

Michigan Department of Corrections

Education Action Plan - Phase II

“Expecting Excellence Every Day”



January 2002

Introduction

The Department of Corrections developed and implemented its first strategic plan for prisoner education programs in May of 1995. The original Education Action Plan continues with the evolution of Phase II -- a cost effective delivery of educational programming, utilizing the original plan as the foundation.

Education Action Plan-Phase II recognizes the impact of Public Act 320 of 1998 which requires prisoners to obtain a GED, if they are capable, prior to release. The Department's commitment to this legislation is further demonstrated through Policy Directive 05.02.112, Educational Programs for Prisoners. The policy ensures accountability and provides dynamic leadership for continually improving educational strategy.

During the implementation of Phase II, the Department will continue strategies gleaned from expert input such as the Michigan State University Study of Vocational Programs in the Michigan Department of Corrections and the working sessions of the Department's Education Steering Committee.

Mission

The mission of the education programs is to provide educational opportunities for prisoners to take responsibility for developing their academic, work and social competencies to assist them to become contributing, positive members of the prison community while incarcerated and productive members of their communities upon release from prison.

Vision for Educational Programs

The vision for the future includes the development of a comprehensive prisoner intake process. This will include the assessment and verification of the incoming prisoner's academic achievements. In addition, an individual plan for each prisoner entering the Department will be developed. This plan will include a vocational assessment and a realistic evaluation that assists the prisoner to overcome barriers to maintaining employment upon release.

Programming will be outlined with attention to length of sentence, security level and health care needs. Following the reception/intake process, the prisoner will be transferred, depending upon Department bed space needs, to the appropriate prison based on the needs identified in his/her plan.

Educational programs will be provided in a new approach that will have facilities specialize in an educational product: GED completion will be the primary focus at 34 facilities and five camps. Career and Technical (vocational) completion will be the focal point at ten facilities. The facility wardens have the authority and will be held responsible for implementing strategies for their facilities' education programs.

This new approach will allow the Department to concentrate resources and provide a quality education program with a more effective and efficient use of educational dollars. The student capacity of the centers identified in this document was established by totaling the number of prisoners requiring a GED or Career and Technical certificate and implementing standard ratios of prisoner to teachers 60:1 for academic and 30:1 for career and technical.

The projected enrollment capacity accommodates all prisoners currently enrolled and on waiting lists. As this new approach takes hold and the schools' productivity increases, the number of academic centers required may be reduced as prisoners obtain their GED certificate earlier in their incarceration. Once the demand for GED certification has decreased, the Department will focus on enhancing and expanding the Career and Technical Education Programs.

The Department has a history of working toward a seamless educational curriculum without prisoners losing their educational track. In the past, the Department has used the "progress plotter" as the core curriculum. The Department will continue in that tradition with the sensible application of current educational technology, which enables a prisoner to continue studies at his/her current skill level, and work towards GED completion or Career and Technical certification without interruption, from one Department school to the next.

The use of technology provides a unique management capability and every prisoner will be required to enter the educational curriculum through the same software. The software allows the electronic transfer of all the information that educators require on an individual prisoner.

The Offender Education Tracking System will be available throughout the Department and will assist in moving to a single educational system rather than separate autonomous schools. This system is expected to be rolled out in 2002 in conjunction with other educational enhancements. Each enhancement is part of an entire educational improvement strategy under the direction of the Education Steering Committee. Starting at the intake process, the prisoner will be entered in the Offender Education Tracking System building a record of programming involvement and completion tracking through the period of incarceration and building a portfolio for employment upon release.

The Education Steering Committee recognizes that continued testing for achievement is necessary and required. The Department will continue to employ the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and TABE-PC as well as reviewing new products.

The technology and curriculum reviewing process will continue as new technologies and resources become available as well as when the GED Testing Service replaces the 1988 GED Test with a new version in January, 2002. The results of all testing will be recorded electronically and available for reference by appropriate Department staff. Testing provides a measure of assessment that demonstrates program validity and cost effectiveness and will be measured against a prisoner's success upon release.

Scheduling to maximize educational opportunities for prisoners will increase as the various centers reflect their missions and goals. The prison environment offers great flexibility for scheduling classes. With the continued 32 teacher-student contact hours and prisoner to teacher ratios, the Department will effectively take advantage of the 24 hour, 7 day a week environment of correctional facilities.

