



## REHABILITATION THROUGH EDUCATION: Correctional Educators

July 2005

DATA SPOTLIGHT

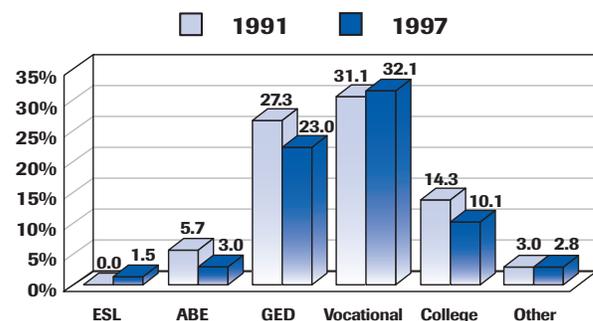
A primary role of correctional institutions continues to be public safety and security. However, the cost of incarceration due in large part to the high number of inmates that return, unsuccessful in their transition to community life is staggering. There is a growing public awareness of the need for cost-effective ways to reduce recidivism. Low offender educational attainment and work force changes in skill requirements amplify inmates' difficulties in finding gainful employment once released. Education is a cost-effective means to reduce recidivism. Success requires maintaining trained and dedicated teaching professionals. This Data Spotlight examines correctional education, teacher attrition, and strategies to improve teacher retention.

### Correctional Education

Inmates are increasingly undereducated. Many have low basic skills in reading, math, writing, and oral communication. Teacher quality has an enormous impact on inmate learning, achievement, and ultimately recidivism. Shifts in the labor market and increasing skill requirements emphasize the need to prepare inmates for work once released. Correctional education is instrumental in helping inmates acquire GED's, find meaningful jobs, and transition successfully into the community, once released. Yet despite the program success, correctional education is declining.

- An estimated 630,000 offenders are released from prison each year.
- Educational achievement is lower for offenders: approximately 40% of inmates had not completed high school or GED, compared with 18% of adults in the U.S.
- The incidence of learning disabilities (LD) among offenders is high; estimated between 30% and 50%, compared to 5% to 15% among the general adult population.
- The majority of prisons offer basic education classes, but less than one-third offer post-secondary coursework. Of the 47.4% eligible to participate in post secondary courses, only 14.2% do.
- Today six out of ten jobs require education and training beyond high school.
- Correctional education is sometimes the best resource for offenders who wish to lead a better life but lack the educational and vocational skills to do so.
- Correctional academic and vocational programs are instrumental in reducing recidivism by as much as 30%.
- One million dollars spent on correctional education prevents about 600 crimes, while that same money invested in incarceration alone prevents only 350 crimes.
- Despite a substantial return on investment, lack of program support and increasing incarceration result in a lower percentage of inmates in educational programs.

Inmate Participation in Educational Programs

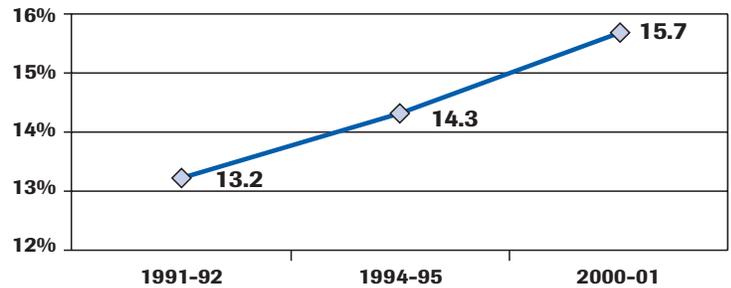


### Teachers In Correctional Settings

Correctional educators are professionals and volunteers from diverse backgrounds. Many have formal training to teach in a traditional school setting. In many instances, they are retired or dissatisfied teachers seeking alternate careers, better pay, or improved work conditions. Most correctional educators have had little formal training in teaching in a correctional setting or adult education. Only 22 states require correctional educators to be certified in K-12, secondary or adult education, and professional development is often low on the funding priority. The cost of teacher loss negatively affects a facilities ability to address offenders' educational deficits and ultimately reduce recidivism.

- Correctional educators work in settings that include prisons, jails, juvenile justice facilities, or various community-based settings and include professional teachers, vocational instructors, community volunteers, counselors, administrators, librarians, and others.
  - Employers may be federal, state, or local level and can be either private for profit or private non-profit agencies.
- The average age of teachers entering the teaching profession is 29.
- Large numbers of beginning teachers leave the profession. For every two new teachers hired, one of them will drop out of the profession within five years—just at the time, student achievement improves.
  - Attrition: 1 to 3 years experience is 33%.
  - Attrition: By year 5 is 46%.
- More than one-third (38%) of teachers are dissatisfied with the level of administrative support.
- Correctional teachers are getting older: Correctional Education Association (CEA) indicates that 57% of its members are between 50 and 64 years of age and 59% are teachers.
- Costs to replace a teacher are on average 1.5 times the annual salary of the position.

