

**The Effect Earning a GED While Incarcerated has on Recidivism Rates:  
A Research Synthesis**

by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research synthesis was to determine the effect that academic education programs have on recidivism rates. The purpose of American correctional facilities is to correct the behavior of convicted felons so that they do not return to criminal activities after they are released. Billions of dollars are spent by state and federal correction departments each year to do this. Academic and vocational education, religious, counseling, substance abuse and drug treatment, anger management, and parenting skills are just some of the prominent programs offered to offenders to help them return to society as responsible citizens. Twenty-one peer-reviewed journal articles from the existing literature were analyzed in this study. They included pre-admission statistics, in-prison programming, and post-release outcomes. This research synthesis confirms that not only does academic education reduce recidivism, but it does so more effectively than all other programs. Academic education has the most significant effect on younger, less educated, first time offenders convicted of property or drug related crimes. Therefore, such programs should be designed to give these offenders every opportunity to earn their GED.

**Key Words:** Recidivism, GED, academic education, prison, offender

## **Chapter One. Introduction**

Each year hundreds of thousands of convicted felons are released from prison. Without the right preparation, supervision, opportunities, and motivation, many of these ex-offenders will return to prison. A significant amount of importance is put on the educational development of these offenders – many of whom enter prison without a high school diploma or equivalency degree. The General Education Development (GED) program is used to educate these offenders.

### **Problem Statement**

There are many factors that are associated with whether or not an offender released from prison is successful in integrating back into society and not returning to a life of crime. Having an education is a significant factor that is positively associated with successful reintegration into the community. Without an education released offenders have fewer job opportunities and fewer job opportunities that pay enough money to help them avoid returning to their previous ways. The lack of education also means that offenders are less likely to be able to take full advantage of other prison programs aimed at assisting the offender's reintegration into society, such as aggression replacement training, parenting classes, substance abuse programs, and life skills classes.

### **Significance of the Problem**

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2009), 729,000 inmates were released in America in 2009 (the latest year for which statistics are provided). The vast majority of these offenders are low-skilled minorities without a high school diploma or general educational development certificate (GED) (Harlow, 2003).

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (2012) writes in its mission statement that self-improvement opportunities are afforded to offenders to help them lead crime-free lives. The New

York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), considered one of the most progressive states in terms of correctional services, states that its mission is to provide a continuity of treatment services to meet offenders' needs and prepare them for release (2012).

This ideology is consistent across the nation.

Research in the field of corrections shows that earning a GED while incarcerated significantly reduces recidivism (State of New York Department of Corrections and Community Services, 2006, p.1). However, only ten to twenty-eight percent of offenders who enter prison without a high school diploma or GED earn a GED while incarcerated, depending on the report (Tyler and Kling, 2006; Harlow, 2003). This suggests that the majority of offenders leaving prison and reentering the community are ill-equipped to lead productive, crime-free lives. A New York State study of offenders who were released in 2005 shows that 38% of offenders who have neither a high school diploma nor a GED returned to prison within three years, while only 31% of offenders who earned a GED while incarcerated returned within three years. 37% of offenders who were admitted to the prison system with a high school diploma or GED returned within three years (State of New York Department of Corrections and Community Services, 2006, p. 3).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Although there are many factors associated with recidivism, earning a G.E.D. while incarcerated is an area of particular interest because it has shown in the past to be significantly associated with lower recidivism rates. Therefore, it is the purpose of this thesis to research the degree to which earning a G.E.D. while incarcerated helps offenders successfully integrate back into society.

## **Research Questions**

- To what degree is earning a G.E.D. in prison associated with recidivism rates?
- What are the education levels of offenders?
- Do academic education programs have a more positive effect on recidivism rates than vocational education programs?
- How does earning a prison GED effect employment rates after release?
  - Are there differences in earned income between GED holders and non-GED holders?

## **Significance of the Study**

In order to research the connection between earning a “prison GED” and the rate of recidivism, the author used academic, sociology, and criminal justice databases to find articles and books on the topic. The link between education and recidivism rates is a topic that continues to be thoroughly studied. The author used articles that represent state correctional departments nation-wide as well as articles that show trends over the recent years to make sure that the information gathered is an accurate representation of the current state of education and recidivism rates in the United States.

Having an accurate representation and understanding of the link between educational levels and recidivism rates of released prisoners in America allows one to develop a more informed opinion about the successes and failures of state and federal correctional agencies. This is especially important because a high level of importance is put on educational attainment of offenders. By understanding what works and what does not work, agencies will be better prepared to use the resources at their disposal most effectively.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**G.E.D.** – The acronym stands for “General Education Development.” For the purpose of this paper, however, G.E.D. refers to the informal definition, which is the high school equivalency degree. More specifically, the high school equivalency degree that is earned in prison (“prison GED”) (State of New York Department of Corrections and Community Services, 2006, p. 1).

