

**REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE**  
**Public Act 114 of 2009**  
**Section 923**  
**Education Feasibility Study**

Section 923. The department shall cooperate with the department of education to evaluate the feasibility of local school districts providing education programming to targeted prisoners under the age of 20 who have not received a high school diploma. By June 1, 2010, the department shall report to the senate and house appropriations subcommittees on corrections, the senate and house fiscal agencies, and the state budget director on any plans or evaluations developed under this section.

**INTRODUCTION**

In response to Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) boilerplate requirements, the Office of Employment and Readiness Education Manager initiated contact with the Michigan Department of Education (MDOE) to cooperate in the preparation of a report regarding community delivered prisoner education programming. Michigan Department of Education was unaware of this requirement and determined that no congruent language existed in the Michigan Department of Education boilerplate. Michigan Department of Corrections requested collaboration with Michigan Department Education to establish an advisory panel in response to this report mandate. The panel was comprised of MDOE staff, MDOE's selected school district representatives, and MDOC prisoner education staff.

Collectively, this panel represents demonstrated talent in education leadership, curriculum development, special needs requirements, budgetary challenges, career and technical education, post-secondary education, and education programming both in the community and prison systems.

**REVIEW OF CURRENT PROGRAMMING**

Upon initial discussion, it was clear that the local school district representatives were not aware of the rigorous adult education and vocational programming that currently exists in the MDOC. Per the request of the non-MDOC representatives, a detailed review of educational programming was provided. These panel members expressed a positive reaction to this information. The school district representatives stated their support of the level of competence measured by the General Education Development (GED) and of our current GED program and, in fact, stated that compared to some high school diplomas a GED is a better gauge of academic achievement.

Generally, program solutions are developed in response to identified needs. In this situation, the request was presented to inquire if local school districts could provide general education program targeted to prisoners under the age of 20 who have not received a high school diploma. Per the boilerplate language, applicable data regarding this target population is:

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Number Of MDOC Prisoners</b>
Prisoners under 20	1,200

Prisoners under 20 with a GED	340
Prisoners under 20 with a High School Diploma	50
Potential eligible population	810
Percent eligible	68%

This means, 32% of the current population under 20 have a High School Diploma or GED. Numerous education programming options were reviewed. Of those, the panel agreed on three as most viable. The table below illustrates those most seriously considered and the three final recommendations (shaded areas).

### PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

<b>Educational Program</b>	<b>Discussion</b>
Work Keys & Career Readiness Certification (Reviewed but not recommended)	The panel removed this from consideration because it has already been implemented by MDOC prisoner education in 2002.
General Education Development Delivery (GED) (Reviewed but not recommended)	The panel removed this from consideration because the GED has already been implemented by MDOC. All prison schools are GED test centers. The review panel saw no justifiable need to expand current GED testing/programming capacity through MDOE. GED was implemented in the early 80's due to High School Diploma cost and time inefficiencies.
Career and Technical Education (Vocational Programming) (Reviewed but not recommended)	The panel removed this from consideration because it has already been implemented by MDOC. Start-up cost, length of completion time and logistics of delivery were also factors that contributed to this decision. CTE programs currently exist; all are aligned with labor market trends and provide state/national certifications.
High School Completion (Recommended Program)	Currently, a high school diploma program for prisoners over 20 years old is being piloted by a local school district through a Michigan Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth (DELEG) 107 School Aide Fund special grant. Given that, it seemed to the review panel appropriate to conduct an analogous pilot for those prisoners under 20 years old who meet the same criteria (as determined by DELEG Office of Life Long

