Exploring the Accessibility of Education to Incarcerated Men in New York State Prisons

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Introduction

This research seeks to explore the accessibility of education to incarcerated men in New York state prisons, and will address the physical, psychological, and logistical factors that impact access to education for this population. In this report, "education" will broadly refer to all academic, vocational, and therapeutic programs offered within New York state prisons.

New York state prisons are run by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). Their mission statement is:

> To improve public safety by providing a continuity of appropriate treatment services in safe and secure facilities where the needs of the incarcerated population are addressed and where individuals under its' [*sic*] custody are successfully prepared for release and parolees under community supervision receive supportive services that facilitate the successful completion of their sentence.

This research will be partially devoted to evaluating whether the realities of accessing educational programming are consistent with what has been described in DOCCS' mission statement. Specifically, this research will focus on the terms "continuity", "safe and secure", and "needs…addressed" in reference to access to education.

In this report, I use "accessibility" to refer to the ability and ease with which incarcerated men in New York state prisons can access educational programming of any type (academic, vocational, therapeutic). Access is not only determined by ability to enroll in a program, but also by whether or not sufficient materials/accommodations are available within that program to make it understandable for everyone, including those with disabilities. The revocation of access as a

result of disciplinary measures—such as expulsion from programs or solitary confinement—will be considered. Additionally, barriers to access in terms of the hostility of the educational environment, especially in regard to the behavior of instructors and correctional officers, will be addressed by this research.

Why New York state men's prisons?

This research was conducted in June/July 2022 with participants who had been incarcerated in New York state men's prisons.. Male prisons were used as opposed to female prisons because of the larger sample size; in 2018, DOCCS reported that 95% of the people in its custody were men (Under Custody, 2018). New York state prisons were identified as a site of interest due to the state's evolving history concerning higher education within prison.

New York's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) as well as federal Pell grants were available to incarcerated individuals in New York state for the purpose of funding higher education until the mid-1990s. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 ended Pell grants for incarcerated individuals. Two years later, EDN § 661 prohibited incarcerated students in New York from receiving TAP grants. When TAP and Pell grants were in place, 70 college-in-prison programs operated in New York prisons, but now only 15 are present (Jacobs et al., 2019).

However, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 lifted the ban on providing Pell funding to incarcerated people in state prisons. Additionally, the 2022-2023 New York state budget includes a 5 million dollar allocation to TAP funding for incarcerated individuals, lifting the 1996 ban. However, neither of these measures have been implemented in New York state prisons yet. Access to Pell funding is expected to begin in 2023, but academic institutions may find other difficulties in accessing it (Gais et al., 2021). The Consolidated Appropriations Act places

criteria on institutions attempting to establish a prison education program, requiring them to be approved by DOCCS based on metrics like job placement rates, earnings, transfer credit eligibility, and rates of recidivism among many others (Walters, 2021). Additionally, TAP has yet to be reinstated for incarcerated individuals, likely due to the budget passing in April of this year.

This research will provide insights pertaining to the current difficulties of accessing education in New York state prisons for individuals who lack the benefits offered by the TAP and Pell programs.

Education and Recidivism

In the United States, prisons have been widely viewed not only as punitive tools, but as sites of rehabilitation. However, incarceration itself is not facilitating rehabilitation: a study across thirty states by the U.S. Department of Justice found that 83% of the over 400,000 state prisoners they monitored were arrested at least once within nine years of their release, with an average of five arrests per individual (Alpher et al., 2018). Recidivism rates—the rate at which formerly incarcerated people are rearrested—clearly indicate state prisons across the country are failing to set their populations up for success.

Education in prison may be the key to stopping these vicious cycles of repeated arrests. A comprehensive evaluation by the RAND corporation found that offenders participating in any form of correctional education had 43% lower odds of recidivism than those who did not (Davis et al., 2013). Additionally, the same study found that incarcerated individuals who participated in vocational training programs had a 28% greater chance of obtaining employment upon release (Davis et al., 2013). Unemployment is deeply tied to recidivism; a U.S. Justice Department study found that not only was poverty the strongest predictor of recidivism, but that short term

financial assistance reduced the odds of recidivism by 83% (Holtfreter et al., 2004). Clearly, receiving education while incarcerated has positive outcomes on recidivism both directly and indirectly through employment.

