collection of "semester experiences," with one student enrolled for one semester with a lag semester available considered as a data point. The unit of analysis for this model was each teen's semester absences, given a lagged variable accounting for the number of absences the teen had in the semester immediately prior. Since the dependent variable, the number of absences in the semester, was positively skewed it was transformed by taking its square root. The resulting dependent variable SABS was made the basis for a series of regression models. This model was selected because it allowed the study to consider the experience of AFDC teens of various ages in the semesters prior to Learnfare and teens of the same ages during the Learnfare experiment.

For each semester experience, a Learnfare variable LEARN was defined as "experiment" (LEARN=1) if for that semester the student was a teen in a family receiving AFDC and was subject to the Learnfare attendance policy. Conversely, LEARN was defined as "control" (LEARN=0) if the teen had previously been in a family receiving AFDC but did not receive AFDC at any time during the Learnfare experiment. The regression variable LEARN attempts to isolate the difference in SABS between semesters in which the student was under the Learnfare attendance policy and semesters in which the student was not on AFDC and thus not under Learnfare. A second variable SANCTION tested whether the student had been sanctioned for poor attendance or as a dropout in a prior semester. In the smaller districts the variable SANCTION was not used because of the limited number of sanctioned cases available.

Several other independent variables were introduced to control for factors and trends possibly influencing student attendance and thus to isolate any influence of the Learnfare requirement on attendance. Some students, due to considerations outside the scope of this study, had generally good attendance patterns while others had generally poor patterns. In attempting to isolate any effect of the Learnfare requirements, the student's attendance record under Learnfare was compared with the same student's prior attendance. A lag variable SLASTABS was introduced utilizing the square root of the absences of the prior semester. This analysis also controlled for grade level, so that control semester experiences from a given grade were compared only to Learnfare semester experiences from the same grade. Other control variables related to the school experience included fall versus spring semester, whether the student was overage in 9th grade, and whether the student had identified exceptional education needs. The regression model considered other patterns in the data which, when controlled for might reveal a relationship between Learnfare and absences. Demographic and economic characteristics used as controlling factors were sex, race or ethnicity, and long-term welfare dependency, as measured by months on AFDC. Control variables were defined as follows:

YEAR9TH - the first year a student was in ninth grade (e.g. 1985-86, 1989-90) of the observation. YEAR8TH was used for middle school.

- SEMESTER - the semester of the observation (0=fall, 1=spring)
- GRADE - the student's chronological grade in school (9, 10, 11, 12, or 13) based upon when the student entered ninth grade. In Milwaukee where the grade level is dependent upon credits earned rather than chronological year in school, the variable AGE was used in place of grade.
- SEX - the sex of the teen (0=male, 1=female)
- BLACK - the student was identified by the school as "African American" or the student's casehead was identified by the income maintenance worker as "black, not of Hispanic origin" (0=no, 1=yes)
- HISPANIC - the student was identified by the school as "Hispanic" or student's casehead was identified as "Hispanic" (0=no, 1=yes)
- ASIAN - the student was identified by the school as "Asian" or the student's casehead was identified as "Asian or Pacific Islander" (0=no, 1=yes)
- NAT-AMER - the student was identified by the school as "Native American" or the student's casehead was identified as "American Indian or Alaskan Native" (0=no, 1=yes)
- OVERAGE - whether the student was more than one year older than his or her classmates in ninth grade
- EVEREXED - whether the student had ever been classified as an exceptional education student (0=no, 1=yes). This variable was only available for Milwaukee Public Schools.
- AFDCMOS - the number of months the subject or the subject's casehead received AFDC in Wisconsin during the period from January 1, 1980 through December 31, 1989. Months of welfare dependency may be underestimated for subjects who moved to Wisconsin from other states after 1980.

Four sets of regressions were performed for high school students from each district, comprising two definitions of suitable "control" groups and two treatments of missing data caused by dropouts.

Pre-Post AFDC Teen Study

The first control group strategy is termed the "Pre-Post AFDC Teen Study." In this analysis, the experience of AFDC teens of various ages in each semester studied prior to Learnfare were utilized along with the semester experience of AFDC teens of similar ages under the Learnfare requirement during six semesters of Learnfare. This analysis tests the hypothesis that

"Learnfare increases the total school attendance of teenage AFDC recipients." The pre-Learnfare AFDC teens were similar to teens under Learnfare in that both groups were on AFDC, indicating a more severe set of economic difficulties. The groups remain different, however, in time, and given the rapidly changing nature of the State's AFDC population by race, sex, family structure, etc., may differ in substantial ways. Control variables including age, sex, race, grade, length of time on AFDC, and in Milwaukee exceptional education status were utilized to control for these differences where data were available. Experimental semesters (LEARN=1) were limited to only those semesters when the teen was required to attend school for one or more months as a student in good standing, on monthly monitoring, or sanctioned. Semesters prior to Learnfare were included only for those students whose families were on AFDC during the given semester. Learnfare period semesters were excluded for AFDC teens who were exempt from school or did not have their school records reviewed by income maintenance workers.

In five school districts the regression models included showed no improvement in attendance attributable to the Learnfare requirement. In Milwaukee an effect was found for the Learnfare requirement but that effect showed increased rather than decreased absences.¹⁰ The regression models for each school district and group comparison are presented in Appendix C.

