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Reforming Inmate Education to Improve Public Safety

LEGISLATIVE ANALYST'S OFFICE

Presented to:

Senate Public Safety Committee

Hon. Mark Leno, Chair

Assembly Public Safety Committee

Hon. Jose Solorio, Chair





Value of Correctional Education



Improves Level of Education Attainment

- Research demonstrates that inmates on average have lower educational achievement than the general public.
- Importantly, research studies have shown that inmates who participate in correctional education programs can experience significant improvement in test scores and other education-related outcomes (such as earning diplomas and obtaining employment).



Increases Public Safety

- Research indicates that correctional education programs can significantly reduce the rate of reoffending for inmates when they return to the community.
- One study found that inmate education programs ranked among the most successful strategies for reducing recidivism.



Provides Fiscal Benefits to State and Local Governments

- To the extent that inmate education programs reduce rates of reoffending, these programs have direct and indirect fiscal benefits for state and local governments, such as reduced state incarceration and jail operation costs.
- The Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that inmate education programs are among the most cost-effective strategies for reducing recidivism.



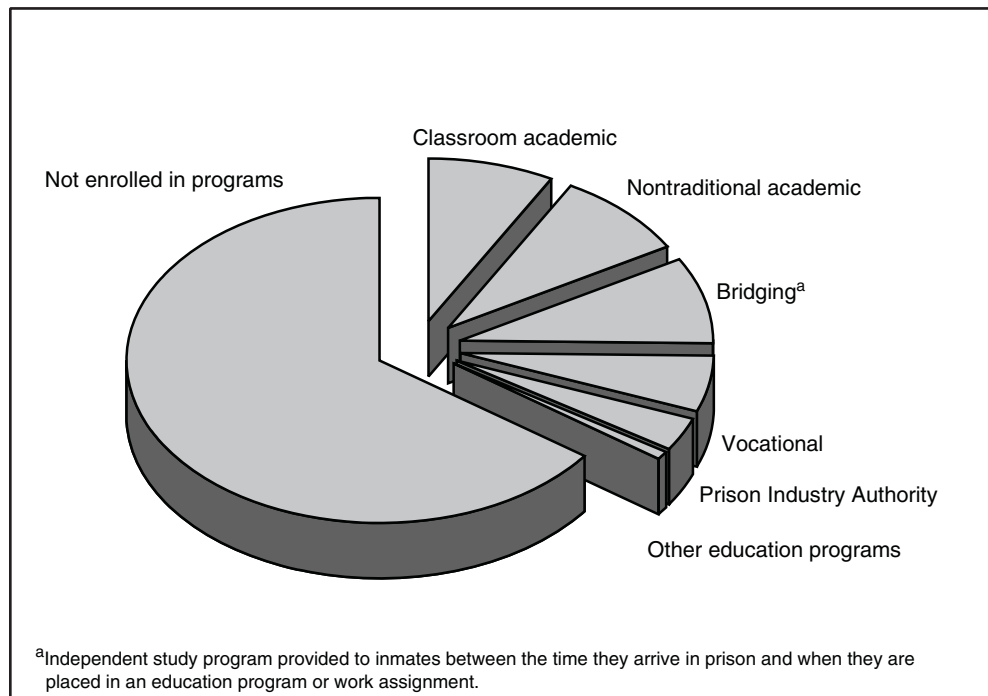
Education Programs Offered by CDCR

- Classroom Academic Education.*** Most prisons offer academic education in traditional classroom settings taught by certified teachers, including adult basic education and courses for inmates with limited English proficiency.
- Nontraditional Academic Programs.*** Inmates also participate in alternative education programs, such as independent study and distance learning.
- “Bridging” Education Program.*** The CDCR provides an independent study program to bridge the gap between when an inmate arrives in prison and when he or she is placed in an education program or work assignment.
- Vocational Education.*** The department offers various vocational training programs in most prisons, totaling almost 30 different specialized trades, including landscaping, automobile repair, and electrical work.
- Prison Industry Authority (PIA).*** While PIA primarily operates as an inmate work program, individual industries offer the opportunity for participating inmates to earn a vocational certification.
- Other Education Programs.*** Most prisons also offer other programs through their education offices, including prerelease preparation, physical education, and a conflict resolution program.



