

Educational Expansion Program on Rikers Island A Program of the New York City Departments of Education (DOE) and Correction (DOC)

PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY

This overview of the Departments of Education (DOE) and Correction (DOC) Educational Expansion Program on Rikers Island is based on a program review conducted by Westat/Metis staff for the evaluation of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiatives. The data were collected between May and July 2008 through interviews with staff of the CEO, DOC, DOE, and Horizon Academy and Austin H. MacCormick Island Academy,¹ and a review of program documents and monthly and quarterly data reports through July 2008 and management reports from DOE through May 2008.

Sponsoring Agency: New York City Departments of Education (DOE) and Correction (DOC)

Provider Agency: Horizon Academy and Island Academy

Start Date: October 15, 2007

CEO Budget: \$2.8 million

Target Population: Young adult inmates (male and female) ages 19 to 24 in DOC custody on Rikers Island

Statement of Need: Prison and jail inmates have been identified as the most educationally disadvantaged population in the United States.² In general, approximately half of the individuals housed in jails do not have a high school diploma or general educational development (GED) certificate. Rikers Island is the second largest jail in the country, and as many as 80 percent of those entering Rikers are estimated to be without a diploma or GED. On an average day in FY07, 96 percent of the eligible inmates aged 19 to 24 did not attend school while in custody on Rikers Island.³ Nearly one-third of all 18- to 21- year old Rikers inmates read below a 5th-grade level.

Goal and Services: The goal of the Educational Expansion Program is to increase literacy levels and GED achievement of 19- to 24-year-olds housed on Rikers Island by increasing and improving the access to educational services for this target population. The program expands services already provided in the on-island school programs (English as a Second Language (ESL), basic literacy and numeracy, pre-GED, and GED) but emphasizes the use of small classes. Vocational programs—*asbestos removal, horticulture, and lead removal*—were also added and others—*computer processing, custodial services, barbering, and cooking*—were expanded. Additional counselors and attendance teachers were hired to support educational efforts and successful transition off-island.

One of the key components of the Educational Expansion Program is the introduction of a monetary incentive to support increased enrollment and participation in the educational program. This incentive is equivalent to the lowest wage paid for jobs within

¹ Horizon Academy and Island Academy are the two high schools on Rikers Island and operate under District 79 of the New York City Department of Education. District 79 is responsible for developing alternative schools and programs for students that have difficulty with traditional high schools. District 79 is responsible for both high school programs and adult education programs in correctional facilities, including Rikers. Island Academy has three school sites and serves detained and sentenced male and female inmates ages 16-24. Horizon Academy serves detained male inmates ages 18-24 in five jails.

² Klein, S., Tolbert, M. Burgarin, R. Cataldi, E.F. & Tauscheck, G. (2004) Correctional education: assessing the status of prison programs and information needs. MPR Associates, Inc. Berkeley, CA. Retrieved July 3, 2008, from <http://www.mpine.com/products>.

³ Lisante, T. NYC Department of Education (August 16, 2007). E-mail communication to CEO.

the prison, approximately 27 cents per hour. To receive the incentive, students must attend school 4 of 5 days (80% attendance), participate in class, complete the required work, and follow behavioral rules.

Eligibility Criteria: For the literacy and GED programs, inmates with low literacy skills and/or without a high school diploma or GED are targeted. For vocational programs, youth participation is determined based on the training requirements (GEDs or math or reading proficiency).

Targets/Outcomes: The target and actual numbers presented in Table 1, as well as the percentages, are as of June 2008.

Table 1. Educational Expansion Outputs and Outcomes Through June 2008

Category	2006-2007	2007-2008	Percent Change
Number of Inmates Enrolled	1,947	2,556	31%
Number Attaining GED	123 ⁴	147 ⁵	20%
Number Receiving Vocational Certification	86	125	45%
Number Re-admitted DOC	n/a	36	n/a%

Selected Key Findings

Fidelity to the Program Model. The program is being implemented as specified. Additional classes were added to each of the schools to keep class size small (student-to-teacher ratios of 12:1 for basic literacy and 15:1 for other programs). Summer school in Horizon Academy for inmates with special education needs was made possible by the additional CEO funding. New vocational classes were offered and others expanded in Horizon Academy and Island Academy. Classrooms were set up in the George Matochan Detention Center Annex. Five additional corrections officers were added to provide security and escort services for the expanded program.

Characteristics of the Clients Served in Comparison to the Target Population. The program added 380 seats targeting the 19- to 24-year-old population on Rikers. The increased capacity resulted in an increased enrollment of 609 or 31 percent. Island Academy reflected notable differences from the overall participant population in the higher percentage of females (27%) and higher percentage of youth ages 19 to 20 (60%).⁶ However, these differences are largely a function of the residential facilities from which it draws (see discussion of jail facilities in “Program Services”). Young Hispanic inmates make up a higher percentage (46%) of the Horizon enrollees than found in the general population or Island Academy (35% each). Black inmates were the majority of enrollees in both academies as well as the population on the whole. Enrollees were most likely to come from Brooklyn or the Bronx, while the general population was more likely to come from Manhattan.