Pre-Post AFDC Teen Study Including Dropouts

Since the data describe school semester experiences, students not in school (e.g. dropouts) are not represented in the semester absence data. Thus, students with large number of absences in the first years of high school may be more likely dropped out by the last years. This could show the rates of absence when viewed by grade level or student age improving over time. Also, it has been hypothesized that one of the effects of the Learnfare attendance requirement might be to cause students who would otherwise drop out to remain enrolled or cause former dropouts to return to school. Since these could likely be students with poor attendance habits, it could have the effect of increasing the absence rates in the Learnfare semesters.

A second set of regression analysis models were run adding in dropouts. The absence values for teens who had dropped out of school were entered as ninety days absent per semester until the semester of graduation for the student's class. The results approximate what we might see if poor attenders did not drop out, but remained on the school rolls as chronic poor attenders. This technique was applied to the high school dropout population in each district for up to eight semesters until the student's class graduated. In all six school districts this analysis showed no improvement in attendance attributable to the Learnfare requirement.

Control vs. Experimental Group Study

A third set of analyses was conducted using the population described for the "Pre-Post AFDC" study plus a population of teenagers in families which formerly received AFDC, but did not receive aid during the Learnfare period. The addition of this control group population had the advantage of providing

historical experience throughout the Learnfare period for non-Learnfare teens with somewhat similar economic experiences to those of the Learnfare teen population. This strategy was termed "Control vs. Experimental." During the pre-Learnfare period semester experiences for the control group included teenagers on AFDC or from families formerly on AFDC. During the Learnfare period, the control group included former AFDC recipients in their teenage years who were never on aid (and consequently not under the Learnfare requirements) in the three Learnfare years studied. During the Learnfare period the experimental group was made up of those teens subject to the Learnfare policy, i.e. subject to financial sanction, in the semester under review.

The inclusion of former AFDC recipients in their teenage years had several advantages. This group was thought to be similar to those teens under the Learnfare requirements on many socioeconomic dimensions and in that they were contemporary with the Learnfare students and the pre-Learnfare AFDC teens. However, they were obviously different from the Learnfare students in that their families left the AFDC program while the families of students under Learnfare did not. This may indicate that students from this population live in families whose economic difficulties were less severe than the Learnfare group. However, absent any socioeconomic variables at the school level, this group was determined to be most similar to the AFDC population and far superior to the random sample of non-AFDC teens in the total school district population recommended by the state Department of Health and Social Services. The variable AFDCMOS was used to control for months the teen's family was on AFDC in the state from 1980 through 1989, and is used for every teen in the study.

In three school districts these regression models showed no improvement in attendance attributable to the Learnfare requirement. In three districts (Milwaukee, School A and School D), an effect was found for the Learnfare requirement but that effect showed increased rather than decreased absences.

Control vs. Experimental Group Including Dropouts

The fourth set of regression analysis models were run utilizing the "Control vs. Experimental Group" and adding in dropouts. Again, the absence values for teens who had dropped out of school were entered as ninety days absent per semester until the semester of graduation for the student's class. These analyses found the Learnfare requirement having no impact on semester attendance in three districts. In Milwaukee, School A and School B the regression model showed increased rather than decreased days absent attributable to the presence of the Learnfare requirement.

Middle School Studies

Two districts, Milwaukee and School A, had semester middle school attendance records available for the six year study period. Lagged regression models were used to compare the performance of eighth grade students subject to Learnfare to the attendance of control group populations. Neither district

showed improvement in attendance for teens under the Learnfare requirement for either the "Pre-Post AFDC Teen Groups" or the "Control versus Experimental Group" study. The Milwaukee middle school analysis showed an increase rather than decrease in absences attributable to the presence of the Learnfare requirement in both the "Pre-Post AFDC Teen Groups" study and the "Control versus Experimental Group" study. The School A middle school analysis showed an increase rather than decrease in absences for the "Control versus Experimental Group" and no change for the "Pre-Post AFDC Teen Groups."

Milwaukee Alternative School Students

For alternative education students in Milwaukee only records of period absences were available for the study period. As noted, this data had a number of flaws, including differing and inconsistent recording methods among schools and missing data for about thirty percent of the courses. The findings of the regression analyses for this data set were consistent with the regular Milwaukee schools and other school districts, although the fit of the model was poor. The analyses found no improvement in attendance under Learnfare for the "Pre-Post AFDC Teen Groups" and a modest increase rather than decrease in period absences attributable to the presence of the Learnfare requirement for the "Control vs. Experimental Group" study.

Importance of Non-Learnfare Variables

In all of the analyses conducted, the most important variable predicting a teen's semester absences was the youth's prior semester attendance. Most districts also showed teens' absences increasing with age or grade level and in the spring versus fall semester. Asian students tended to have fewer absences than non-Asian youth. In Milwaukee, where data were available on students with identified exceptional education needs, this variable also predicted higher absences.

