

The Three State Recidivism Study

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The Three State Recidivism Study was conducted by the Correctional Education Association for the United States Department of Education Office of Correctional Education. Over 3600 inmates, who were released more than three years ago in Maryland, Minnesota and Ohio, are involved in a longitudinal study. The study, which uses educational participation while incarcerated as the major variable, shows that simply attending school behind bars reduces the likelihood of re-incarceration by 29%. Translated into savings every dollar spent on education returns more than two dollars to the citizens in reduced prison costs. In Maryland, that means that last year's \$11,700,000 annual state budget for correctional education returned at least \$23,280,000 to the state. The Correctional Education Program in the Maryland State Department of Education has legal responsibility for the state prison education programs. The State Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Nancy Grasmick, has been outspoken about her belief in the effectiveness of prison education for some time. While the savings in dollars is important, the reduction in crime itself cannot be so easily translated into dollars.

Background

Drs. Stephen Steurer, Linda Smith and Alice Tracy are the primary investigators for the *Three State Recidivism Study*. Dr. Steurer, who works for the state of Maryland Correctional Education Program, and as Executive Director of the Correctional Education Association, is the Project Director. Dr. Smith, from the University of Maryland Bureau of Governmental Research, is the lead researcher for the project. Dr. Tracy, former Assistant Director for CEA, is project manager and responsible for much of the report itself.

CEA received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Correctional Education in 1997 to study the impact of education while incarcerated on post release behavior, primarily recidivism and employment. The study covers inmates who were released from Maryland, Minnesota and Ohio in late summer, 1997 to early winter, 1998. The states pooled their data in a format that allows for individual state as well as

aggregate reports. Within each state the correctional, parole and probation, education and work force agencies cooperated in the data collection.

As the study began each state determined who were the next 1,000 or more releases. These inmates were called together in the various institutions and given a one hour interview. Their answers were put onto scan sheets and entered into the database. Of course, it was voluntary, but most inmates were eager to participate after the study was explained to them. Criminal history and educational data was collected on each person as well. After release the parole officers were asked for behavioral and employment information. Finally, re-arrest, re-conviction and re-incarceration data were collected from state records. These are the three common recidivism definitions used by the federal government. The re-incarceration rates are of particular interest to the correctional and education agencies. While recidivism dropped significantly for all three areas, the 23% overall figure represents re-incarceration for all three states.

Over 500 variables have been collected on the study participants. While the first report deals primarily with recidivism additional reports on the demographics of the participants is anticipated. The results and the quantity of data are impressive. There is an enormous amount of demographic information on family and community background, economic status and employment, educational experience, offender perspectives on education, motivational factors and much more. No other study has attempted to collect so much information from so many agencies. This is the first study to collect extensive information from the inmates themselves.

The Results

The tables below show a summary of the recidivism results of the study for each state and for all three states as an aggregate. The three most commonly used definitions of recidivism are used – re-arrest, re-conviction and re-incarceration.

Recidivism Results for Each State

Maryland:	Participants	Non-participants
Re-arrest	52.1	55.7
Re-conviction	31.5	36.0
Re-incarceration	30.9	37.7
Minnesota:	Participants	Non-participants
Re-arrest	42.6	54.0
Re-conviction	24.5	33.8
Re-incarceration	14.3	21.5
Ohio:	Participants	Non-participants
Re-arrest	50.7	58.2
Re-conviction	26.1	33.7
Re-incarceration	24.4	31.7

Aggregate Criminal History Data for Maryland, Minnesota and Ohio

() shows percentage drop in recidivism

Three States:	Participants	Non-participants
Recidivism Drop		
Re-arrest	48.4	55.9 (-13%)
Re-conviction	27.3	34.5 (-21%)
Re-incarceration	23.2	30.3 (-29%)

Implications

The results can be used to guide policy and legislation. While it is difficult to ascertain which kinds of education programs are most effective, overall investing in education for the incarcerated is wise. As a matter of public policy it would seem that education should be emphasized as both a rehabilitative as well as a crime reduction tool. Further research is needed to decide what education program work best. The drop in recidivism in each state clearly indicates that the program returns at least \$2 for every \$1 spent in terms of saving in cell space on those who do not return to the system. While it is difficult to generalize the results of a study from one state to another, the fact that the recidivism results were similar in three different states is very encouraging.