**Nationwide K-12 Teacher Turnover**

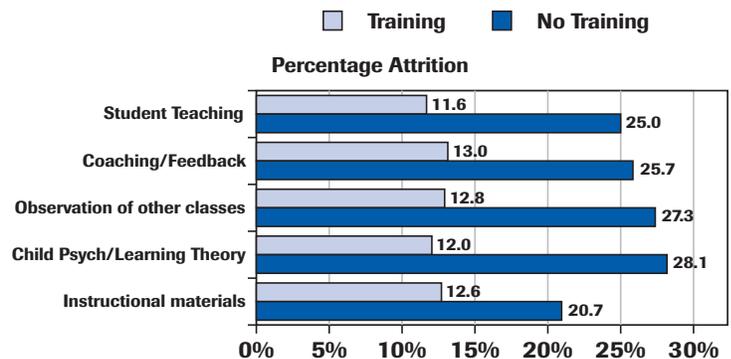


## Improve Correctional Teacher Retention

Many administrators are implementing innovative practices in selecting, preparing, and supporting teachers to improve work conditions, teacher quality, and the organization’s long-term teacher retention. With few formal correctional educator-training programs, preparing teachers for work in a correctional environment can raise retention rates; improve attitudes, feelings of efficacy, instructional skills, and enhance the safety and security of both the teacher and offender.

- Teacher preparation is vital.
  - 66% of beginning teachers with a strong preparation-training plan to stay in teaching.
  - Only 29% of beginning teachers with less preparation and training plan to stay in teaching.
- Correctional educators work with unique populations requiring skill and training.
  - With the number of offenders who learn differently, instructors should receive research-based professional development to enhance their lesson preparation and instructional strategies.
- Student teaching experience:
  - 15% of teachers that experienced student teaching left within 5 years.
  - 29% of teachers who did not have student teaching experience, left within 5 years.
- Change human resource practices that serve as a barrier.
  - In Houston, teacher selection occurs at the site, including upgrades in starting salaries, sign on bonus, and decisions about teacher qualifications.
  - In Montgomery County, MD, administrators and union leaders work together to plan and implement teacher professional development, enhancing their ability to recruit.
- Knowledge and skills-based pay structures provide proper incentives.
- Induction and mentoring programs are effective and improve retention of new teachers.
  - The Santa Cruz New Teacher Project, part of the Beginning Teacher Support & Assessment (BTSA) Program in California, indicates that 94% of new teachers that received support through the program were still teaching seven years later.

**Teacher Preparation: Reducing First Year Teacher Attrition, 2000-01**



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- Lafourche Parish, LA first year teacher retention improved from 49% to 85% over a three-year period.
- Rochester, NY increased 1st year teacher retention from 69% to 86% in just over ten years.
- Well-designed programs raise retention rates; improve attitudes, feelings of efficacy, and instructional skills. Programs invigorate veteran teachers as well.
  - California State University at San Bernardino provides an Alternative and Correctional Education Academy certificate program to train educational and ancillary staff who serve adjudicated and at-risk students in institutions and alternative instructional settings.
  - The Correctional Education Association has collaborated with Eastern Washington State University to provide an online four (4) credit hour course called "Fundamentals of Correctional Education."
- Create a facility culture that supports education.
  - Develop a current, well-defined, mission to unite staff and improve classroom management.
  - All facility staff must be involved in creating a positive environment.
  - Displays of motivational messages encourage offender involvement and achievement.
  - Create partnerships and opportunities for the local community, volunteers, teacher associations, institutions of higher learning, and administrators who can work together to enhance the learning environment.
  - Develop a comprehensive understanding of discipline management and support regarding behavioral issues.
  - Provide incentives for challenging and special assignments.
  - Utilize classroom assignment structures to create a good mix of students (i.e., rating of behavior and academics).

**Correctional education administrators may apply the techniques that have proven successful in the public school systems to improve teacher selection and retention. Properly trained and prepared novice teachers, with limited additional duties, mentoring by a master teacher for several years after they start, and who work in a supportive environment have a higher probability of staying in the education profession.**

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The MTC Success for Life<sup>SM</sup> program includes correctional education as a major component of a holistic approach to correctional programming. This Data Spotlight examines correctional education, teacher attrition, and strategies to improve teacher retention.

**Management & Training Corporation (MTC)** is an international private contractor that manages and operates Job Corps centers and correctional facilities.

**MTC Institute** is dedicated to examining data and projecting trends relevant to job training and corrections programs.

**The Data Spotlight** is a periodic publication highlighting issues that impact the future of young people and inmates.

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