Incorporated in the academic or career and technical center approach is the incentive for prisoners to earn a transfer through completion of individual educational program plans. Most prisoners will start their sentence in the Northern Region and earn additional educational opportunities and placement at Region II and Region III facilities as they complete their programming requirements and earn additional educational opportunities outlined during the intake process in their individualized plans.

The new approach will continue the audit process on an annual basis and measure use of resources, productivity and compliance with policy. The audit will be the guiding document for improvement and meeting the standards as outlined in this new approach to educational programs.

Educational Programs

The Michigan Department of Corrections offers the following programs:

1. Academic - Adult Basic Education, GED preparation (GED) and English Literacy (EL)
2. Special Education (Under federal guidelines for Special Education)
3. Career and Technical Education (CTE) (Vocational)
4. Pre-Release Skills (Including job seeking skills, social skills and life skills)

Academic

The Department's first priority for resource allocation will be to assist each prisoner, with few exceptions, to obtain a General Education Development (GED) certificate and second to assist the prisoner to obtain career and technical training before he/she is released to the community. This plan establishes the minimum educational functioning level as attainment of the GED certificate, with accommodation for the needs of handicapped prisoners and exemptions for a few prisoners as provided by Public Act 320.

The established academic centers will provide educational programming in a flexible schedule that includes evening and weekend classes where classroom space and staffing are available. Scheduling will provide each teacher with a minimum of four classes two hours long with a minimum of fifteen (15) prisoners, reflecting a 60:1 ratio. At the new centers, ABE and GED shall be combined (where feasible) with the exception of non-readers. All prisoners will have a common goal: working toward the completion of their GED. English Literacy (EL) classes will be available for those prisoners struggling with language barriers.

The incentive program established by the Education Action Plan of 1995 and reflected in policy, will continue:

- 1) A prisoner otherwise eligible for camp placement or community supervision will not be eligible unless he/she has attained or is successfully progressing toward attainment of the GED certificate, with the exception of those prisoners excluded by Public Act 320 of 1998, who are not eligible for parole without attainment of the GED or exempted as directed by law;
- 2) If a prisoner refuses to participate, he/she is subject to all appropriate sanctions provided by policy and law including loss of disciplinary credits; and
- 3) A prisoner must successfully complete the minimum education course before the prisoner may be assigned to the more prestigious or higher sought after institution and prison industry jobs.

As part of a calculated effort to assist all prisoners who are capable of attaining a GED certificate, prisoners who do not qualify for special education services and who exhibit potential learning disabilities, shall be tested by a school psychologist where appropriate. This testing will determine a prisoner's eligibility for GED accommodations such as extended time, scribe, calculator, etc. Another option may involve a review of health records of a prisoner to determine whether he/she may qualify for GED accommodations due to various health issues.

Special Education

Special Education Programming shall continue in accordance with the MDOC Special Education Plan. All previously identified special education centers shall continue.

Career and Technical Education

In 1998, Michigan State University's Criminal Justice Department conducted an assessment of vocational (CTE) education programs in the Michigan Department of Corrections. The report included recommended areas of improvement. These suggestions were incorporated in the restructuring of vocational (CTE) programs in the Department.

This new approach begins at the intake process with a realistic assessment and verification of a prisoner's educational skills and vocational (CTE) aptitude. Each prisoner will have a relevant individual plan which will become part of the computerized Offender Education Tracking System providing information regarding prisoner placement. Data gathered during the interest and aptitude assessment process will be considered in future CTE programming decisions.

This new plan identifies career and technical centers that will provide prisoners with training in technical skills and workplace competencies, including job skills and life skills, which are in demand in the modern marketplace. This plan is intended to assist the prisoner in taking personal responsibility for him/her to become a productive member of the prison community and a contributing member of society upon release.

The Phase II plan establishes specialized career and technical schools within facilities throughout the state, taking into consideration various security levels. The number of centers was developed with the creation of an average 1:30 teacher - student ratio allowing the Education Steering Committee to create enough educational slots to account for all prisoners with a prerequisite of an agency verified GED or high school diploma who have been identified for Career and Technical Education (CTE), including those prisoners on waiting lists.

On average, each trades instructor will teach two, 15 prisoner classes per day. General Technical Staff (School Teacher P-11) will teach classes 1, 2, or 3 hours in length depending on institutional need, physical plant limitations, and curriculum requirements. Class size will be determined by guidelines for square footage of vocational programs as established by the Michigan Department of Career Development.

