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Correctional Education Programs

A majority of states in the country offer inmates the opportunity to participate in correctional education programs such as vocational certification and adult basic education, but very few states offer inmates the opportunity to earn their high school diploma. Vermont, Nevada, California, Ohio, Utah, Minnesota, and New Hampshire are the states that do offer inmates the opportunity to earn their high school diploma while incarcerated.

Effects of Correctional Education on Incarcerated Persons

Effects of Correctional Education on Recidivism

In 2013 The Rand Corporation, in research sponsored by The Department of Justice, conducted a meta-analysis¹ of studies examining the effectiveness of correctional education for incarcerated adults in the United States. The meta-analysis found that there were positive correlations between participation in correctional education programs and lower odds of recidivism,² a finding that was consistent with several other meta-analysis conducted over the past fifteen years. In 2000 a meta-analysis conducted by Wilson et al. and published in the *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* found that participation in correctional education programs was correlated with a reduction in recidivism.³ This finding was updated and confirmed by Doris Mackenzie in her book *What Works in*

¹ A meta-analysis is a type of research that analyzes the findings of all research on a subject.

² Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer Steele, Jessica Saunders and Jeremy Miles, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs that Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults," a RAND Corporation Research Report, 2013, accessed February 24, 2015, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html.

³ D. B. Wilson, C. A. Gallagher, and D. L. MacKenzie, "A Meta-Analysis Of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, And Work Programs For Adult Offenders," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 37 (2000): 347-368.

*Corrections: Reducing the Criminal Activities of Offenders and Delinquents.*⁴ These findings were also replicated in 2006 by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in a meta-analysis that again found that participation in correctional education programs was associated with a reduction in recidivism.⁵

- In the Rand study, Davis et al. found that inmates who had participated in correctional education programs had, on average, 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than inmates who did not, which translates to a reduction in the risk of recidivating of 13 percentage points for those who participate in correctional education programs versus those who do not.⁶
- Davis et al. also found that inmates who participated in high school and GED programs had 30 percent lower odds of recidivating than those who had not.⁷
- Wilson et al. found that participation in correctional education programs (ABE, GED, and postsecondary academic programs) was correlated with an average reduction in recidivism of 11 percentage points.⁸
- Mackenzie found that participation in correctional education programs was associated with a 16 percent higher likelihood of not recidivating.⁹
- The analysis by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that participation in correctional education programs was associated with a 7 percent reduction in recidivism.¹⁰

Effects of Correctional Education on Post-Release Employment

Two of the meta-analyses previously mentioned also examined the effectiveness of correctional education for incarcerated adults in terms of post-release employment. Both found results to suggest that there is a positive correlation between participation in correctional education programs and higher odds of obtaining post-release employment.

⁴ Doris L. MacKenzie, *What Works in Corrections: Reducing the Criminal Activities of Offenders and Delinquents*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁵ Washington State Institute for Public Policy, "Evidence-Based Adult Corrections Programs: What Works and What Does Not," January 2006, accessed February 24, 2015 <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/924>.

⁶ Davis et al., "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education."

⁷ Davis et al., "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education."

⁸ Wilson et al., "A Meta-Analysis Of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, And Work Programs For Adult Offenders."

⁹ MacKenzie, *What Works in Corrections*.

¹⁰ Washington State Institute for Public Policy, "Evidence-Based Adult Corrections Programs."

- Wilson et al. found improved odds of employment among correctional education participants, although they did not quantify the relationship in terms of a percentage increase/decrease.¹¹
- Davis et al. found that the odds of gaining post-release employment was 13 percent higher for inmates who participated in correctional education programs over those inmates who did not participate (including both academic programs and vocational programs). Though this figure was based on many studies, only one of the studies was of high quality. Still Davis et al. concluded that “[d]espite this limitation, our findings align with those produced in the meta-analysis by Wilson and colleagues, which also found improved odds of employment among correctional education participants.”¹²

Does Facility Type Matter?

