



## PRISON REPORT CARDS: A Working Model to Assess Prison Success

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DATA SPOTLIGHT

The public and policy makers are concerned with the growing costs of corrections, quality of management, and the growing need to invest time and money in those things that effect more positive outcomes for inmates that return to the community. The public is beginning to 'expect' more for their investment and the outcome standards for correctional institutions are increasing. An objective model of indicators that allows cross-jurisdictional comparisons will provide valuable information leading to wiser use of tax dollars. Ultimately, such a model will enable professionals and the public to compare prisons equally.

Corrections professionals possess the know how to measure the quality of a prison. As leaders, MTC recognizes factors indicative of a professional, safe, and secure institution, where programs exist to enable successful offender re-entry to society and reduce the likelihood of the offender recidivating.

### Why do we need a model?

A model frames issues, focusing public discourse on qualitative standards, rather than arbitrary designations (e.g., public or private).

- An evaluative model incorporates aspects of the standards determined by professional associations and research to be important measures of success.
- Holds Management to the higher standards and outcomes, because it is in our best interests.
- If prison managers do not reach specified outcome thresholds, they can and should be replaced.
- The move to standardization recognizes that each facility may have different groups and inmate levels, but they all need to be measured by outcomes.
- Government sets higher standards and holds those who operate prisons accountable to them.

### Why is recidivism a central outcome that must be a part of the debate?

The lack of programming in prisons makes successful reentry virtually impossible for those without education and with persistent substance addictions. Indicators that address programming specifically geared to reduce recidivism provide the outcomes that society is expecting and needs.

- More than 95 percent of offenders return to the community.
- Out of the offenders released, over 68 percent are rearrested within 3 years.
- The majority of the offenders serve a sentence that is approximately 2 1/2 years.
- The majority will be released back into the community unskilled, undereducated, and highly likely to become re-involved in criminal activity.
- The data is unequivocal that education, training, and effective drug treatment will reduce the numbers who reoffend by 25 to 40 percent.

### What does the model framework include?

In response to the observed need for action, the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA) and the American Correctional Association (ACA), among others, are identifying

performance measures. While these measures address processes, and do not include outcomes on a macro scale, they are a starting point to enable the public comparison of the efficacy of facilities.

Any model should include:

- *Accreditation*- Facilities must be accredited. This provides external validation of the level of adherence to professional standards and the ongoing commitment to quality management practices.
- *Safe and Secure*- Facilities must have standard outcomes defining incidents, escapes, and other threats to a safe and secure operation.
- *Management*- Facilities must maintain an adequate level of trained and experienced staff appropriate to the facility workflow.
- *Programs and services* to improve the quality of life within the facility;
  - ✓ Work facilitating job skill enhancement, inculcating a work ethic, which aids in cost reduction;
  - ✓ Education/Training with outcome measures that include attainment of diplomas and certificates that are employer recognized, provide benchmarks to facilitate comparisons/improvements;
  - ✓ Therapeutic treatment, including substance abuse, cognitive skills and anger management; and
  - ✓ Faith-based, victim restoration and community service programs.
- *Re-entry programs and recidivism* monitoring to hold prison managers accountable for the ultimate outcome; inmates who do not return to prison following release.
- *Cost Effective*-Facilities must meet specified outcomes while maintaining projected cost estimates or face concrete tangible consequences. These components culminate in an offender being prepared to enter society with the best chance for success, lessening the likelihood they will recidivate.

In the final analysis, elected officials, the public, and government officials will know, based upon the evaluative framework that they are receiving the maximum value for the funds provided to a corrections system. This added value provides a safe, sound operation and programs proven to reduce recidivism, in a cost effective manner.