ENDNOTES

1. The only AFDC teen population not subject to Learnfare was the group of dependent teens living with a non-parent. This population was ruled out as a possible control group population since children placed with non-parents are considered as a group to have more serious family problems than the AFDC teen population subject to Learnfare.
2. This evaluation was designed to examine the impact of the Learnfare experiment on the school performance of AFDC teens. Conclusions regarding the performance of teens in the study populations do not apply to the performance of the total school populations in the districts studied.
3. See the Employment and Training Institute's Report on the Learnfare Evaluation (January, 1991) for a discussion of income maintenance review codes and the administrative problems and errors noted in Learnfare codes for teens not under review.
4. The evaluation expected that the Learnfare policy which threatens families with monthly income losses of 15 to 43 percent and places the family well below the poverty level should not require a long period to show an effect. For a teen dropout, the Learnfare sanction is immediate and continuous until the teen reenrolls in school and attends regularly for at least one calendar month. For the teen entering welfare with a semester of poor attendance, the family income is reduced the first month the teen shows more than two unexcused absences. In each case, a sanctioned family receives no economic support for the teenager out of compliance with the policy.
5. Serious limitations in welfare data hampered the evaluation of Learnfare's impact on the school attendance of teen parents. The effect of Learnfare on the teen parent population could not be studied separately as proposed. Teen parents who had not graduated from high school were expected to be a prime target group for Learnfare, as this population is most likely to become long-term welfare dependent. However, almost one-half of this population were never required to attend school under Learnfare. A method of constructing a pre-Learnfare group or comparison group in which one-half the population is exempt could not be found. In addition, state welfare officials did not record teen parent status prior to Learnfare, nor was it possible to identify teen parents in the comparison group. Because teen parents could not be extracted from the pre-Learnfare AFDC population or from the comparison group, they remained in the study during Learnfare.
6. In Milwaukee high school days absent are defined as four or more periods absent in a day for the regular school population. Milwaukee middle school attendance was reported in half days absent for the semester. For every school district the analysis considered all absences occurring over time regardless of whether they were recorded as excused or unexcused. The intent of the evaluation was to determine if school attendance had improved, not whether the ratio of excused versus unexcused absences had changed.

7. Thirteen year olds in Wisconsin AFDC families were subject to the Learnfare policy only after the first six month AFDC review held after the teen's thirteenth birthday, and many teens retain Learnfare "CH" (children under age 13) codes for longer periods of time.

8. Students who transferred out of the school district were not included in this analysis, nor were teens sanctioned as dropouts who were not enrolled in school in the first spring semester. The spring semesters were used because of continuing start-up problems of Learnfare in the fall semester of 1988-89 in Milwaukee.

9. Teen parents who graduated prior to becoming parents were excluded from this analysis as were those teen parents who transferred out of MPS.

10. It is important to note that population sizes vary greatly among the districts. (The N's for each analysis are included in Appendix C.) This influences the standard errors of the regression coefficients such that the larger districts, especially Milwaukee, show many more significant regression coefficients than the smaller districts even though the overall fit of the model might actually be lower. Care must also be used in making comparisons between districts because community differences may make variables which account for absences in one district, such as gender, less important in others. Similarly, local policies, such as enforcement of truancy laws, may affect attendance more in one district than in another, increasing or decreasing the importance of the YEAR9TH variable, for example.

APPENDIX A

Cluster Analysis Used for Sampling School Districts

Cluster analysis was used to partition the set of Wisconsin school districts into relatively homogeneous subsets based upon common student characteristics, economic and Learnfare-related variables. The analysis was also used to identify those districts most representative of each cluster for purposes of sampling the Learnfare teen population in the state. Both the state and federal government agreed that the Milwaukee Public Schools, the largest school district in the state and the district serving the most teenagers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), should be studied. As of December, 1989, forty-three percent of the teenagers in the state subject to the Wisconsin Learnfare requirement were enrolled in or expected to attend the Milwaukee Public Schools.

In December of 1989, 25,000 Wisconsin teenagers in cases receiving AFDC were required to attend school under the Learnfare requirement. The evaluators summarized the Learnfare experiences of these teens for the 429 public school districts with one or more teens under the policy, and also reviewed Department of Public Instruction reports on pupil enrollment, school district tax base, characteristics of the student populations, and ten-year high school dropout statistics. This information along with municipal birth statistics and county unemployment figures was used to cluster the school districts of the state. Four school districts were identified as representative of other Wisconsin school districts with fifty or more teens subject to the Learnfare school attendance policy. Nine quantitative variables were used for this clustering: ENROLL, the 1989-90 student enrollment for the district; TAXBASE, the taxable property per pupil in the district used to calculate 1989-90 state school aids; MINRATE, the percent of 1989-90 student population who were minorities; DROP10, the average high school dropout rate over the past ten year; UNEMPL, the December, 1989 unemployment rate for the county in which the school district is located; BIRTHS17, the percent of births in 1988 to mothers ages 17 and under for the minor civil jurisdiction in which the school district is located; LEARNTOT, the percent of the 1989-90 student enrollment under Learnfare in December, 1989; LEARNPAR, the percent of teens receiving AFDC under Learnfare who were teen parents in December, 1989; and SANC RATE, the percent of Learnfare students who were sanctioned in December, 1989. Skewed variables were transformed by taking the natural logarithm or the square root to make their distributions more symmetric. All variables were converted to Z-scores to nullify the effect of their inherently different degrees of variability. Based upon preliminary cluster analyses, using Ward's clustering algorithm, three school districts which each tended to remain as a separate group, were removed from the analysis.

The cluster analysis was preformed producing several solutions with different numbers of final clusters. The agglomeration schedule for the last stages is shown below. The Change in Coefficient column, measuring how separate the two clusters were which are joined at each stage, increased slowly and smoothly until four clusters were obtained. It then began to change more rapidly as clusters are combined. Thus four clusters seemed appropriate for this data.