While receiving education in prison has positive impacts on recidivism rates, it is also important to note that base levels of education plays a role. A study by the state of New York found that recidivism rates were almost identical between those that earned their GED in prison and those that entered prison having already obtained their GED (Nuttall et al., 2003). While this study is not conclusive, it indicates that if the base population of incarcerated people were well educated, recidivism rates may be much lower. However, a special report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice found that about 40% of state prisoners did not have a high school diploma compared to only about 18% of the general population (Harlow, 2003). Additionally, about 26% of the state prisoners who reported having a GED also reported earning it while incarcerated (Harlow, 2003). This means that a large portion of the people entering prison are less educated than the general population. Therefore, increasing access to education within prison has the potential to greatly reduce recidivism rates because of the number of people it will impact.

Education has clear positive effects on post-release outcomes, but those effects are meaningless if incarcerated people cannot access educational programming. The U.S. Justice Department found that 40% of men incarcerated in state prisons did not have either their high school diploma or GED (Harlow et al., 2003). It is critical to examine the gaps in the system that are preventing incarcerated people from obtaining appropriate academic, vocational, and therapeutic education.

Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions in regards to male New York state prisons:

Are academic, vocational, and therapeutic programs accessible to incarcerated men?

Do incarcerated men have the ability to dictate their educational experiences through class choice? If so, are there a variety of classes to choose from?

How are programs being run by instructors and the facility's administration? Do variations in teaching attitudes impact student learning?

How do punitive measures impact student learning?

Are disabled and learning impaired individuals being given appropriate accommodations?

Methodology

Interviews were conducted with eleven formerly incarcerated men about their experiences accessing education while incarcerated. Each participant was asked about his overall experiences with educational programming, the process of enrolling in classes, how he perceived his teachers, factors that impacted his motivation to take classes, what resources were available to disabled groups, and whether he held a position in the prison. Most interviews ranged between 45 minutes to an hour in length.

Each participant was actively receiving services at Exodus Transitional Community's 2271 3rd Avenue location, which is where each interview was conducted with the explicit permission and guidance of Exodus's legal department. Exodus is an organization that provides a variety of services to formerly incarcerated people in New York City with the goal of preventing recidivism and aiding reentry to society. Exodus was chosen because it has a diverse base of

clientele due to its lack of entry restrictions and connection to the justice system; parole officers may recommend their parolees to seek services at Exodus. Though solely interviewing participants affiliated with a New York City-based organization has the risk of introducing bias, it should be noted that the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision assigns and transfers all incarcerated people under their jurisdiction to facilities across the state without preference for their home location. Therefore, bias in terms of participants' breadth of knowledge about facilities across the state should be negligible due to the lack of location preference DOCCS employs when assigning facilities.

Participants were chosen on a voluntary basis. An Exodus staff member familiar with the research project approached people receiving services at Exodus and asked them if they would be interested in being interviewed about their experiences with educational programming while incarcerated. Many refused to participate. This method may have introduced response bias, as people with strong opinions about their experiences may have been more inclined to participate.

Each participant was assured full confidentiality. As such, identifying information including participants' names have been omitted for this report. Participants will be referred to by the pseudonyms they chose from a provided list. Interviews with participants were recorded, transcribed, and then the recordings were deleted to maintain participants' privacy. Participants' real names and consent forms have been stored in hard copies only, while transcriptions are listed under pseudonyms. As recently incarcerated people are a vulnerable population, participants were not provided any incentive to interview nor any reward afterwards.