Education Programs Enroll About One-Third of Inmates

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- ☑ Roughly 60,000 inmates (about one-third of the total inmate population) are voluntarily enrolled in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) education programs, including 29,000 inmates in classroom academic and vocational programs.
- ☑ About 21,500 inmates (13 percent of the total inmate population) are currently on prison waiting lists for education programs.
- ☑ The revised 2008-09 budget includes about \$208 million for inmate education programs, with all but \$7 million (federal funds and reimbursements) coming from the General Fund.



Shortcomings of CDCR Inmate Education Programs

- ☑ **Many Inmates Cannot Get an Education Assignment**
 - The CDCR core academic and vocational training programs reach only a small segment of the inmate population who could benefit from them.
 - Research has shown that California compares poorly with the rest of the nation in providing education programs to “high-need” inmates.

- ☑ **Enrolled Inmates Frequently Do Not Get to Class**
 - On average 43 percent of all enrolled inmates were in class each day in 2006-07.
 - Factors that contribute to low attendance rates include (1) lockdowns, (2) staffing vacancies, and (3) the state’s process for allocating funding for education programs based on expected attendance rather than actual attendance.

- ☑ **Limited Incentives for Inmate Participation and Rehabilitation**
 - While most inmates in education programs earn “day for day” credits, other prison programs offer greater benefits in terms of sentence reduction or pay.

- ☑ **Poor Case Management of Offenders**
 - Inmates are assigned to education programs on a first-come, first-served basis, resulting in some inmates not being assigned to the most appropriate program.
 - No centralized case management database for inmate education programs.

- ☑ **Lack of Program Evaluation Limits Effectiveness**
 - The CDCR is unable to identify program outcomes such as grade level advancements, program completion rates, and impacts on parole outcomes.



LAO Recommendations to Improve Performance, Outcomes, and Accountability

- Fund Programs Based on Actual Attendance, Not Enrollment.*** Provide funding for inmate education programs based on a formula tied to inmate attendance, similar to average daily attendance formulas used in K-12 schools.
- Develop Incentives for Inmate Participation.*** Encourage inmates to participate in education programs such as by (1) providing a higher work release credit rate, (2) linking the pay scale for inmate jobs to educational attainment, and (3) giving program participants better housing assignments.
- Fill Teacher Vacancies.*** Allow CDCR to hire teachers with emergency permits and continue utilizing substitute teachers to cover teacher vacancies.
- Reduce Negative Impact of Lockdowns on Prisons.*** Direct CDCR to reevaluate its policies that bar inmates from attending education and other programs even when they were not involved in the incident that caused a lockdown.
- Develop Inmate Case Management System.*** Direct CDCR to improve its case management of inmates in the education system and develop policies to better ensure that the right inmates are assigned to the right programs.
- Base Funding Decisions on Program Assessments.*** Utilize data on the effectiveness of education programs in determining how to best target limited state resources for the greatest benefit.



Future Options to Expand Enrollment After Structural Problems Addressed

- Create Half-Day Programs.*** Restructuring CDCR's education programs from full-day to half-day classes would increase program capacity at little or no costs to the state, improve program effectiveness, and create greater incentives for inmate participation.

- Partner With PIA to Build Program Space.*** In order to address future classroom space needs, modular education buildings—which tend to be constructed more quickly and are no more expensive than permanent space—could be purchased from PIA.

- Other Opportunities to Expand Education Programs.*** Additional options include (1) inaugurating evening classes for inmates, (2) partnering with local colleges to provide advanced instruction, (3) partnering with businesses and unions to expand vocational training, and (4) hiring inmates as student aids to provide additional instructional support.