In 2007 *The Prison Journal* published a study that evaluated the differences between education programs offered at two Maryland State Correctional Facilities.¹³ One facility was a traditional prison, the other a more therapeutic “boot camp” style facility. The researchers found that the inmates at the boot camp facility had an increased likelihood of obtaining a GED over inmates at the traditional facility. In both facilities, the individuals studied had been recognized by the criminal justice system as offenders who could be successful in a short-term incarceration program emphasizing treatment and rehabilitation—they were randomly assigned to a boot camp or a traditional prison. The inmates studied were all voluntarily participating in a mutual agreement program, a contract making them eligible for early release. Inmates received the same amount of money for going to school that they did for working regular jobs.

High School Diploma versus the GED

The General Educational Development (GED) test is a four subject test administered to individuals who have not earned a high school diploma. The GED was originally designed to allow veterans to take advantage of the GI Bill’s college program, not as a standalone degree. Students who successfully complete the GED test are given a high school equivalency certificate, which certifies that an individual has “met the state requirements

¹¹ Wilson et al., “A Meta-Analysis Of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, And Work Programs For Adult Offenders.”

¹² Davis et al., “Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education,” p. 47.

¹³ O’Neill, L., D. MacKenzie, and D. Bierie, “Educational Opportunities within Correctional Institutions: Does Facility Type Matter?” *The Prison Journal* 87 (2007): 311-327.

for high school graduation equivalency.”¹⁴ In general, high school diplomas have consistently been shown to be academically, economically, and socially superior to GED certificates, with an actual high school diploma resulting in far more in terms of wages, postsecondary education achievement, job attainment, and social perceptions.¹⁵ Because researchers who examine correctional education treat a GED and high school diploma as functional equivalents, there is no evidence to support or contradict these general findings of the inferiority of a GED in prison setting.¹⁶

Some specific findings in the difference between a GED and a high school diploma include:

- 30.3% of those with a high school diploma go on to attend a four year college while only 16% of those with a GED go on to attend a four year college.¹⁷
- Of those that go to a four year college 75% of those with a high diploma graduate while only 5% of those with a GED graduate.¹⁸
- Individuals with a GED earn roughly 8% less compared to individuals with a high school diploma.¹⁹

¹⁴ Susan Aud, William Hussar, Grace Kena, Kevin Bianco, Lauren Frohlich, Jana Kemp, and Kim Tahan, “The Condition of Education 2011,” A U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics Report, NCES 2011-033, (2011), p. 352, accessed February 24, 2015 <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011033.pdf>.

¹⁵ David Boesel, “The Street Value of the GED Diploma,” *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 80, No. 1, September 1998, 65-68, 95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20439363>; Stephen V. Cameron, and James J. Heckman, “The Nonequivalence of High School Equivalents,” A NBER Working Paper, No. w3804, National Bureau of Economic Research, 1991, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w3804.pdf>;

Melissa A. Clark and David A. Jaeger, “Natives, the Foreign-Born and High School Equivalents: New Evidence on the Returns to the GED” *Journal of Population Economics* 19, no. 4 (2006): 769-793;

Lela M. Horne, John R. Rachal, and Kyna Shelley, “Academic Rigor and Economic Value: GED® and High School Students' Perceptions and Misperceptions of the GED® vs. the High School Diploma,” *Journal of Research & Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary & Basic Education* 1 (2012): 4-18.

¹⁶ Christain Sarver, Jessica Seawright, and Robert Butters, “Utah Cost of Crime Education and Vocation Programs for Adult Offenders,” A Utah Criminal Justice Center Report, University of Utah, July 2013, accessed February 24, 2015, http://ucjc.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/EdVoc_Technical-Report_final.pdf.

¹⁷ Horne et al., “Academic Rigor and Economic Value,” p. 15, 16.

¹⁸ Horne et al., “Academic Rigor and Economic Value,” p. 15, 16.

¹⁹ Clark and Jaeger, “Natives, the Foreign-Born and High School Equivalents: New Evidence on the Returns to the GED,” p. 781.