**Grade Equivalent** – A score from an academic test indicating the grade at which an offender functions academically.

**Inmate** – See “Offender”

**Offender** – An individual who has been admitted to a prison, whether federal or state.

**Prisoner** – See “Offender”

**Recidivism** – Recidivism can be measured differently depending on the study. Some studies only count an offender in recidivism statistics if he or she has committed a new crime, while others include offenders who return to prison for violating their parole (State of New York Department of Corrections, 2006, p. 1). Recidivism can also be measured by self-reported crime (Visher, Debus, and Yahner, 2008). The most comprehensive definition of recidivism is offered by Langan and Levin (2002): “rearrest, reconviction, resentence to prison, and return to prison with or without a new sentence. All recidivism statistics are over a three year time span immediately following the prison term.

Chapter two discussed education programs in prisons and their effect on recidivism rates. Competing philosophies of the intended purpose and the actual impact of correctional facilities in America were also discussed.

## **Chapter Two. Literature Review**

American prisons are constantly under scrutiny by advocacy groups for many reasons. Because of this, State and federal departments of corrections rely heavily on researched based practices to inform their decisions regarding how programs, services, and security are carried out. Researchers conduct studies on the effectiveness of programs in correctional facilities and the offenders who reside within them. The effectiveness of almost all of these studies is measured by recidivism.

### **Correctional Facilities vs. “Warehouses”**

The goal of prisons across the United States, and in many other developed nations, is to correct behavior of individuals who have broken the law. This is why prisons are more appropriately called correctional facilities. The philosophy behind this approach asserts that there are reasons why individuals in prison have committed felonies, and if those reasons can be remedied the individual will be prepared to return to society as a responsible citizen.

Of course, there is not one, single reason an individual engages in criminal activity, therefore, there are many programs available to offenders that are designed to address offenders' varying needs. Common programs in American correctional facilities include academic education (Generalized Educations Development [GED] programs), vocational education programs, anger management programs, counseling programs, parenting programs, religious programs, work release programs, and recreational programs, to name a few. Each program is a part of a continuum of treatment services aimed at correcting the underlying reasons an individual committed the crime(s) that sent him or her to prison.

## **Admission Statistics**

Before the different types of common prison programs offered to offenders were discussed, it is important to break down the admissions statistics of the offender population in America.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) (2012) report that approximately 218,000 inmates are under their supervision, 94% being male. Nation-wide, 59% are white, 37% are black and Asian and Native Americans comprise less than 2% each. "Hispanic" is categorized separately as an ethnicity, not a race, but 35% of inmates classified themselves as Hispanic. The average inmate age is 39. Approximately three quarters are American citizens, 22% are from Central or South America, and the rest have an unknown citizenship. 64% of these inmates are serving sentences between 3 and 15 years, with 13% serving sentences 20 years or more, or life sentences. Approximately half of all inmates are serving sentences for drug offenses (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2012).

As of January 2011 the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Services (DOCCS) reports having custody of approximately 56,000 offenders in prison, 95% of whom are male. 48% are African American, 25% are Hispanic, and 22% are White. The average age is 37; under twenty-one offenders account for only 5% of the DOCCS population. 72% of offenders come from urban areas (48% coming from New York City, 24% from upstate New York cities). 63% of offenders were convicted of violent felonies, 15% of offenders were convicted of drug offenses, and 12% of offenders were convicted of property/other crimes (State of New York Department of Corrections and Community Services, 2011).

Since approximately half of New York's prison population is made up of New York City residents, it is somewhat of an outlier as far as prison admission statistics are concerned. Other

states that do not have a major city (New York City has 8.2 million citizens according to the 2010 census) – and therefore do not have large number of citizens from urban areas – have quite different statistics. For example, Nebraska’s largest city is Omaha, which has a total population of 409,000 people. Its department of corrections had a total of 5,600 inmates as of 2011, which is only 10% of the population of New York’s department. Similar to New York, 92% of their prison population is male, the average age is 37, and 48% of inmates are from urban areas of its major cities. Unlike New York, 56% of inmates are white, 27% are black, and 12% are Hispanic. Only 12% of inmates were convicted of drug offenses (Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, 2011).

Figure 1 compares the admission statistics for New York and Nebraska. For the percentage of offenders who are either white, African American, or Hispanic, the percentage of the state’s population for each of these races are in parentheses. New York has 24% more of its offenders coming from urban areas, and 21% more African American offenders. 73% of New York’s offenders are either African American or Hispanic, while only 39% of Nebraska’s offender population is African American or Hispanic.