AGGLOMERATION SCHEDULE

Stage	Resulting Number of Clusters	Coefficient (Distance)	Change in Coefficient
28	9	103.0	9.7
29	8	112.8	9.8
30	7	123.3	10.5
31	6	136.6	13.3
32	5	149.9	13.3
33	4	168.9	19.0
34	3	201.4	32.5
35	2	247.2	45.8
36	1	324.0	76.8

For each of the four cluster groups, the mean value of each of the nine variables was computed and the nine values for each districts were used to compute the squared distance of each district from the group mean. This procedure provided a ranking of the districts according to how central they were to the group. Those school districts most central to each group were targeted as sampling candidates.

Examination of the means of the nine variables for the four groups provided a method of identifying the variables most important in depicting the groups. In the table below, mean values between 0.8 and 1.5 (in absolute value) were identified with a single plus (+) or minus (-); variables with means beyond 1.5 were identified with a double plus or minus (++ or --). These are arbitrary values used to simplify the pattern.

MEANS OF VARIABLES BY GROUPS

Variable	Group:			
	1	2	3	4
ENROLL	+			-
TAXBASE	-			-
MINRATE	++		-	
UNEMPL				+
LEARNTOT	++			
LEARNPAR	+			
DROP10	++			
BIRTHS17	+		-	+
SANCRATE	+			+

Group 1 (School A) typifies a set of large school districts with relatively high minority student enrollments, high enrollments of teens under the Learnfare requirement, and higher dropout rates. Group 2 (School B) is central to those school districts in the state close to "average" on all nine variables. Group 3 (School C) represents school districts in the state which

are close to "average" on most characteristics, but that have a lower percentage of students who are minorities and a lower percentage of births in the community to young teen mothers. Group 4 (School D) typifies relatively smaller districts with weaker tax bases, higher unemployment, a higher percentage of births in the community to young teen mothers, and a high rate of Learnfare sanctions.

School districts with at least ten but fewer than fifty Learnfare teens in December, 1989 were treated as a single cluster in order to identify a district which typified this group. Nine variables were used for this analysis. Because birth rates were for minor civil jurisdictions of the smaller areas of the state are subject to wide variation due to the very small numbers of births per unit, BIRTHS17 was not used as a variable. The percent of district students classified with exceptional education needs, which was available for all districts, was included as the ninth variable. Again, the districts were ranked based on the distance of each school district from the mean of the variables. School E was selected as statistically central to these very small school districts in the state which enrolled at least ten but fewer than fifty teens under the Learnfare requirement in December, 1989.

A panel assembled by the Department of Health and Social Services including representatives of the department, the state Department of Public Instruction, and county and school district staff, reviewed the clusters to determine if any school districts should be eliminated as sampling candidates by virtue of a differing application of Learnfare at the school district or county level or other factors not evident in the statistical analysis. None of the school districts or counties identified by the panel as possible concerns appeared central to the clusters identified.

At this stage, five school districts were identified which appeared central to each of the clusters. These districts, while typical of their clusters, were not regionally diverse. To insure adequate geographical diversity, only one school district was allowed for a county, beginning with the largest size district. The five school districts selected were then contacted for their participation in the study. One school district, which at the time of the study's initiation was heavily involved in Operation Desert Shield, declined to participate. For that cluster the district next closest to the mean of the cluster was contacted and agreed to participate.

APPENDIX B

School Data Used for the Evaluation

Prior to requesting school records for the evaluation study, the evaluators examined thirty-one months of state income maintenance records to identify all teens in AFDC cases from September, 1988 through March, 1991 and to determine which teens were subject to the Learnfare school attendance requirements and which were exempt each month. The evaluators also identified all youth who were or became teenagers during the study period and who were in families receiving AFDC for the period 1984 through 1988.

Student information was collected from the six school districts during the summer and fall of 1991, after the completion of the 1990-91 school year. The data included enrollment status by semester, days absent by semester or school year, courses attempted and completed, grades earned, credits earned, reasons for withdrawals, and dates of withdrawal or graduation. Two districts, including Milwaukee and School A, provided computerized records on their students. Four districts provided individual student transcripts and student file records which were hand coded and computerized.

Milwaukee Public Schools:

The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) provided computer tapes which listed the course records, enrollment, attendance and completion data for each 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade student enrolled in the school system in 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87, 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91. Teens in the study populations were matched using names, dates of birth, and social security numbers where available.

Milwaukee Public School records for the years 1984-85 through 1990-91 were used to construct the Learnfare study population. For middle school (grades 7th and 8th) all years of student records were available, while high school records on attendance were missing for school year 1986-87 and high school grades and credits were missing for the first semester of 1987-88. To compensate for the periods in which MPS data were missing, the study period was expanded to include the 1984-85 school year.

Student enrollment and absences were examined for each semester for the population on AFDC as well as the group of students whose families previously had received AFDC. The study population for high school included a total of 32,561 prior or current AFDC children and the middle school study population totaled 24,178. Additionally, for the high school population a separate analysis of alternative school students was required because daily attendance was not recorded on the MPS computerized attendance system. Instead, the MPS computerized grade and course files were used to track enrollment and attendance where enrollment and period absences were reported for each course for each marking period and semester. Even within the course file, however, for about 30 percent of the courses period absences were not reported and only showed enrollment. For this reason enrollment was used to construct a separate cohort survival analysis while attendance was used to conduct the analysis of the impact of Learnfare on attendance. Both of these analyses were used to report on the experience of students ever enrolled in alternative schools.

In Milwaukee "days absent" was defined as four or more periods absent in a day for the regular high school population, the definition used for the Learnfare policy in Milwaukee schools where daily period attendance is recorded in the MPS computerized attendance system. Half day absences were not calculated for high school. For middle school, attendance was reported in half days absent per mark period and semester.