It should be noted that I, the researcher and interviewer, have a vested interest in this topic. Several members of my close family have been incarcerated, albeit not in New York state

prisons. I am also actively volunteering at a non-profit organization that works to better the lives of incarcerated people in the federal prison system. My previous knowledge of what incarcerated people experience within federal systems not only guided my questioning of participants, but prompted me to initiate this research. I had a base level of knowledge that caused me to question whether incarcerated people have adequate access to educational programming in accordance with DOCCS' mission statement.

Explanation of Terms and DOCCS Practices

This section will serve as a quick reference guide to terms and concepts relevant to New York state correctional facilities.

Program instructors and teachers are civilians, with the exception of inmate program assistants (IPAs) and teacher's aides, who are incarcerated individuals that help instructors and teachers, respectively.

A conditional release date is the date that a person may be released from prison if they have satisfied the parole board. It could be several years prior to an individual's "max out" date, or the date of release prescribed during sentencing.

"Long-termers" are individuals who have spent or will spend several decades in prison.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes are for individuals who need to be educated before entering high school equivalency classes.

An individual's placement into academic classes is dependent on their score on a standard intake test. An individual may be able to "test out" of academic classes if they already have their high school diploma. If an individual does not have a verified diploma, GED classes are mandatory.

The special housing unit (SHU) is also known as "solitary confinement" and "the box".

Some vocational programs are also considered jobs, and pay some portion of a dollar an hour. Better-paid jobs require a diploma or GED. Some jobs have no educational or job training value, such as the mess hall where incarcerated individuals serve food.

Participants can lose many privileges and be written up for refusing to attend their programs.

Findings

I found that participants consistently brought up ten interconnected barriers affecting the accessibility of education inside New York state men's prisons: (a) the behavior of COs and administrators, (b) the behavior of instructors, (c) transferring facilities and/or programs, (d) accommodations available to disabled individuals, (e) quality and availability of materials within programs, (f) disciplinary measures, (g) the variety of programs available/the autonomy in choosing programs, (h) the irregular availability of college-in-prison programs, (i) waiting times, and (j) motivation to participate. Racial and intellectual discrimination also seemed to play a consistent role.

CO and Administrator Behavior

Participants were not asked about their experiences with correctional officers. Despite this, 9 of 11 (81.81%) of participants spontaneously expressed that correctional officers were abusive as

part of their response to other questions. Participants observed or were subject to physical/sexual abuse, demeaning comments, threats, corruption, and obstructions of justice.

COs make a deliberate effort to prevent certain people or groups from participating in programs. This takes the form of threatening and physically accosting individuals. In addition to general aggression, participants reported that COs would target people based on their race, personality, or offense. Xavier, a participant who helped found an inmate-run educational group, described how officers would make these threats:

> COs are designated certain blocks. You would think the officers in the academic area would be more laid back, but they're extremely confrontational. They'll search you if you just try to go to the bathroom. They'll put you against the wall and you're spread out as far as you can go to the point where you're barely balancing and then tell you if you move they'll take it as a threatening gesture… They'll beat you up and then take you to the Special Housing Unit.

Several other participants corroborated this exact practice of targeting an individual with a supposed search in order to physically abuse them. This practice directly contradicts DOCCS' mission statement to provide a "safe and secure" learning environment.

Additionally, 6 of 11 (54.6%) participants noted the demeaning manner with which COs spoke to them. This would include racial slurs, name calling, and treating individuals as "just prisoners" instead of people, as one participant put it. Participants explicitly expressed the desire to remove COs from classes in order to improve the academic environment.

Due to fear of retaliation, participants expressed hesitancy about using the prison grievance system in order to address CO behavior. They noted that many COs and administrators have the same last name, are intermarried, or are very close friends. One participant who also served as the grievance representative at his facility, Ahmad, noted that complaints would not be properly filed or addressed because "you have to put the complaints into the hands of the people you're complaining about", referring to the nepotism he noticed within his facility. Corruption voids the grievance process, and reduces access to education for individuals who have been targeted.