Each state’s prison population is different. Southwestern states such as Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico are more likely to have a higher percentage of Hispanic inmates due to immigrants coming to America from Mexico. Midwestern and northern states such as Nebraska, Oklahoma, and North and South Dakota are more likely to have a higher percentage of Caucasian inmates due to their lower minority populations. States with large cities, such as New York and California are more likely to have higher minority populations (Tyler and Kling, 2006).

Offenders are far less educated, on average, than law-abiding citizens. A major study published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that in 1997, 41% of offenders in United

States prisons did not have a high school diploma or G.E.D., while only 18% of the general population did not have a high school diploma or G.E.D. (Harlow, 2003; Urban Institute, 2008). Only 11% of offenders attended some post-secondary institution while 48% of the general population had. The highest level of education for 25% of offenders is passing the G.E.D. exam, while this is true for only 4% of the general population (Harlow, 2003). This information is displayed in figure 2.

### **Factors Effecting Post-Release Outcomes**

Butler (2009) writes that many offenders are more likely to commit crimes after they have been in prison because they become “criminalized” while incarcerated. He explains that while in prison, the effectiveness of programs is outweighed by the connections and networking offenders make with other offenders. In other words, being around hundreds of other convicted felons has an adverse effect on behavior.

Offenders are a uniquely difficult population to work with. As many as fifty to seventy-five percent of offenders meet the diagnostic criteria for anti-social personality disorder (Hare, 1996, cited from Elliott and Verdeyen, 2002). Establishing long-term fundamental changes in offenders is difficult because the majority of offenders have lived much of their lives with anti-social and criminal behaviors. Even when they truly want to change and are successful in making short-term changes, they fall back into their own habits very easily. This reality makes the job of corrections employees very difficult.

Department of Corrections employees and critics of state and federal correctional systems must change the common perception of what it means to be successful by setting realistic expectations for offenders. Otherwise, both officers and civilians (teachers, counselors, etc.) run the risk of becoming unnecessarily stressed out and possibly “burning out” (Elliot and Verdeyen,

2002). Prison employees may argue that the population they are working with are likely to be actively resistant to changing their life and becoming more responsible, law-abiding citizens. A disproportionately large percentage of offenders come from poverty-stricken, crime-ridden, inner city communities and have not known anything but that life style. Therefore, it is unrealistic to believe that prison programs should have a significantly larger impact on offenders than they currently do.

An additional concern that limits the effectiveness of prison programs is the need for security. Prison is a dangerous and violent place where the realities of criminal behavior cannot be taken for granted. Security concerns take precedence over programming concerns when potentially dangerous situations occur. For example, when gang activity leads to violence, programs are often shut down in order to allow security personnel to have greater oversight and control over where offenders are allowed to go in the facility, while simultaneously quelling the situation as time passes and offender aggression reduces. Although situations such as this do not occur each day in a facility, other security concerns do effect programs every day. For example, it is common in academic education classes to severely limit (or eliminate altogether) partner and group work due to the dangers of pairing up offenders who are members of rival gangs. Instead, offenders are more likely to work on their own during class. In many prisons technology that would greatly enhance the effectiveness of programs (i.e., the internet) cannot be utilized because offenders would attempt to take advantage of the technology for unauthorized uses, such as coordinating escape.

Transitioning back into society can be a significant obstacle to overcome. Offenders who serve lengthy sentences will likely find it difficult to reconnect with family and friends, and find

work quickly, both of which are linked to reduced recidivism. Transitional services and work release programs are designed to help this process, but making the transition is still an obstacle.

### **Recidivism Statistics**

Critics of American correctional facilities argue that programs are not effective in deterring criminal behavior. According to Langan and Levin (2002) and Visser, Debus, and Yahner (2008), two-thirds of offenders released from federal prisons across the United States in 1994 recidivated within three years. Harlow (2003) found the recidivism rate slightly higher at approximately 75% (p. 11). In one of the largest and most cited studies on recidivism, Steurer, Smith, and Tracy (2001) found the recidivism rate to be approximately 56%. Such a high percentage of recidivism means a large portion of the prison population is made up of offenders who are continually in and out of prison, and even though these offenders spend a significant number of hours in programs, they continue to lead a criminal life style. Although there is variation among these prominent studies, critics of American correctional facilities claim that prison programs are not effective enough in correcting the behavior of criminals.

Langan and Levin (2002) conducted a major study that tracked the recidivism trends of over 272,000 inmates – two-thirds of all released inmates – who were released from fifteen states in 1994. The released offenders were tracked for three years.