This plan requires that all Career and Technical Education centers offer training that is relevant to institutional assignments and Michigan State Industry employment to ensure prisoners become productive members of the prison community while incarcerated. In turn, there is a corresponding expectation that skills learned and practiced while incarcerated will lead to successful employment and promotional opportunities upon release.

All CTE Centers will have the same components. However, the technical training component will vary depending on the CTE programs offered at each facility. Components at the centers will include: 1) Assessment/Evaluation/Counseling; 2) Technical training in various trades areas; 3) Computer literacy; 4) Applied Skills; 5) Technical Math; 6) Job Related Social Skills; 7) Employment search using Michigan Occupational Information System; and 8) Pre-release.

The projected number of hours required for an average student to complete a core program for each trades area has been standardized and is printed on each of the approved progress plotters. Upon completion of course requirements, a standard CTE certificate will be issued which will include information on skills areas completed and associated D.O.T. codes.

CTE programming will include training for institutional jobs and training for outside employment for those within three years of their earliest release date. Those inmates, who have a short time to release, will be trained in general workplace skills. These programs will be computer based and arranged in employment focused clusters. There will be emphasis on these types of programs at Level I facilities.

New program recommendations will take into consideration the data gathered from interest and aptitude testing, cost of start-ups, physical plant, and employment opportunities. Curriculum that can be adjusted to the changing needs of the marketplace will be considered.

The plan includes a recommendation that all CTE students be required to take a course in computer literacy unless they have demonstrated such literacy through previous course work. The course instruction will be delivered separately from a regular CTE class where appropriate.

Staffing at the CTE Centers will include Civil Service certified staff (Trades Instructor P-11) who are qualified to teach specific trades areas. These staff may also teach components outside their trades areas if part of combination assignments. General Technical Staff with Michigan Teaching Certificates (School Teacher P-11) will provide integrated instructional and evaluation services in testing, technical math, applied skills, computer literacy, employment counseling, job related social skills, and pre-release. Depending on the needs of the institution, they may continue to provide some ABE/GED instructional services.

This plan will not only continue the mutually beneficial and growing relationship between Career and Technical Education Centers and the MDOC Prison Build Program, but will examine all areas that can enhance the opportunity for prisoners to gain skills and at the same time return valuable resources to the community.

As part of a continuous review and improvement process, the Department will seek to establish new relationships and strengthen present ties with outside employers to ensure that skills being taught are relevant in today's job markets. Instructors will be encouraged to attend trades specific professional development activities and maintain employer connections which will keep them current in their fields of instruction. In addition, the Department will explore the possibility of partnerships with various employment agencies and/or potential employers that can assist ex-offenders in attaining meaningful employment.

Pre-Release

The overall pre-release program starts with the planning during the intake assessment and progresses through the period of incarceration with the prisoner working toward completion of his/her plan for attainment of a GED and/or career and technical skills.

Pre-Release programs offer opportunities to apply skills to real life situations. The actual class titled "Pre-Release" consists of a core program in the areas of self awareness, job-search skills, job keeping skills, and community integration. Additions to the core curriculum are encouraged at the individual facilities and community resources are used whenever feasible as a supplement to the program.

In order to continue to utilize and involve available staff resources, some of the prisons will use non-teaching staff, such as Chaplains, Resident Unit Managers, Assistant Resident Unit Supervisors, and Resident Unit Officers to teach Pre-Release class components

Prisoners will be enrolled in Pre-Release classes as close as possible to their release date. The standardized curriculum provides knowledge and skills training for prisoners to better prepare themselves to be responsible, productive citizens and workers upon release into society.

Summary

It is essential that all staff in the Department embrace the strategies included in Education Action Plan-Phase II and assist in the implementation. The delivery of education programs must be done in a cost-effective manner. The professional educators who deliver services have the greatest impact on improving the efficiency by which the Department delivers educational programs. Achieving the goals in this action plan will aid in enhanced public safety, but will also be a significant step toward achieving a major educational mission of the Department. This plan puts into action the standard that all Departments of Corrections will be judged. The Education Steering Committee, in developing this plan, continues to focus on our obligation to the citizens of Michigan, staff, and the care and custody of prisoners, "Expecting Excellence Every Day".