

Expansion of Educational Programs on Rikers Island

The expansion of education programs on Rikers Island initiative focuses on literacy, GED preparation and testing, English as a Second Language (ESL), vocational training, and counseling services for inmates ages 19-24.¹

| <i>Agencies</i> | <i>Start Date</i> | <i>Number Served per year</i> | <i>CEO Budget (City FY 08)</i> | <i>Total Budget (City FY 08)</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| The Department of Correction/The Department of Education | October 2007 | 380 | \$2,800,000 | \$2,800,000 |

Problems Statement

On a typical day in FY07, 96% of eligible inmates aged 19-24 did not attend school while in custody on Rikers Island.²

The majority of 19-21 year old inmates on Rikers Island are junior high or high school dropouts with poor reading and writing skills. Data from Rikers Horizon Academy, the school for 19-21 year olds, indicate that 63% of English speaking students read below an eighth-grade level, and 80% of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students read below an eighth-grade level.³

Research and Evidence

Rikers educational programs are geared towards developing literacy, occupational and social skills in order to boost participants' self-confidence, earn a GED, increase employability, and ease transition to the community upon discharge.⁴

Several studies have demonstrated that inmates who participate in educational programs when in custody are less likely to recidivate than inmates who do not participate in these types of programs. For example, a three-state study on education and recidivism conducted by the Correctional Education Association in 2001 found that re-arrest rates were reduced by 9% and re-incarceration rates were reduced by 10% for inmates who received educational services when incarcerated.⁵ Another study, conducted by the NYS Department of Correctional Services in 1989, found that recidivism rates for inmates who received a GED when incarcerated were 5% lower than inmates who entered custody without a high school degree and who did not earn a GED while incarcerated.⁶ A third study, conducted by the New York State Department of Correctional Services and published in 2003, tracked inmates who were released from the Department of Corrections in 1996 for a 36 month period after discharge.⁷ The findings suggest that, similar to previous studies, recidivism rates were reduced for all inmates who earned their GED when in custody. Unlike other studies, however, recidivism rates differed by age group. For inmates who were under the age of 21 at the time of their release, there was a 14% reduction in recidivism, compared with those youth who entered or exited the prison system without a degree. In contrast, for those inmates age 21 or older at the time of their release, there was a 5% reduction in recidivism, compared to those who did not enter or exit the prison system without a GED.

One possible explanation for these different findings is that the New York State study was longitudinal, and age differences in recidivism may emerge over time. Nevertheless, the research effectively establishes that participation in educational programs during incarceration reduces recidivism rates.

Program Description

The Expansion of Educational Programs on Rikers Island initiative expands basic literacy, numeracy, GED preparation and testing, and vocational training for inmates ages 19-24, who are not required to participate in such programs (inmates age 18 and younger are required to attend school).

The initiative adds classroom space, correctional staff, and officers for an education unit. When combined with expansions funded by WIA and Employment Preparation Education (EPE), the daily attendance number of inmates will increase by 495, for a total of approximately 1,400, or 50% of the eligible 19-24 year old population.

The initiative also implements a monetary incentive equivalent to the pay received for participating in a Department of Correction work program (27 cents an hour), to offset any disincentive to attending class.

In addition, the Department of Correction/Department of Education (DOC/DOE) has launched an outreach campaign on Rikers Island to ensure that non-readers and those with low literacy skills are identified and recruited for services. The campaign consists of posters, an "education hotline" for inmate telephone inquiries about services, and retraining intake/admission officers.

The level of literacy instruction will be targeted to the reading and arithmetic needs of the population.

Evaluation Framework

Educational progress will be measured via post-testing academic gains as outlined by the State Education Department's System of Accountability for Student Success (SASS). Recidivism rates will be updated regularly by DOC. The readmission rate of students will be compared to the rate for the overall inmate population. Select criteria, such as age, will be used to make appropriate within group comparisons. Student attendance and increased enrollment rates will be measured by both DOE and DOC. Other outcome measures include GED test results and discharge planning reports.

Target Population

The Expansion of Education Programs on Rikers Island initiative serves young adults ages 19-24 who are in custody on Rikers Island.

Expected Outcomes

Short-Term (While in Detention):

- Increase in the enrollment of 19-24 year olds in educational programs
- Increase in the literacy levels of participants
- Increase in the average daily educational attendance of 19-24 year olds

Long-Term (Upon Return to Community):

- Reduction in the recidivism rate
- Increase in the elapsed time between discharge and readmission
- Increase in the enrollment in post-discharge education programs
- Increase in the achievement of HS Diploma/GED
- Increase in employment for program participants

¹ Education attendance for 16-17 year olds is compulsory, so that entire population is already being served. Because 18 year old inmates are housed with 16-17 year olds in adolescent housing areas, that age group also goes to school with the rest of the housing area and is served in its entirety.

² On a typical day in FY07, 116 inmates aged 19-24 attended class at one of two schools on Riker's Island (Island Academy and Horizon Academy). An additional 2,624 eligible inmates in this age cohort (in custody over 10 days) did not attend.

³ Data are from Tim Lisante, NYC Department of Education, e-mail communication to CEO, August 16, 2007.

⁴ Educational outcomes for inmates at Rikers Island, based on uniform pre- and post-training testing, are similar to adult literacy programs for the general population.

⁵ Steurer, Stephen, Linda Smith, and Alice Tracy, "Three State Recidivism Study." Correctional Education Association, 2001. Submitted to the Office of Correctional Education, U.S. Department of Education.

⁶ New York State Department of Correctional Services, "Follow-up study of a sample of offenders who earned high school equivalency diplomas while incarcerated." 1989.

⁷ Nuttal, John, Linda Hollmen, and E. Michele Staley, "The Effect of Earning a GED on Recidivism Rates." *Journal of Correctional Education*, Volume 54, Issue 3. September 2003.