WHAT IS A LEARNING CENTER?
HOW CAN I CREATE ONE IN MY CLASSROOM?
A baker’s dozen steps to getting it done

A learning center is a small area, a corner, an alcove, a table and chairs or computer workstation that is set aside within a classroom where specific supplies or educational materials are stored in a way that provides easy access to students. Sometimes Learning Centers are called resource centers or work stations. The materials including print, non-print, electronic and manipulative, included in Learning Centers are designed to provide individual students with self-directed, differentiated learning to target and remediate specific learning difficulties and skill deficits. Learning Centers may also provide opportunities for student learning teams (two or three students) to engage in collaborative learning activities.

Learning Centers may be organized for any content area or topic. Learning Centers provide individualized educational experiences based on students’ particular needs and interests. Learning Centers stimulate learning, reinforce skill development and are a resource for students’ to use to extend their knowledge in a particular area. Learning Centers are not used with students on a daily basis. Usually, they are available to students once or twice a week depending on instructional time available and the skill and knowledge needs of the students.

Math teachers might organize their Learning Centers by PSSA Reporting Categories: Numbers and Operations, Measurement, Geometry, Algebraic Equations, Data Analysis and Probability. English and Reading teachers might organize their Learning Centers using the Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Research Academic Standards that include Learning to Read Independently; Reading Critically in All Content Areas; Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature and non-fictions; developing expanded vocabulary and the like.

Organizing the Learning Center is both an art and a science. Teachers should express their own creativity and organizational design to develop meaningful Learning Centers within their classrooms to promote learning and student achievement. Visit this Wiki for more ideas on creating Learning Centers: [www.drpaulasprescriptions4pd.wikispaces.com](http://www.drpaulasprescriptions4pd.wikispaces.com). These 13 steps will help you get started:

1. **GATHER STUDENT ASSESSMENT DATA**
   Download the 4Sight Item Analysis Report from the Success For All Member Center for each of your classes.
   [http://members.successforall.net](http://members.successforall.net) User name: WHSD Password: High

2. **ANALYZE DATA**
   Use the Item Analysis Form to record your students’ answers to each of the items and compare students’ answers to the correct answers listed on the Item Analysis Form.

3. **INTERPRET DATA**
   After all students’ responses for a given class are listed, review the students’ answers and look for patterns and trends. Have several students given the same wrong answer for the same item? Have several students missed the same items? Which items did most students get wrong? List the items that students most often missed. Which Standards, Reporting Categories or Anchors are these most often missed items related to? Then consider whether the most missed items are related to the most heavily weighted Reporting Categories. After analyzing this information, you should be able to identify 2-3 areas in which each of your classes are experiencing the most difficulty. An example of topical Learning Centers in English classes might be: Fact/Opinion; Inference; Figurative Language; Graphics/Charts.

4. **DEVELOP STUDENT LEARNING PROFILES**
   Assess each of your students and create a learning profile for each one. Consider how each student learns best: visual, auditory, kinesthetic learner. Consider the amount of time it takes for each student to learn concepts. Consider the reading level of each student. Consider the number of days absent. Consider 4Sight test scores, especially item analysis data. Consider PSSA scores. Determine if there are small groups of students (3-5) who have similar skill needs. See sample of Student Learning Profile.

5. **PLAN FOR SPACE, LOCATION, DESIGN**
   Plan the location of the Learning Center carefully. Select a corner or alcove or create a special space in your classroom to encourage students’ use. Many students respond favorably to inviting environments, cozy corners, comfortable chairs, attractive decorations and special touches from students such as a mural painted on a cardboard room divider. Area rugs may also help to set off an area and make it appealing. You don’t have to be an interior designer, but creating a unique area is a motivating influence in getting students to use the Learning Center productively. Ask interested students to help create the environment you want to provide at your Learning Center. Consider inviting students to contribute to the Learning Center with personal collections or related artifacts and items for display. Parents might also be invited to contribute ideas to the Learning Centers. See sample of classroom floor plan options.
6. **IDENTIFY THE LEARNING CENTER TOPIC OR THEME**
   Develop Learning Centers gradually. Make them an integral part of your lesson planning process. Your Learning Centers should support the lessons you are teaching during your whole group or small group instruction. Avoid feeling that you must create several Learning Centers immediately. Design and implement one Learning Center thoroughly in an area of personal strength or interest that relates to your content area and related Academic Standards, Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content. Tie Learning Centers into your curriculum. The content and skills can change regularly to match what you are studying in a particular unit or chapter. Then, consider developing others. Work with a colleague to develop Learning Centers. If each develops one Learning Center, you can share them so that each of you has two Learning Centers to use with your students in your classroom.

7. **ORGANIZE THE LEARNING CENTER**
   Clearly label your Learning Centers and make sure they are easily accessible, are well-stocked with all the materials and supplies necessary for students to work independently. Be sure that the goals, objectives and directions are clearly written in student friendly language so that students can derive the maximum benefit from their usage. Consider placing “In” and “Out” boxes or folders at the Learning Center so that students know where to pick up their work and where to place completed work. Create a storage system of boxes, baskets, folders or large envelopes to store materials. Label all materials in the Learning Center for quick and easy access.

8. **DIFFERENTIATE THE LEARNING CENTER ACTIVITIES**
   Include a variety of activities to engage different types of learners. Avoid providing only paper and pencil tasks. Students should have opportunities to create models, diagrams, graphs, posters and similar products that require them to compare, classify, outline, assemble and rearrange data and concepts. The possibilities are as endless as your imagination. Be sure to allow for student choice among the activities offered. Allow students to practice self-direction, responsibility and accountability for their work at the Learning Center. Periodically add new activities to maintain student interest. Be realistic about making changes. Weekly is too often, but yearly is not often enough. Changes with the grading periods, quarterly or with the administration of 4Sight might be more reasonable and doable. Gather ideas from [www.drpaulasprescriptions4pd.wikispaces.com](http://www.drpaulasprescriptions4pd.wikispaces.com)

9. **BE EXPLICIT, SPECIFIC AND DETAILED**
   List clear procedures for using the Learning Centers in a variety of modalities. Include visual, graphic directions, written directions and oral directions (with earphones) so that students are able to begin work immediately.

10. **ESTABLISH CONSISTENT ROUTINES**
    Before directing students to use the Learning Centers, conduct one or more orientation sessions to familiarize them with what the Learning Centers are, why they are being used and how they should be used. This is particularly important if students are working in learning teams since they must have clear guidelines and expectations for success and must take responsibility for their behavior and their learning products.

11. **POST SCHEDULES AND PROCEDURES**
    Post a Learning Center Schedule and Activity Log at the Learning Center. They operate more smoothly, efficiently and effectively when students have a set time of the week, day or class period to use them. The Activity Log can consist of dated sign-in and sign-out sheets to make students more accountable for their self-directed learning activities.

12. **IDENTIFY STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND CONSEQUENCES**
    Require students to complete a self-evaluation form after each visit to a Learning Center. These can provide meaningful feedback to help you assess students’ progress and address their needs. If you prefer not to have a separate self-evaluation form, you might include a “Comment/Evaluation” space on the sign-in sheets so that students can write a brief self-assessment right on that same form.

13. **EVALUATE AND REVISE**
    Be sure to take photos of the Learning Centers that you create. These will serve as a reminder for future use. Colleagues could also share photos and gather ideas for developing Learning Centers from one another. Use the student self-evaluations as well as your own observations to determine the success of the Learning Centers. Make changes to the Learning Centers based on the data you gather as students use the centers.