Service Delivery. Educational services provided by Horizon and Island Academies expand on those already provided on-island. The curriculum is based on an adult education model (Adult Basic Education, or ABE) for all Rikers students 16 and older. ABE is a modular curriculum that can take into account the variable lengths of sentences. Also, unlike a traditional adolescent curriculum that focuses on continuing education, the focus for the adult students is on developing skills to move into a job once they leave the island and return to their

⁴ The GED numbers reflect those from 2005-2006 because GED testing was suspended during the 2006-2007 school year.

⁵ This number may be lower than expected because GED testing was also suspended in January and February of 2008.

⁶ In contrast, Horizon Academy served no females, and 38% of participants were youth ages 19 to 20.

community. Students are assessed (with the same test used upon entry) after 150 hours of instruction (approximately 6 weeks or 50 days). The transition team works with inmates who opt out of school (“refusals”) to encourage them to go to and stay in school. Where appropriate, the program supports participation in off-island educational programs.

Provider Capacity. Space varies from site to site, depending on the spaces that have been made available for the schools. As programs in the two schools expand, classrooms are developed where possible but space can be tight in some locations. The providers believe enrollments can be increased and that their current CEO expansion capacity or average daily attendance (ADA) has not quite been reached. Both district and school staff reported needing to see higher ADA rates on a regular basis before requesting increased funds. ADA fluctuates quite a bit (based on competition with other schedules and/or level of inmate engagement in schools), so the programs are rarely “full.”

Agency Management. Requirements for monitoring the expanded educational programs are the same as the ongoing management of both Island and Horizon through District 79. Both District 79 and DOC administrators routinely visit the schools and maintain almost daily contact with on-island staff. DOC conducts a second training each year for corrections officers assigned to the two schools to underscore its support for the educational program. The new funding has improved relations and coordination between DOC and DOE. More meetings are being held between the two agencies to discuss challenges and improved case management. DOE staff members are working hard to maintain and manage the large amount of hard copy case-level and aggregate data for reporting requirements to CEO. DOC reviews the monthly and quarterly data to identify operational issues requiring administrative action and change.

Early Outcomes. The schools served 609 more students in the most recent year than in the previous year. This represents an increase of 25 percent for inmates 19 to 21 years old and 41 percent for inmates 22 to 24 years old. GEDs were awarded to 147 youth, slightly more than the 123 GEDs awarded in the 2006 year.⁷ Horizon awarded 125 industry certifications for a 45 percent increase over the previous year. Recidivism rates (readmissions to DOC custody) were 1 percent of the total enrollment in the two schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

As implemented, the Educational Expansion Program on Rikers Island, sponsored by DOE and DOC, is in alignment with the CEO mission and is meeting key CEO criteria. Other considerations for continued implementation include:

- 1 The program succeeded in increasing the number of youth served above the 380-seat Expansion capacity. The increases in service were larger for the 22- to 24-year-olds than the 19- to 21-year-olds; however, this may be a reflection of the larger number of inmates in the older category.
- 2 Vocational courses were well received by the Rikers population, according to comments from the focus group. These inmates particularly cited their interest in vocational programs during school breaks. Additional certificate-level programs would be positively received in the environment and would provide constructive activities during stressful times.
- 3 To improve the hand-off between on- and off-island programs, schedule planning sessions over the next few months with educational and counseling staff from both Horizon and Island Academies in order to solidify a productive working relationship with these DOE schools for the purpose of outreach and recruitment and program planning and design.
- 4 Experiment with different incentives for increasing both enrollment and retention. These could be monetary incentives for achieving milestones (e.g., completing 75 hours of educational services),

⁷ The state suspended GED testing during the 2007 school year; therefore, comparisons cannot be made to that year.

passing the predictor test (or smaller incentives for passing any section of the predictor test⁸), or being the first to finish a particularly difficult book or assignment; an award for tutoring another student; or other incentives such as movies, popcorn, cookies, or extended visitation hours.

- 5 Currently summer school is held only for students with special needs. Consider implementing summer classes for all target inmates, so that school is held year round. The obstacles to date have been (1) insufficient resources, and (2) the need for union approval and teacher agreement to teach during the summer months. However, the Westat/Metis team believes that given the target population's needs, and the fact that the inmates would be present and as available for classes during summer as they are the rest of the year, steps should be taken to obtain the necessary funding and teacher involvement to offer year-round classes.

⁸ Focus group participants mentioned being depressed when they did not pass the predictor test and that they just wanted to give up. Providing an incentive to students for passing any section of the test might mitigate those feelings.