High School Diploma Programs in Other States

Nevada

Correctional Education in Nevada is administered by the Nevada Correctional Education Consortium, which consists of nine correctional school districts plus the Nevada Departments of Corrections and Educations. Each major Nevada prison offers a range of educational programs including adult basic education, vocational certification, and a high school diploma program.²⁰

In FY2013, 56% of Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC) inmates lacked a GED or a high school diploma. Sixty-six percent (4,387) of eligible inmates were enrolled in education services, 8% (344) of all inmates enrolled earned a GED, and 9% (399) earned a high school diploma.²¹

A 2013 report by the Research, Planning, and Statistics Section of the NDOC that studied recidivism rates of inmates released in 2009 found that inmates who participated in NDOC educational programs had a recidivism rate of 25.6% compared a rate of 28.1% for those who did not, and that inmates who earned a high school diploma had a recidivism rate of 26.9% compared to a rate of 28.0% for those who did not. The report noted that while recidivism is a complex problem that has a myriad of possible influences, education programs did have the lowest recidivism rate of all programs.²²

California

Correctional Education in California is administered by the Office of Correctional Education within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. In FY2013, 113 inmates earned their high school diploma, 3,915 earned their GED, and 3,049 earned vocational certifications.²³

²⁰ Nevada Department of Corrections, Nevada Correctional Education Consortium, "2014 Annual Report Card," accessed February 15, 2015,

http://www.doc.nv.gov/sites/doc/files/pdf/education/NCEC_ANNUAL_REPORT_CARD_2014.pdf.

²¹ Nevada Department of Corrections, "Annual Statistical Report," (Fiscal Year 2013), p. 64, accessed February 15, 2015, http://www.doc.nv.gov/sites/doc/files/pdf/stats/annual/FY2013_Statistical_Abstract.pdf.

²² Nevada Department of Corrections, "Recidivism Rates for the 2009 Release Cohort," *Recidivism Newsletter* (2013), accessed February 15, 2015,

http://www.doc.nv.gov/sites/doc/files/pdf/stats/articles_newsletters/Recidivism_Newsletter_2009_Release_Cohort.pdf.

²³ California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations, "The Year in Accomplishments," A CDCR Annual Report (2013), accessed February 15, 2015, 13, <http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports/CDCR-Annual-Reports.html>.

California defines its high school diploma/GED eligible population based on inmates' score on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE); inmates who score a 9.0 (out of 12) or higher qualify as eligible for a GED or high school diploma.²⁴ CDCR literature treats the GED and high school diploma as functional equivalents, and only inmates who have made "sufficient progress towards their high school diploma"²⁵ are eligible to earn a high school diploma.

Utah

The Utah Department of Education administers 24 correctional school districts that offer inmates the opportunity to earn a high school diploma along with other correctional education programs such as GED preparation and vocational certification. Utah awarded 927 high school diplomas to inmates in FY2013. This figure represents 20% of all enrollees in Utah educational programs in 2013 and an 8% increase from 849 high school diplomas earned in FY2011.²⁶ From 1998 through 2008 inmates earned 5083 GEDs and 6788 high school diplomas, making Utah the most productive state in terms of high school diplomas awarded to inmates.²⁷

Enrollment, diplomas awarded, and ratio of high school diplomas to GEDs awarded vary greatly by district. A 2012 performance audit of inmate high school education, performed by the Utah Legislative Auditor General, indicates that differing program outcomes reflect the values of the school district's adult education programs. In FY2011 the Nebo School District awarded 132 GEDs (the most of any district) but relatively few diplomas, reflecting the program's goal of helping inmates quickly achieve academic certification.²⁸

Comparatively, both Utah State Prisons awarded many more diplomas (472 combined) than GEDs (42 combined), reflecting the fact that "prison inmates are generally in custody

²⁴ California Office of Correctional Education, "General Education Development," A CDCR Fact Sheet, January 2014, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/rehabilitation/docs/Factsheets/OCE-Factsheet-GED-Jan2014.pdf>.