Five School Districts in the Balance of State:

School A provided computerized student records for the 1985-86 through 1990-91 school year for those teens identified in the study population. The other districts provided individual student transcripts and student record files for teens identified in the experimental and control group populations who were enrolled in their districts from 1985-86 through 1990-91. These transcripts, which included information on attendance, days tardy or class cuts, courses taken, credit attainment, withdrawal data, and graduation information were hand coded and computerized. Only three school districts were able to provide historical absence data for middle school students for the study period. School A provided this data by semester; Schools D and E provided the data by school year. The study examines the records of 5,926 high school and middle school students in the five districts.

AFDC Records on Teens and Cases:

The evaluators analyzed tapes from the Department of Health and Social Services' Computer Reporting Network (CRN) system files which were used to administer the AFDC program and to enforce the Learnfare policy. Longitudinal files were created for the thirty-one month experience of all AFDC teenagers under Learnfare in the state from September, 1988 through March, 1991, and the experiences of all Wisconsin AFDC cases on a quarterly basis from January, 1980 through December, 1989. These records included information on the length of time cases received AFDC, the sex and race or ethnic background of the casehead, and each client's age, sex, relationship to the casehead and the casehead's spouse, marital status, reported school district and school status, and the client's Learnfare or adult work program status.

APPENDIX C

Discussion of the Regression Models

Rationale for Two Control Groups

Four regressions were performed for high school students from each district, comprising two definitions of suitable "control" groups and two treatments of missing data caused by dropouts. Since the Learnfare attendance requirements were applied to all districts in the State, quasi-experimental control groups were defined. No single control group could be devised which was similar to the AFDC group subject to Learnfare on all criteria, so two control groups were created, each similar to the experimental group in several ways.

The first control group strategy comprised teenagers whose families were on AFDC during the period prior to Learnfare (1984 to 1987). This strategy was termed "Pre vs Post." The experimental group is made up of those teens subject to the Learnfare policy, i.e. subject to financial sanction, in the 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 school years. The pre-Learnfare AFDC group was similar to the Learnfare group in that both were on AFDC, indicating a more severe set of economic difficulties. The groups were different, however, in time, and given the rapidly changing nature of the State's AFDC population by race, sex, family structure, etc., the Pre and Post groups were different in substantial ways. The lagged regression model used semester experiences, controlling for identified differences in sex, race, age and length of time on AFDC. It could not control for threats to validity based on history during the Learnfare period.

The second control group strategy is termed "Control vs. Experimental." In order to control for historical changes occurring during the Learnfare period, this strategy uses a broader study population, including teenagers whose families received AFDC at some time since 1984. Again, the unit of analysis is the semester experience. Experimental semesters are those in which the teen is on AFDC and under the Learnfare requirement, i.e. subject to financial sanction in that semester. Control semesters include semester experiences for those teens who were on AFDC prior to Learnfare but not on AFDC during the Learnfare period. The control group includes teens similar to the teens under the Learnfare requirement on many socioeconomic dimensions and in that they were contemporary with the Learnfare students. However, former AFDC recipients obviously differ from the Learnfare students in that their families left the AFDC program while the families of students under Learnfare did not. This may indicate that these students live in families whose economic difficulties were less severe than the Learnfare group. However, absent any socioeconomic variables at the school level, this group was determined to be most similar to the AFDC population and far superior to a sample of non-AFDC teens drawn randomly from the total school population in the districts as recommended by the state Department of Health and Social Services. The variable AFDCMOS was used to control for months the teen's family was on AFDC in the state from 1980 through 1989, and was used for all teens in the study.

Analysis of Two Control Groups

Lagged regression analysis of student absences were performed using both control strategies. The tables at the end of this Appendix give the results of the regression models. It is important to note that the sample sizes vary greatly among the districts. This influenced the standard errors of the regression coefficients such that the larger districts, especially Milwaukee, show many more significant regression coefficients than the smaller districts even though the overall fit of the model might actually be lower.

The table below displays the signs of significant regression coefficients for the Pre vs Post and the Control vs Experiment regressions. For the most part, signs of regression coefficients are the same across both regressions. No coefficient changed sign between models. Examining first the results for the model without dropouts, it can be seen that for two of the districts, A and D, the Learnfare variable is significant and positive for the Control vs Experiment regression but insignificant for the Pre vs Post regression. For the model with dropouts included, the Learnfare variable for Milwaukee, District A and District B shows a similar pattern with no effect in the Pre vs Post analysis but a positive effect in the Control vs Experiment analysis.

Rationale for Including Dropouts

In order to correctly interpret the results of the regression analyses it is necessary to be aware of two potential problems associated with the data. First, since the data describes semester experiences, students not in school (e.g. dropouts) are not represented in the data. Thus, students with large number of absences in the first years of high school are very likely dropped out by the last years. This may cause the rates of absence when viewed by grade level or student age to improve over time. This was termed the "Dropout Selection Phenomenon." Second, it has been hypothesized that one of the effects of the Learnfare attendance requirement might be to cause students who would otherwise drop out to remain enrolled or cause former dropouts to return to school. Since these are likely students with poor attendance habits, it may have the effect of increasing the absence rates in the Learnfare semesters. This was termed the "Learnfare Selection Phenomenon."