Instructor Behavior

Under DOCCS, teachers are able to remove any student from their class using Form 4804A, "Request for Waiver from the Mandatory Education Policy". The form lists "disciplinary," "failure to progress," "medical, psychological, emotional reason," and "other" as the reasons someone can be removed from a program. Participants reported that many teachers will abuse this loose categorization in order to remove students that they dislike. These students do not "jeopardize[s] the safety or security of the program area", which DOCCS directive 4804 lists as the criterion. Even Johanna, a participant who spoke highly of his instructors for teaching him how to read, mentioned this practice:

> So [the teachers] get them riled up, then say "He's got an attitude, get him out of my class." They know how to get rid of them. They know how certain people are going to act. They've been in the business for so long, with inmates.

This is a clear restriction of access to education, and is based solely on the whims, personality, and tolerances of a program's instructor.

Six of 11 (54.6%) participants also reported that their peers would spend between 6 and 25 years in the same academic classes, such as the GED and ABE classes, due to lack of progress. For

comparison, one participant who brought up this phenomenon only spent 90 days in the GED class. When asked what was causing people to spend inordinate amounts of time in academic classes, participants cited teachers' apathy towards their students' learning. They explained that teachers use worksheets as their primary learning tool as opposed to lectures and do not go over graded worksheets with students. Additionally, participants noted that teachers would often do "nothing" around the facility, and would leave class for extended periods of time.

Teachers were also reported to demean students in a manner similar to that of COs. Teachers ridicule students for being illiterate or having learning hardships. This causes many illiterate students to attempt to hide their illiteracy instead of addressing it.

Participants reported that some teachers were motivated to improve their students' learning. To this end, they would purchase outside materials. However, DOCCS universally bans this practice. Benjamin, a participant who served as a teacher's aide while incarcerated, described this:

> It could be something as simple as a board game. But because it wasn't approved by the state or the facility, the use of it was disallowed. Things that bring up motivation and enthusiasm were banned. Something as simple as a sponge-type ball.

By disallowing enriching materials, DOCCS' educational policy harms those who would benefit from more tactile, interactive modes of learning.

Materials

Six of 11 (54.6%) participants mentioned that vocational programs, or programs that teach job-marketable skills such as welding, electrical, building maintenance, etc., use outdated

materials and learning practices. These programs are outdated by several decades, and therefore do not provide job marketable skills.

The outdated nature of materials and technologies in prisons has a more devastating effect on the older population and long-termers; many are released from prison technologically illiterate. Technological illiteracy increases difficulty in applying to jobs, receiving welfare services, keeping track of monetary obligations, and re-establishing support networks—which are all paramount to successful reentry. However, as of 2020, tablets are now available to inmates in New York state prisons. While vocational programs such as computer training classes are still outdated, this recreational and educational tool may improve accessibility.

Academic programs also suffer from outdated and insufficient materials. Victor, a long-termer who attempted to do college through correspondence, said that incarcerated students would file grievances just "To try to get the appropriate materials. Reading materials, college materials, pens, paper. To get up-to-date books." By making it difficult for students to acquire basic materials, facility administrators increase the difficulty of getting an education for an already educationally-disadvantaged population.

Transferring

Incarcerated people in New York state can be transferred both by request and unwillingly, at DOCCS' discretion. Transfers occur between New York state men's facilities, and can happen at any point during one's term. Despite DOCCS' mission to provide "a continuity of appropriate treatment services", transfers disrupt program progress, resulting in significant penalties. Disruption occurs in two different ways: 1) a prisoner is transferred to a facility that does not have the program they were in, and 2) if a prisoner did not complete the programs they were in,

they automatically lose progress upon reaching a new facility. Some programs are required by the parole board in order to be eligible for your conditional release date, and disruption in program progress can result in having to spend several more years in prison. There are also programs that offer time-based benefits in addition to "good time". Andre, a participant who was frequently transferred due to an ongoing court case, related his experience in this type of program:

> They had this program and if you complete two years of this program you get 6 months off of your sentence. Because I kept moving around for court, it kept restarting my time. By the time my court case was over I didn't have enough time to do the program and get credit for it.