²⁵ California Office of Correctional Education, "High school diploma Program," A CDCR Fact Sheet, January 2014, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/rehabilitation/docs/Factsheets/OCE-Factsheet-HS-Jan2014.pdf>.

²⁶ Utah State Office of Education, "Cost Differentials for Inmate Education," Budget Report, November 20, 2013, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.schools.utah.gov/legislativematerials/2013/Nov/CostDifferentialsforInmateEducationReport2013.aspx>

²⁷ "Utah State Office of Education, "Adult Education – Corrections," January 1, 2010, accessed February 15, 2015. <http://www.schools.utah.gov/adulted/Corrections.aspx>.

²⁸ Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, "A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education," Report to the Utah Legislature, Number 2012-11, August 2012, accessed February 15, 2015, p. 15, <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2012/pdf/00002406.pdf>.

longer and have the time to work on a diploma,”²⁹ as well as the Draper prison program director’s belief that a high school diploma is more valuable than a GED.³⁰ Districts have recently tended towards focusing on either the GED or high school diploma, with most districts awarding significantly more high school diplomas than GEDs.³¹

A 2012 cost-benefit analysis of correctional education spending by the University of Utah found that “providing basic education demonstrably lowers recidivism and enables parolees to participate in post-release jobs programs to further enhance taxpayer benefits.”³² The study found that Utah’s public spending on correctional education is “highly taxpayer efficient” in terms of reduced recidivism costs, and that correctional education spending is “inexpensive relative to other prison programming options,” which increases the per dollar impact of correctional education spending.³³

Funding for Utah correctional education is mostly drawn from Adult Education appropriations and distributed based on a formula that considers the number of enrolled students, contact hours, and outcomes which include high school credits, diplomas or GEDs, and academic level gains.³⁴ Additional funding is drawn from a Federal Title 1 grant designed to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.³⁵

²⁹ Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education*, Report to the Utah Legislature, Number 2012-11, August 2012, accessed February 15, 2015, p. 15, <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2012/pdf/00002406.pdf>

³⁰ Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education*, Report to the Utah Legislature, Number 2012-11, August 2012, accessed February 15, 2015, p. 15, <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2012/pdf/00002406.pdf>

³¹ Utah State Office of Education, *Cost Differentials for Inmate Education*, Budget Report, November 20, 2013, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.schools.utah.gov/legislativematerials/2013/Nov/CostDifferentialsforInmateEducationReport2013.aspx>

³² Richard Fowles, “Corrections Education in Utah: Measuring Return on Investment,” University of Utah, 2012, p. 5, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.schools.utah.gov/adulted/DOCS/Corrections/TheBenefitsofCorrectionsEducation.aspx>

³³ Fowles, “Corrections Education in Utah: Measuring Return on Investment,” p. 1.

³⁴ Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education*, Report to the Utah Legislature, Number 2012-11, August 2012, accessed February 15, 2015, i, <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2012/pdf/00002406.pdf>

³⁵ Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education*, Report to the Utah Legislature, Number 2012-11, August 2012, accessed February 15, 2015, 7, <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2012/pdf/00002406.pdf>

New Hampshire

New Hampshire correctional high school diplomas are awarded by the Granite State High School, which operates in the New Hampshire State Prison for men in Concord. The Granite State School System awarded 2 high school diplomas in FY2014, down from 16 in FY2013 and 12 in FY2012.³⁶ In 2014, the New Hampshire State Board of Education replaced the GED with the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) after a review of several test candidates including the recently updated GED.³⁷ The New Hampshire Department of Corrections partially attributed the 2014 decrease in high school diplomas awarded to the difficulties associated with the planning and implementation of the HiSET during 2013, and expects academic performance to rise with a fully trained staff.³⁸

Ohio

Correctional education in Ohio is administered through the Ohio Central School System (OCSS), which offers inmates educational and vocational programs in 28 facilities. The Ohio Central School System does award high school diplomas, but inmate high school diploma earners constitute less than one percent of all correctional program completions, and OCSS literature treats them as functionally equivalent.³⁹

Correctional Education Funding

It is difficult to determine the methods other states use to determine correctional education costs and distribution formulas due to the lack of information available. This report was unable to find reliable data regarding funding and enrollment in California and New Hampshire. Information and data regarding correctional education costs and funding in Utah, Nevada, and Ohio are presented below.