	Learning). There are considerable challenges to enacting this model such as prisoner transfers, school “jurisdictions”, prison custody and security requirements, space restrictions due to prison closures and re-entry activities and lack of prisoner motivation and intent. It should be noted that in 2011 the Michigan merit curriculum will decrease the likelihood of the success of this option.
Connection to Intermediate School District (ISD) (Recommended Program)	This would provide improved access and increase the rate of connectivity to educational programming by informing prisoners in ISD locations school enrollment processes and program offerings. This would serve to eliminate a barrier to potential education success for parolees. Prisoners releasing to the community often do not know where to begin to access educational opportunities. It is clear that a strong communication bridge is required between MDOC Prisoner Education and ISD’s. This bridge should be available to prisoner/students prior to release to the community. This program would ensure an improved process of transferring educational information between prisons and LSD’s. Facilities housing the largest populations of prisoners under 20 will be targeted. Finally, a presentation could be developed to provide consistent information statewide.
Connection To Post-Secondary Education (Recommended Program)	Prisoner/students often lack post-secondary education and have no one to mentor/advise them on how to gain access to post-secondary services. Since advanced education is known to reduce recidivism this seems like a logical and appropriate program. This program would require the counseling services of the involved local schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Advisory Panel identified three areas of promise:

### *HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA:*

The benefit of this diploma opportunity is to allow prisoners most recently removed

from high school a chance to complete that community-based education.

*CONNECTIONS TO LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT:*

This will provide a communication system between the MDOC and local school districts to share information regarding a prisoner's education status. This will allow prisoners rapid connectivity to educational opportunities provided by their local school districts. Additionally, this can inform prisoners about local school district location and contact information and the programming available.

*CONNECTION TO POST-SECONDARY SCHOOLS:*

The local school would provide required information on availability of post-secondary schools and means of accessing this programming in response to interest of prisoner students. This is traditionally a career development facilitator paraprofessional.

## **CHALLENGES AND RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS**

The panel identified the following challenges that must be overcome in order to increase the probability of success:

- Eligible prisoners are housed throughout the state due to security, mental health, physical health, re-entry and numerous other special needs. Thus, making coordinated programming difficult.
- Prisoner Transfers: Custody, security and other administrative priorities impact the continuity of the education delivery process.
- Prisoner Resistance: Prisoners may see that the GED allows them more opportunity to succeed and to complete in the event of transfer. Some prisoners view the GED as a better credential. Given the proclivity of prisoners to prefer the quickest and easiest solution to a situation, resistance to a longer high school completion could be expected.
- Program Delivery Staff: Qualified educational staff willing to work in MDOC prisons is difficult to find. To demonstrate this, community colleges currently delivering grant-funded programs in Michigan prisons cannot always find sufficient staff to offer approved courses. Bringing in outside staff creates training, space, scheduling and custodial concerns for the facility.
- High School Merit Requirements – 2011: The merit requirement creates additional and even more rigorous standards for graduation. This will impede the prisoners' ability to obtain a high school diploma.
- Skill Building: Due to credit award process, a high school diploma equivalency may result in prisoners receiving a high school credential without increasing math/reading skills to the level of the GED standards.
- Outcomes Clearly Identified: To measure success, a measurement must be established.

The current cost of high school diploma, for an unproved outcome, is not truly known. It is anticipated that the cost per measurable completion is higher than the GED and that the Michigan merit exam will provide a measurable outcome for High School Diplomas in 2011.

- Space: If the identified programming is in addition to current programming, as MDOC closes additional prisons, space is a problem.
- Funding & Jurisdiction: Funding stream(s) and resources must be identified. It is recommended the ISD closest to the prison site would provide services to all prisoners within the scope of this report.
- Priority: Determination by the MDOE/MDOC regarding program priority must be clearly identified to establish and maintain continuity of programming and to optimize completions.

## **SUMMARY**

The advisory panel collaborated to create some structure to identify the education problems/gaps/barriers in order to prepare this report. The school districts involved in the development of this report were supportive and cooperative at providing ideas and information.

Through the panel discussion it became clear, that Intermediate School Districts is more aptly suited for this program delivery than Local School District. In conclusion, it should be clear that the cost and concerns were believed to outweigh the benefits, given the current struggles that schools face regarding funding, program requirements and success measures. It also needs to be noted that current ISD resources will not allow for this programming.