One participant estimated that facility transfers regularly happen roughly every ten months.

While transferring facilities poses a blatant barrier to accessing education, intra-facility program transfers also harm accessibility. Facility administrators can transfer incarcerated students between programs. Ahmad and Xavier, both older long-termers, noted this practice using nearly identical diction:

> Sometimes the facility need is bigger than yours. Sometimes guys will be forced into the mess hall. A lot of people are denied school. -Ahmad
>
> What they like to do is stick you in areas like the mess hall because they constantly need people in the mess hall. It's all about the facility's need. -Xavier

When asked, both explained "facility need" as the justification used to transfer students from their chosen programs and into programs that the facility needs to fill. Other participants noted that intra-facility program transfers were not done with respect for the incarcerated person's

behavior, wishes, or program performance; they were arbitrary. It is unclear how common these types of transfers are, but they are a barrier to attaining education for incarcerated men.

Disciplinary Measures

Like transferring, some disciplinary measures can have disruptive effects. If an incarcerated man is sent to solitary confinement, he will most likely lose all progress in his programs unless his stay in solitary is very brief (less than a week). However, one participant reported that solitary confinement terms typically are measured in months as opposed to days. Individuals in solitary confinement are also not eligible for any programming. In addition, a person may have to retake previously completed programs if he incurs a relevant charge. Jerry, a young participant who struggled with depression during his incarceration, described this:

> While I was upstate I did the program three times because I had jailhouse alcohol and they caught me and my time didn't count anymore. So I had to redo the program even though I wasn't intoxicated or had dirty urine or anything.

Requiring individuals to repeat programs not only is incredibly frustrating for the individual in question due to the threat it poses to his conditional release date, but also decreases accessibility for those waiting to get into the program he has to retake.

Disabilities

Physical and mental disabilities are not treated appropriately within classrooms; learning-impaired individuals face punishments and the physically disabled do not receive accommodations.

Firstly, participants reported that individuals with learning disabilities would be placed into the same classes as non-learning impaired students. This may be in part due to DOCCS ceasing to provide special education services to students over the age of 21, according to Code 43 of their Special Education Services directive. According to the same directive, newly incarcerated individuals over the age of 21 are also not tested for learning disabilities. The consequence of this, though, is that teachers are not equipped to deal with their special needs students. Students either end up dropping out of their classes, being kicked out, or being sent to solitary confinement for their inability to keep up with the class. Benjamin, a participant who served both as the Transitional Director and a teacher's aide, related his observations:

> A guy might be slow, like he may not catch on as quickly as the next person. There's been cases I've seen where the person is removed from class and locked into a cell…They would take the learning hardships as a form of disobedience.

In addition to failing to screen older individuals for learning disabilities, participants reported that DOCCS also consistently fails to provide sufficient accommodations for physically disabled individuals. Even basic necessities such as hearing aides were not provided. Ahmad, a participant who worked as the grievance representative while incarcerated, reported that he helped many disabled individuals file for accommodations, but that "they never, ever got… a system that was workable." Other participants also reported that their disabled peers rarely had appropriate accommodations.

These barriers to access aren't limited to a small proportion of the prison population, either; a study published in the Journal of Disability Policy Studies found that 41% of inmates in state and

federal prison had a disability, with learning disabilities being most prevalent (Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2015).

College-in-Prison Programs

The only consistent complaint across participants about college-in-prison programs was how difficult it is to get into them. This complaint exists in two dimensions: the selective application process, and the scarcity of college programs across facilities. Multiple participants applied to a college program at their facilities and were rejected. Once rejected, individuals are left with no means to pursue higher education.

The scarcity of college-in-prison programs is also a significant barrier to access. There are only 15 college-in-prison programs across 25 New York state facilities, leaving 18 facilities with no college programs whatsoever (Jacobs et al., 2019).

With the recent reinstatement of TAP and Pell funding, hopefully college programs will be more abundant in New York prisons and able to accept more students.