Processes such as these which control the selection of observed data may affect the regression analysis by biasing the estimation of regression coefficients for any variables which are correlated with the selection variables. It is necessary to either demonstrate that a selection effect is not operating, or introduce a mechanism to control for the effect in the regression model. The survival analysis results presented above made a strong case for the absence of a "Learnfare Selection Problem." The regression analysis with absence values for students who have dropped out entered as ninety days absent per semester until the graduation of the student's class is a mechanism for artificially eliminating the "Dropout Selection Phenomenon." The results approximate what we might see if poor attenders did not drop out, but remained in the school as chronic poor attenders.

TABLE 1

**SIGNS OF REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS
CONTROLL/EXPERIMENT AND PRE/POST ANALYSIS
REGULAR HIGH SCHOOLS
WITHOUT DROPOUTS**

VARIABLE	MILWAUKEE		DISTRICT A		DISTRICT B		DISTRICT C		DISTRICT D		DISTRICT E	
	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P
SLASTABS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		
SEX	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AGE	0	0	+	+								
GRADE					+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
YEAR9TH	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NAT-AMER	+	+			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BLACK	+	+	0	0								
ASIAN	-	-			-	-						
HISPANIC	0	0	+	+								
LEARN	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0
SANCTION	+	+	0	0								
AFDCMOS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SEMESTER	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	+				
EVEREXED	+	+										
OVERAGE	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+

WITH DROPOUTS

VARIABLE	MILWAUKEE		DISTRICT A		DISTRICT B		DISTRICT C		DISTRICT D		DISTRICT E	
	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P	C/E	P/P
SLASTABS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		
SEX	-	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0
AGE	+	+	+	+								
GRADE					+	+	+	0	+	+	0	0
YEAR9TH	+	+	-	0	+	0	0	0	+	+	0	0
NAT-AMER	+	+			0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0
BLACK	+	+	0	0								
ASIAN	-	-			-	-						
HISPANIC	0	0	0	0								
LEARN	+	0	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SANCTION	+	+	+	+								
AFDCMOS	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SEMESTER	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	+				
EVEREXED	+	+										
OVERAGE	+	+	+	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0

+ OR - INDICATES SIGNIFICANT AT THE .05 LEVEL

TABLE 2

**SIGNS OF REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS
ANALYSES WITHOUT AND WITH DROPOUTS
REGULAR HIGH SCHOOLS**

VARIABLE	CONTROL VS EXPERIMENT MODEL											
	MILWAUKEE		DISTRICT A		DISTRICT B		DISTRICT C		DISTRICT D		DISTRICT E	
	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W
SLASTABS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		
SEX	0	-	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+
AGE	0	+	+	+								
GRADE					+	+	0	+	0	+	0	0
YEAR9TH	+	+	0	-	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0
NAT-AMER	+	+			0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0
BLACK	+	+	0	0								
ASIAN	-	-			-	-						
HISPANIC	0	0	+	0								
LEARN	+	+	+	+	0	+	0	0	+	0	0	0
SANCTION	+	+	0	+								
AFDCMOS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SEMESTER	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+				
EVEREXED	+	+										
OVERAGE	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	0

VARIABLE	PRE VS POST MODEL											
	MILWAUKEE		DISTRICT A		DISTRICT B		DISTRICT C		DISTRICT D		DISTRICT E	
	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W
SLASTABS	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		
SEX	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AGE	0	+	+	+								
GRADE					0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0
YEAR9TH	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0
NAT-AMER	+	+			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
BLACK	+	+	0	0								
ASIAN	-	-			-	-						
HISPANIC	0	0	+	0								
LEARN	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SANCTION	+	+	0	+								
AFDCMOS	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SEMESTER	+	+	+	+	0	0	+	+				
EVEREXED	+	+										
OVERAGE	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0

+ OR - INDICATES SIGNIFICANT AT THE .05 LEVEL

Almost certainly, filling in missing semesters with a high number biases the regression results just as self selection does, but it biases the regression coefficients in a direction opposite of the Dropout Selection Phenomenon. It thus provides a means for comparing regression coefficients to help identify which might be affected by the Dropout Selection Phenomenon.

Analyses With and Without Dropouts

Table 2 displays the signs of significant regression coefficients for the models with and without dropouts for each district. Examining first the Pre vs Post analysis, a few coordinate pairs change from insignificant to significant, especially in District D. The Learnfare requirement, however, shows no improvement in attendance. Examining the results for the Control vs Experiment analysis, several pairs of regression coefficients change from significant to not significant or vice versa, but no pairs change sign. Some variable tend to be more significant in the positive direction in the regression with dropouts, particularly grade level and YEAR9TH. The presence of the Learnfare requirement tends to show a mixed impact on attendance. In no case does the Learnfare requirement show a reduction in absences using the model.

In summary, the regression models appear to be quite stable across both control strategies and with and without dropouts included. A handful of variables consistently affect absences: SEMESTER, ASIAN, and especially SLASTABS. Other variables show importance in certain districts or when the control group is specified a certain way, but the LEARN and SANCTION variables do not show attendance improvement in any of the models used.

Regression Tables

The attached tables provide the regression models for each school district studied. Approach 1 shows the regression models using the "Control vs Experimental" group design without dropouts. Approach 2 shows the regression models using the "Control vs. Experimental" group design including dropouts. Approach 3 shows the regression models using the "Pre-Post AFDC" study population not including dropouts, and Approach 4 shows the regression models using the "Pre-Post AFDC" study populations including dropouts.

