

Reform for Correctional Education

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Education in a correctional setting is also participating in education reform. California has been promoting a new state bill Student Bill of Rights, AB 2236 that guarantees every student the right to be educated. State Bill AB 2236 passed out of the Assembly Education Committee on April 4, 2002 to require schools, districts, and the state to identify education officials who will be responsible for ensuring that necessary tools are provided to all students (ACORN, 2002 April 16). This ambitious state bill would guarantee all students in the state of California the opportunity to attend a clean, safe, free of harassment, and violence school. The goals are to provide students with necessary textbooks, resources, qualified teachers, and appropriate facilities to achieve the skills to enter a four-year university, obtain a living wage job, and participate in civic life. The Student Bill of Rights is expected to expand the state role in education. Coming at a time of wide public concern about the state of education, The Student Bill of Rights sets in place requirements that will reach into every school in California. The No Child Left Behind Act and The Student Bill of Rights signal a more proactive role in education for student achievement. Federal and State leadership has formulated a vision and made demands that accountability and student achievement be accomplished (Cohen, 2002, February).

Last year, the President launched a multi-year effort to reform job training programs with proposals to consolidate or eliminate various ineffective, duplicative, and overlapping programs. This year with budget cuts and many institutional job-training programs set to expire funding will be terminated. The 2004 budget sets out to build on previous reforms to consolidate and eliminate ineffective programs and incorporate the No Child Left Behind frame work (United States Department of Education Office of Management and Budget, 2003, February). This will ensure that fund recipients are accountable for results and given greater flexibility to achieve them. The timing is right; the mandates require accountability for funding. The California Department of Corrections has had the funding, but now that the budget is cut the Department must do more with less. The focus is on accountability and what works. The mandates should improve education within the California Department of Corrections.

The California Department of Corrections Evaluation and Inmate Program Unit (EIPU) and the Department of Education translate these efforts into proposals for sweeping vocational and adult education reforms. Occurring today there is a far closer examination of vocational rehabilitation programs and what is working to assist student achievement in these areas. EIPU distributes monies to the correctional facilities to support programs intended to develop the academic, vocational, and technical skills of inmate students. However, decades of increasing federal and state investment, and various attempts at program reform, have produced little or no evidence that the California Department of Corrections Education Department's vocational education programs lead to improved outcomes. Since the most recent reform effort in 1998, the federal government has spent close to six billion dollars on these programs, despite a continuing absence of significant outcomes or improvements (CSEA Union Update, 2003, February). The President's insistence on accountability and performance calls for an end to this type of investment that does not produce results. The President's education and job training reform agenda proposes to reform vocational education using the No Child Left Behind framework for accountability and flexibility. Funds provided under this program will be contingent on a rigorous assessment that improved student outcomes are being achieved. Where possible, programs should be consolidated to simplify federal requirements and streamline delivery of services (United States Department of Education, Career and Technical, 2002, August). The Department of Corrections EIPU is reviewing the academic and vocational programming within the institutions for accountability. The lack of educational programming in institutions that are on lock down status a majority of time are scheduled for review. The California Department of Corrections currently has about 1,200 prison educators. Governor Davis proposed budget cut of \$46.2 billion would constitute a thirty-three percent reduction in the California Department of Corrections education budget and would threaten three hundred of the system's teaching positions. The proposed cuts are in addition to the five hundred positions that have already been eliminated (CSEA Union Update, 2003, February).

Additionally, the California Department of Corrections shows that the recidivism rate is the highest in the nation and is in excess of sixty percent. Therefore, the budget proposes significant reforms to the Adult Education programs designed to improve their performance and increase accountability for results. Federal resources will be targeted to educational approaches that have proven effective in increasing reading and math skills. New accountability provisions will ensure that grantee funds are contingent on achieving real and measurable outcomes, such as the number of participants who obtain high school degrees or find a job. EIPU tracks each institution's education department's high school degree, GEDs, and other pertinent programming information. This data guides the monies that are awarded to each institution. The California

Adult Skills Assessment System (CASAS) testing is now mandatory in each institution. Federal funds are awarded on inmate student achievement when the CASAS testing is completed and reports tabulating the benchmarks are turned in at the end of June. The Test of Adult Basic Education is required every six months for inmate students that do not have a high school diploma or GED. The test scores are documented and reported to EIPU. The ReEntry Program is being reviewed and revised to extend services for parolees in the community by partnering with Sacramento City Unified School District. The One Stop Program is a pilot program that has services available for parolees upon release from prison. Parolees are required to report to the One Stop Program to meet their parole officer and attend orientation. The services available include academic and vocational training, assistance in obtaining financial resources, shelter, and medical care. The One Stop Program is progressing towards meeting the goal to streamline services and make them more effective (United States Department of Education, Career and Technical Education, 2002, August).

In conclusion, there are opportunities with the new mandates to focus on inmate student achievement and accountability. In summary:

Correctional education should strive to meet federal and state accountability mandates for academic and vocational programs.

Streamline educational services and consolidate through creating a One Stop parolee program.

Eliminate some inmate student choices within the institutions and focus on increased reading and math skills for vocational and academic programs.

References

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