Variety and Selection

Participants expressed the need for more trade programs, as well as more consistency in program offerings across facilities. The most consistently offered program is floor maintenance, which requires students to clean the facility's floors. Some facilities have many programs, but others are notably lacking.

While incarcerated individuals can submit a request to be placed in certain programs, one participant reported that individuals with a violent history will likely be denied and placed somewhere like the mess hall, where they will not receive an academic or vocational education.

In addition to discrimination based on charges, participants reported that program placement has a racial component. Certain vocational programs and jobs are racially segregated, with white people tending to be in better paid, less labor-intensive placements.

Academic classes lack different levels, meaning that everyone is held back until the last person understands the material. Benjamin, a participant and former teacher's aide, stated the effect this had on his education:

> I lose motivation because I'm sitting here for the next ten days doing nothing because I'm waiting for the last person to catch up. There's not levels. There should be a multiplication 1 class, a multiplication 2 class, and so on. When a guy reaches a level, he should be able to move on.

The lack of levels to classes is especially harmful when combined with DOCCS's refusal to provide special education services for those over the age of 21. Because learning impaired individuals who may need a slow-paced education share classes with the general population, everyone is forced to move at a slower pace.

Wait Times

Waiting is a component of admittance into programs. According to participants, waiting lists to get into programs can stretch from several months to a year. Incarcerated individuals have a deadline to complete the programs recommended by the parole board in order to be eligible for their conditional release date. The parole board does not take into consideration whether an individual is attempting to get into their recommended programs when deciding whether the individual is eligible for their conditional release date. As a result, incarcerated individuals may not have the luxury of staying on program waiting lists. Participants reported that facility administrators don't automatically give waiting list preference to those with a quickly

approaching release date. The only way to bypass the waiting list process is to write letters to the parole board explaining the situation. Omar explained that process:

> But you would have to repeatedly write, 3-4 letters to the point where you have to get your counselor to call them and ask them if they acknowledge your letters. It could take up to 60 days depending on the capacity of the list and people going to the board earlier than you.

Motivation

There are various external factors that impact an individual's motivation to pursue education in prison. These include: separation from family, lack of understanding of the importance of education, stigma, compulsory programming, being forced to repeat programs, and the use of outdated materials.

Being separated from family causes some incarcerated individuals to become depressed and unmotivated to learn. Participants reported that access to family members varied by facility, and that in some facilities COs would forcefully limit phone calls to 10 minutes or less.

Not understanding the importance of education coincides with being unmotivated to learn. Johanna, a participant who entered prison illiterate, reported waiting three years into his sentence to start learning to read and write because he "didn't think [he] needed it." Many other participants reported witnessing the same phenomenon in their peers; men with little to no education would actively skip class or play cards during classes because they felt that they didn't need education.

However, this phenomenon may be more closely related to stigma than ignorance of education's importance. Participants reported that people in the "dummy classes", or the Adult Basic Education classes, would be made fun of by their peers. Johanna reported using many "tricks" to hide his illiteracy, one of them being feigning apathy: "How do you go about denying it? How do you make people think you're okay? 'I can read, I just don't want to do it.'" It may be that a culture of intellectual superiority pressures individuals to hide their lack of education.

The compulsory nature of programs prompts some individuals to adopt a resistant attitude. Directive 4804: Academic Education Program Policies details that incarcerated people without high school diplomas must work towards their GED. However, it also states that individuals cannot offer their own diploma as proof; their high school must verify it. This can lead to individuals being forced back into classes they have already surpassed.

An individual that does not score high enough on their intake test will have to retake high school-level classes until they attain their GED. However, this is not explained to individuals taking the intake tests. Tests are administered at the beginning of incarceration, and so anyone who has not been warned of the consequences of an inadequate score may not try on the admittance tests. Ahmad explains his observations:

> They test you when you reach the intake facility... You'll find that a lot of the guys play games with the tests. They'll get such a low score that whatever facility they end up going to they're forced into school, into a classroom of such elementary nature. I try to warn guys of that. You'll find that that happens often, a lot of the guys, because they're bored and want to go back to their cells, just run through the test.

