

Research Brief

High School Education in Correctional Facilities

Question: What are the educational programs available to students without a high school diploma who are in a correctional facility?

Summary of Findings:

With the advent of “Get tough on crime” and “Three strikes” in the 1980s and 1990s, correctional facilities have become overloaded with prisoners who are often repeat offenders. 51% of those imprisoned have a GED or high school diploma. Out of the remaining 49%, 36% of inmates had not completed the ninth grade and approximately a quarter of them read at or below the fourth grade level. “The U.S. Department of Education defines correctional education as ‘that part of the total correctional process that focuses on changing the behavior of offenders through planned learning experiences and learning environments. It seeks to develop or enhance knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of incarcerated youth and adults’” (*State correctional education programs*). It has been found that most individuals who were involved in the justice system as juveniles had a track record of being unsuccessful in the traditional school setting. Research shows that without an education, they often end up in the system as adults.

Prior to 1998, the federal government required that states spend no less than 10% of their Adult Education budgets in correctional institutions. As a backlash to the perception that jail had become too much like a recreational facility, the law was changed so that states could not spend more than 10% in this area. To continue this trend, access to Pell Grants that had been available to prisoners, are now denied to anyone who is incarcerated. The Bureau of Prisons mandates that those without a high school diploma or GED must attend literacy classes for 120 days or until they earn a GED. As of 2000, 80% of prisons provided some type of program in secondary education and 75% in basic adult education. However, each state determines if a general education program in their prisons will be mandatory and how much funding will be allotted to the educational programs.

The research has continuously found that the more education an inmate has, the lower the recidivism rate. In a study in Virginia, it was found

that those inmates who received education in prison had a 59% lower recidivism rate than those who did not. With some sort of degree it is easier to find and keep a job and the person has gained the requisite literacy skills to be successfully functional in society. Another finding has been that the more extensive and consistent the program, the more successful it is for those who earned at least a GED. In New York, it was estimated that it costs approximately \$2,500 a year to educate an inmate while it runs \$25,000 a year to house them. For every dollar spent on prison-based education, there is a \$3-5 savings to the taxpayers.

With all of the cuts in the prison educational programs, the most common ones tend to be for inmates to:

- earn a GED, where they must read at least at the eighth grade level in order to pass
- earn an AA, through a community college program
- develop basic literacy skills

High schools and community colleges often work with representatives from correctional facilities to help provide suitable programs. In order for a program to be accredited it should include:

- communication skills
- general education courses
- basic academic skills
- a GED or high school diploma preparation
- vocational education
- post-secondary education
- other programs appropriate for the population

Some ways that high schools can help those students who seem to be at risk for becoming part of the justice system:

- provide individualized tutoring
- offer high interest, low-level literacy/communication courses
- follow up immediately on poor attendance and/or behavior issues
- communicate regularly with the student, let him/her know that there is an adult available who is interested in and cares about their well-being

- be in regular contact with the student's parents about concerns, issues and things the student is doing well
- provide individualized counseling, including information about community and 4-year colleges
- send the student to an alternative school, if available and appropriate
- encourage them to stay in high school

Online Resources:

- Adult female offenders
This article deals with the needs of females who are incarcerated.
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reports/98Guides/wcjs98/chap1.htm>
- Alternative education
A brief home site that includes a contact phone number for several alternative schools in California.
<http://www.rcoe.k12.ca.us/divisions/sps/programs/aeoverview.html>
- Catch and release
An overview of the needs of people who are released from prison is provided in this Atlantic Monthly article.
<http://www.newamerica.net/index.cfm?pg=article&DocID=1148>
- Correctional education and the community colleges
A brief background on correctional education and issues with it are given in this piece.
<http://themoryhole.org/edu/eric/ed321835.html>
- Correctional education as a crime control program
“This study compares the cost-effectiveness of these two crime control methods - educating prisoners and expanding prisons.”
<http://www.ceanational.org/documents/ed-as-crime-control.pdf>
- Correctional Education Association
This is the home site for information on education issues and programs in correctional facilities.

<http://www.ceanational.org/>

- Correctional programming: A value-added service
Reasons to provide educational programs to prison inmates are provided in this article.
http://www.aca.org/publications/ctarchivespdf/commentary_apr_web.pdf
- Corrections education
An overview of the importance of providing educational programs in prison is provided in this piece.
http://kenmentor.com/papers/corrections_ed.htm
- Corrections education: A learning profiles special report
Reasons for providing education programs are given in this article.
<http://literacynet.org/ll/issue8/columnist2.html>
- Criminal Defense Letter
Click on Prison Based Education. This is a synopsis of a study, "Education as Crime Prevention: Providing Education to Prisoners," [that] says that prison education programs also lead to substantial savings, higher productivity and employment levels for released inmates, and improved security within prisons."
<http://www.sado.org/21cdn1.htm#21cdn1f>
- Education and vocational training
Reasons for educational programs for those who are incarcerated and some sample programs are described in this piece.
http://www.reentrypolicy.org/rp/main.aspx?dbID=DB_PS15750
- Education as crime prevention
The impact on society of educating those in prison is described in this article.
http://www.prisonsucks.com/scans/research_brief_2.pdf
- Literacy and justice
Reasons for providing literacy for those who are in prison are given in this piece.
<http://www.literacy.ca/litand/factsh/crimjust.pdf>

- Locked up and locked out
This is an extensive report on the state of education in the prison system.
<http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PIC-LOCKEDUP.pdf>
- Prison-based education and re-entry into the mainstream labor market
This study examines the “economic effects of participation in prison-based General Educational Development (GED) ...”
http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Economics/Papers/2004/2004-10_paper.pdf
- Prison education programs
This 1995 report from Iowa briefly describes the demographics of their educational programs in the state’s prisons along with funding considerations.
<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/lsadocs/IssReview/1995/IR131J.PDF>
- School behind bars
This is a brief description of an alternative school in California along with quotes from participating students.
<http://www.freelancenews.com/printer/article.asp?c=174502>
- State correctional education programs
“This State Policy Update provides background on the criminal justice system, summarizes the funding sources, correctional philosophy, and laws affecting state correctional education programs, and describes the adult prison population today. In addition, the Update reviews the various components of correctional education, discusses the benefits of education to inmates, and highlights correctional education initiatives in three states—Maryland, Ohio, and Texas.”
http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/policy/st_correction_02.pdf
- The practice and promise of prison programming
This piece provides reasons for education programs in prisons and is supported by statistics from a study conducted in the Great Lakes region.
http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410493_PrisonProgramming.pdf



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