REGRESSION TABLES FOR EACH OF FOUR APPROACHES

MILWAUKEE										SCHOOL A:										SCHOOL B:																																
REGULAR HS:										COEFFICIENT										COEFFICIENT										COEFFICIENT																						
INTERCEPT										-2.636										-6.449										-2.505																						
SLASTABS										0.653	**	0.004									0.561	**	0.027									0.739	**	0.037																		
SEX										-0.022										0.001										-0.002										0.002												
AGE										0.013										0.061	*	0.029									0.015										0.087											
YEAR9TH										0.030	**	0.004									0.551	**	0.025									0.739	**	0.037																		
NATAMER										0.233	**	0.067									0.184	**	0.010									0.154										0.362	**	0.002								
BLACK										0.064	**	0.019									0.061	*	0.025									0.067										0.084										
ASIAN										-0.537	**	0.046									0.042										0.111										0.105											
HISPANIC										-0.010										0.034	*	0.020									0.014										0.046											
LEARN										0.184	**	0.019									0.084	*	0.046									0.147	*	0.064																		
SANCTION										0.168	**	0.028									0.237	*	0.099									0.129										0.098										
AFCOMOS										0.000										-0.000										-0.000										0.001												
SEMESTER										0.530	**	0.015									0.034	**	0.001									0.293	**	0.044																		
EVEREXED										0.532	**	0.015									0.445	**	0.032									0.500	**	0.045																		
OVERAGE										0.035										0.020										0.032										0.500												
APPROACH 1										APPROACH 2										APPROACH 3										APPROACH 4																						
STANDARD ERROR										STANDARD ERROR										STANDARD ERROR										STANDARD ERROR																						
COEFFICIENT										COEFFICIENT										COEFFICIENT										COEFFICIENT																						
ERROR										ERROR										ERROR										ERROR																						

REGRESSION TABLES FOR EACH OF FOUR APPROACHES

	APPROACH 1		APPROACH 2		APPROACH 3		APPROACH 4	
	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR
SCHOOL C:								
INTERCEPT	-4.649		-2.217		-1.333		0.262	
SLASTABS	0.970 **	0.030	0.902 **	0.030	1.019 **	0.042	0.979 **	0.031
LEARN	0.123	0.124	0.130	0.117	0.183	0.285	0.162	0.274
AFDCMOS	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	-0.001	0.002	-0.000	0.002
GRADE	0.070	0.061	0.022 *	0.011	0.092	0.127	0.031	0.124
YEAR9TH	0.015	0.040	0.000	0.031	-0.031	0.105	-0.038	0.102
SEX	-0.015	0.095	-0.029	0.091	0.087	0.148	0.092	0.141
SEMESTER	1.971 **	0.117	1.652 **	0.106	2.107 **	0.170	1.956 **	0.166
NAT-AMER	-0.228	0.225	-0.255	0.228	-0.252	0.322	-0.290	0.327
OVERAGE	0.072	0.051	0.130 *	0.051	-0.003	0.076	-0.001	0.075
	R2=0.6963	N= 559	R2=0.8263	N= 628	R2=0.7456	N= 255	R2=0.8127	N= 275

SCHOOL D:								
INTERCEPT	6.454		-19.715		23.181		-28.051	
SLASTABS	0.479 **	0.084	0.201 **	0.049	0.462 **	0.106	0.218 **	0.069
LEARN	0.997 *	0.403	0.594	0.344	1.186	0.708	0.096	0.536
AFDCMOS	0.003	0.004	0.006	0.004	0.001	0.006	0.005	0.005
GRADE	-0.041	0.211	0.344 **	0.017	-0.413	0.356	0.325 **	0.022
YEAR9TH	-0.051	0.138	0.215 *	0.066	-0.201	0.251	0.316 *	0.139
SEX	0.456	0.276	0.460	0.251	0.619	0.373	0.575	0.336
NAT-AMER	0.581	0.394	0.738 *	0.328	0.833	0.521	0.850	0.435
OVERAGE	0.102	0.267	0.208	0.264	0.006	0.351	0.035	0.343
	R2=0.4117	N= 156	R2=0.8369	N= 192	R2=0.4161	N= 101	R2=0.8119	N= 125

SCHOOL E:								
INTERCEPT	14.338		5.899		31.244		18.808	
LEARN	0.542	0.516	0.172	0.618	1.237	0.832	0.748	1.001
AFDCMOS	0.007	0.006	0.006	0.007	0.005	0.007	0.000	0.009
GRADE	0.189	0.237	0.452	0.284	0.080	0.371	0.374	0.450
YEAR9TH	-0.159	0.123	-0.095	0.148	-0.341	0.225	-0.230	0.273
SEX	0.669	0.383	0.966 *	0.461	0.414	0.489	0.683	0.592
NAT-AMER	0.672	0.645	1.401	0.736	1.031	0.723	1.234	0.856
OVERAGE	1.047 *	0.477	1.042	0.578	1.070 *	0.508	1.105	0.618
	R2=0.1638	N= 114	R2=0.1750	N= 117	R2=0.1895	N= 75	R2=0.1654	N = 77