Individuals may be unmotivated to progress through classes that they perceive as well below their knowledge level, but these classes are still mandatory. While it is possible to file Form 4804A, "Request for Waiver from the Mandatory Education Policy" to get out of these classes, the parole board will note this, which may negatively impact their release date.

The program committee also prescribes vocational and therapeutic programs to every incarcerated person based on their charge. If an individual fails to complete all programs recommended by the parole board, they will be forced to "max out", or serve the entirety of their sentence instead of being released on their conditional release date. This can be demotivating for individuals who are targeted by the instructors in their recommended programs. Instead of being able to redirect their educational pursuits elsewhere, they are forced to endure abuse and demeaning language. This can cause some individuals to adopt a retaliatory mindset. Jeremiah, a participant who spent four years studying for his GED in prison, explained how he fell into this mindset:

> At some point in time, there's going to be a rebuttal, especially if you're not being treated right. There's no incentive to do things… Say you didn't want to go to the class. You would get reprimanded. And I wouldn't say no to going to class because I didn't want to go, it was to make a stand for myself.

DOCCS policy also makes it compulsory for incarcerated individuals to repeat programs if they receive an appropriate charge, or "ticket", while incarcerated. For example, if an individual completes Aggression Replacement Training (ART) and then gets ticketed for a dispute—physical or verbal—they must retake ART. Two participants (18.2%) reported that having to repeat programs and losing progress in their programs depleted their motivation to learn.

Outdated materials also had a negative impact on student motivation. Participants reported that it was widely known among students that the education they were receiving in vocational programs was outdated and not job-marketable. Benjamin, a former teacher's aide, reported that "People would rather stay in their cells or go to the yard instead of do these programs, because they didn't see the use of them."

Next Steps

The findings of this research are based on interviews with incarcerated men, and thus capture only one perspective on the issue of access to education within New York state men's prisons. To obtain a more holistic view, interviews should be conducted with correctional officers, teachers, instructors, and facility administrators. This would be particularly useful to aid in identifying ways to change policies that preserve their purpose but mitigate their harm.

A follow up on this issue should be done in five to ten years, as the reinstatement of TAP and Pell funding will likely have dramatic positive effects on the accessibility of college-in-prison programs.

Implications

My findings imply that there needs to be statewide policy reform, an evaluation of current personnel, and funding reallocation.

Policy reform should address disruption in program progress due to transferring and disciplinary measures. Additionally, there should be protective policies to ensure that teachers cannot remove students without an in-depth investigation into alternate solutions. To reduce corruption, DOCCS should ban the practice of hiring and/or managing family members. Restrictions should also be placed on the use of force by COs. Ideally, an inquiry to determine if there was a criminal misuse of force should be conducted by a third party government agency after every incident in which

force was used. Additionally, body cameras should be mandatory for all COs. Another important policy reform is opening up disability testing and special education services for those over 21 years of age. Accommodations should also be much more readily available.

In addition, an evaluation of current personnel should be conducted to reduce nepotism through transferring family members out from under each other's purview. Background checks and behavior reports of all employees should be carefully examined, especially for COs. Individuals against whom numerous reports have been filed should be terminated.

Funding reallocation could improve materials by ensuring that they are up to date and available to the incarcerated population. Diverting more funds to create special needs classes for those with learning, sight, and hearing disabilities would also create much greater access to education for a large portion of the prison population.

Conclusion

My research revealed ten primary barriers to access: (a) the behavior of COs and administrators, (b) the behavior of instructors, (c) transferring facilities, (d) accommodations available to disabled individuals, (e) quality and availability of materials within programs, (f) disciplinary measures, (g) the variety of programs available/the autonomy in choosing programs, (h) the irregular availability of college-in-prison programs, (i) waiting times, and (j) motivation to participate. Ultimately, statewide policy reform, an evaluation of current personnel, and funding reallocation need to be conducted in order to mitigate these barriers.

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