Utah

Utah correctional high school programs cost around \$5.4 million in state and federal funds in FY2011.⁴⁰ These programs primarily drew funding from general Adult Education and

³⁶ New Hampshire Department of Corrections, "2014 Annual Report," accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.nh.gov/nhdoc/divisions/publicinformation/documents/annual-report-2014.pdf>.

³⁷ New Hampshire Department of Education, "New Hampshire Chooses New High School Equivalency Test," accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.education.nh.gov/news/2013/ged-test.htm>.

³⁸ New Hampshire Department of Corrections, "2014 Annual Report."

³⁹ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, "Ohio Central School System Annual Report," (2014), accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.drc.ohio.gov/web/reports/OCSS/2014.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education*, Report to the Utah Legislature, Number 2012-11, August 2012, accessed February 15, 2015, p. 5, <http://le.utah.gov/interim/2012/pdf/00002406.pdf>

Corrections Education funding, receiving around \$2.2 and \$2 million respectively. In FY2011, the cost per correctional student was \$653 in jails and \$1330 in prisons.⁴¹ The roughly \$2 million in Corrections Education funding is only distributed to the school districts within the two Utah state prisons, which attributes to their higher cost per student compared to jails.⁴² Available Adult Education funding is distributed to facilities based on the number of enrolled students, contact hours, and academic outcomes in ratios set at the beginning of the fiscal year. For example, in FY2012, 25% of total Adult Education correctional funding was distributed to facilities based on number of enrollees.⁴³

Nevada

Nevada correctional high school programs cost around \$6 million in FY2012, and costs per enrolled student were \$1,606.63. 3,706 students (66% of eligible inmates) enrolled in correctional high school programs in FY2012.⁴⁴ The Nevada Department of Corrections primarily draws funding from the State General Fund and divides costs into five main categories, one of which is correctional programs. Nevada Department of Corrections literature does not provide a description of how program costs are estimated or funds distributed.⁴⁵

Ohio

Ohio correctional educational services cost around \$30.8 million in FY2013 and FY2014 combined, and the educational services cost per inmate was \$598.60 in 2013 and \$613.20 in 2014. The Ohio Central School System does not provide more detailed information regarding methods to determine costs and distribution of funding.

⁴¹ Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education*.

⁴² Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education*.

⁴³ Office of the State of Utah Legislative Auditor General, *A Performance Audit of Inmate High School Education*.

⁴⁴ Nevada Department of Corrections, "Annual Statistical Report," (Fiscal Year 2012), accessed February 15, 2015, p. 59, <http://doc.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/docnvgov/content/About/Statistics/Annual Abstracts by Fiscal Year/fy2012.pdf>

⁴⁵ Nevada Department of Corrections, "Annual Statistical Report," p. 79.

Summary

In conclusion, there are various working models, exemplified by other states, for educating incarcerated populations. This report reviewed the programs most similar to Vermont that offer prisoners the opportunity to earn high school diplomas. Research clearly shows that a high school diploma can be more valuable to an individual than a GED, in terms of both employment success and further education. Additionally, research on correctional education has consistently shown that there is a positive correlation between getting education while incarcerated and an individual's post-release chances of not returning to prison. The research that has investigated the effects of correctional education, however, has not differentiated between high school diploma programs and GED training programs, so there is no evidence to suggest that the difference between the two (the superiority of a high school diploma) is any different in a prison setting.

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Disclaimer: This report has been compiled by undergraduate students at the University of Vermont under the supervision of Professor Anthony Jack Gierzynski, Professor Robert Bartlett and Professor Eileen Burgin. The material contained in the report does not reflect the official policy of the University of Vermont.