** INDICATES SIGNIFICANT AT THE .01 LEVEL

* INDICATES SIGNIFICANT AT THE .05 LEVEL

REGRESSION TABLES FOR EACH OF FOUR APPROACHES

MPS MIDDLE SCHOOL:	APPROACH 1			APPROACH 2			APPROACH 3			APPROACH 4		
	COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR		COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR		COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR		COEFFICIENT	STANDARD ERROR	
INTERCEPT	-0.877						3.269					
SLASTABS	0.696	**	0.006				0.700	**	0.005			
SEX	0.031	*	0.014				0.035	*	0.016			
AGE	0.127	**	0.015				0.152	**	0.018			
YEAR8TH	-0.011	*	0.005				-0.064	**	0.009			
NATAMER	0.092		0.070				0.101		0.080			
BLACK	-0.122	**	0.019				-0.129	**	0.024			
ASIAN	-0.525	**	0.049				-0.570	**	0.055			
HISPANIC	-0.023		0.029				-0.051		0.035			
LEARN	0.203	**	0.020				0.389	**	0.037			
SANCTION	0.277	**	0.052				0.281	**	0.052			
SEMESTER	0.531	**	0.021				0.512	**	0.024			
EVEREXED	0.422	**	0.016				0.427	**	0.018			
OVERAGE	-0.015		0.030				-0.051		0.033			
	R2=0.5502 N=27,032						R2=0.5535 N= 21,081					

SCHOOL A MIDDLE SCHOOL:

INTERCEPT	0.508						-2.909					
SLASTABS	0.715	**	0.012				0.712	**	0.015			
SEX	0.091	*	0.038				0.143	*	0.048			
AGE	0.081	*	0.037				0.073		0.043			
YEAR8TH	-0.016		0.012				0.023		0.033			
BLACK	-0.086	*	0.042				-0.083		0.054			
HISPANIC	-0.005		0.059				0.028		0.077			
LEARN	0.200	**	0.049				0.069		0.098			
SANCTION	0.367		0.212				0.206		0.197			
AFDCMOS	-0.000		0.001				-0.000		0.001			
SEMESTER	0.350	**	0.050				0.391	**	0.058			
OVERAGE	0.104		0.087				0.189	*	0.090			
	R2=0.4879 N=4,261						R2=0.4984 N= 2,669					

MPS ALTERNATIVE:

INTERCEPT	-3.798						-11.656					
SLASTABS	0.561	**	0.010				0.512	**	0.012			
SEX	0.235	**	0.090				0.299	**	0.116			
AGE	0.008		0.051				0.141	*	0.067			
YEAR9TH	0.091	**	0.032				0.169	**	0.045			
NATAMER	0.412		0.454				0.542		0.609			
BLACK	0.053		0.153				-0.053		0.186			
ASIAN	-0.995		1.329				-1.591		1.496			
HISPANIC	0.142		0.232				-0.037		0.276			
LEARN	0.605	**	0.134				0.242		0.133			
SANCTION	0.035		0.143				0.141		0.146			
AFDCMOS	-0.002		0.001				0.001		0.002			
SEMESTER	1.131	**	0.091				0.968	**	0.116			
EVEREXED	0.188		0.170				0.167		0.258			
OVERAGE	0.189		0.135				0.110		0.171			
	R2=0.3233 N=8,294						R2=0.2787 N= 5,888					

** INDICATES SIGNIFICANT AT THE .01 LEVEL

* INDICATES SIGNIFICANT AT THE .05 LEVEL

APPENDIX D

Description of the Learnfare Experiment School Attendance Requirement

Under Wisconsin's "Learnfare" policy all teenagers, ages thirteen through nineteen, who are parents or living with a natural or adoptive parent are as a condition for receiving AFDC benefits required to attend school regularly until they graduate or earn a high school equivalency credential. The Learnfare requirement was first enforced for thirteen- and fourteen-year old dependent teens and all teen parents in March of 1988. In September, 1988, all remaining teens were placed under the policy. Under the current system at the time of a family's application for AFDC or at the family's six month AFDC review, the county income maintenance worker handling the case is expected to inquire whether each teenager is in school and to collect school attendance records from the parent or the teen's school. The attendance of all AFDC teens subject to the Learnfare attendance requirement is required to be monitored each semester.

Teens are placed on monthly monitoring of their school attendance if they have ten or more full days of unexcused absences in a semester. Each month the school district where these teens are enrolled is directed to provide information on the number of unexcused absences incurred by each teen. If the number of full days of unexcused absences exceeds two for any teen, the family of that teen is notified that its monthly AFDC benefits will be reduced. Teens who have dropped out of school or who fail to provide evidence of school enrollment are sanctioned each month until they attend school for a complete month with fewer than three unexcused absences. The amount of a "sanctioned" family's AFDC grant reduction is determined by subtracting the "sanctioned" teen from the number of persons in the family eligible for AFDC that month. In cases where the teenager is the casehead, only her children are counted for the AFDC grant for the months when the teenager fails to meet the Learnfare requirement.

The Learnfare administrative rules specify conditions under which teens may be exempt from school attendance. AFDC teens who cannot graduate by age twenty may be permanently exempted from school attendance under Learnfare. This determination is normally made by the local school district, based upon the teen's age and credit deficiencies. Teens may also receive temporary exemptions to care for an infant up to three months of age, for illness, for religious reasons, for incapacitation, if suspended or expelled with no available alternative school, or if the teen cannot find child care or lacks transportation to and from school. Daily absences from school may be excused according to local school district policies or determinations made by the casehead's income maintenance worker based upon the Learnfare "good cause" criteria. Thirteen year olds are subject to sanctioning after the first six month AFDC case review held in a month following their thirteenth birthday. Youth remain under the Learnfare requirement until they graduate from high school or earn a high school equivalency credential.