Overall, 68% of these inmates recidivated, a 5% higher recidivism rate than was found in a 1983 study. Recidivism is defined in this study similarly to other studies that focus on this topic: re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration (including parole violations). For clarification purposes, an individual can be re-arrested but not convicted or incarcerated. An individual can be arrested and convicted, but not incarcerated. The authors found that 68% of prisoners were re-arrested, 47% were re-convicted, and 25% were re-incarcerated within three years. Individuals

with the highest re-arrest rate were motor vehicle thieves (79%), individuals in prison for possessing or selling stolen property (77%), and larcenists (75%). Individuals with the lowest re-arrest rate were those in prison for homicide (40%), sexual assault (41%), and rape (46%). Vehicle and property theft, and larcenous crimes are typically shorter sentences than violent crimes such as homicide, sexual assault, and rape. Offenders who serve shorter sentences return to their community better connected to other criminals and are therefore more likely to return to their criminal ways. Offenders who serve more time in prison are less connected to the community they are returning to, are older and more likely to be more mature than they were when they committed their crime. The authors found that offenders who served sixty-one months or more in prison were significantly less likely to return to prison (54%) than offenders who served thirty months or less (66%) (Langan and Levin, 2002).

Ninety-one percent of released prisoners in the study were male and 9% were female. 68% of males and 58% of females recidivated. Fifty-three percent of males returned to prison, while only 39% of females did so (Langan and Levin, 2002).

Fifty percent of released offenders were white and 49% were black. "Hispanic" was categorized separately as an ethnicity and not counted as a race, however, 25% of released offenders identified him or herself as Hispanic and 75% identified him or herself as non-Hispanic. 63% of white offenders recidivated, of whom 50% returned to prison. 73% of black offenders recidivated, of whom 54% returned to prison. 65% of Hispanics recidivated, and 52% returned to prison. 71% of non-Hispanics recidivated, and 57% returned to prison (Langan and Levin, 2002).

Two-thirds of those who recidivated were between eighteen and thirty-four years old. This age group returned to prison at a slightly higher rate than other age groups (2-4% more

often), with the exception of the fourteen to seventeen age group, which returned to prison 4-6% more often (Langan and Levin, 2002). See figure 3 for the recidivism rate breakdown.

Based on this information, males are more likely to both recidivate and return to prison than females; African Americans are more likely to recidivate than whites, although they return to prison at a similar rate; non-Hispanics are slightly more likely to both recidivate and return to prison than Hispanics; and the younger an individual is the more likely he or she is to recidivate and return to prison. It should be noted that of the 52% of total released prisoners who returned to prison in this study, 26% returned due to a technical violation of the parole (i.e., failing a drug test, missing a meeting with their parole officer, or being re-arrested), while the other 25% returned to prison solely as a result of being re-arrested for a new crime while they were not on parole (the remaining 1% is due to rounding error) (Langan and Levin, 2002).

### **The Effectiveness of Education Programs in Reducing Recidivism**

Educational programs have been shown to be the most effective programs to reduce recidivism; more so than vocational, counseling, religious, substance abuse, transitional services, and work release programs.

Steuer, Smith, and Tracy (2001) studied 3,600 offenders in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio prisons and found that participating in education programs reduced recidivism by 29%. The researchers compared G.E.D. program participants to non-participants. 40% of the participants were white and 53% were African American, yet 36% of the non-participants were white and 58% were African American. The average age of non-participants was 2 years older than the average age of participants. 27% of participants were unemployed one to six months prior to incarceration compared to 22% of non-participants. Since there is a link between unemployment rates and recidivism, this tells us that the participant group was more likely to recidivate. The

authors also compared the two groups based on prior criminal history and family incarceration history since both are linked to recidivism rates. 60% of participants had a family history of incarceration, while only 51% of non-participants had a family history of incarceration. Additionally, participants were more likely to be incarcerated due to violent crimes (50% compared to 38%). Participants were 11% more likely to have served time in a juvenile facility (45% compared to 34%), which also places participants at a higher risk of recidivating. All of these statistics were found to be significant at .01 (Steuer, Smith, and Tracy, 2001, pp. 16-20).

These statistics imply that participants in an educational program in prison are more likely to be African American than white, younger, more likely to have been unemployed prior to incarceration, more likely to have a family history of incarceration, and more likely to be in prison for a violent felony. Based on these statistics program participants are more likely to recidivate. However, the authors write that “overall, the two groups were sufficiently equivalent to support inferences about how correctional education participation effects recidivism” (Steuer, Smith, and Tracy, 2001, pp. 20-21).

The results of the study support the hypothesis that participating in educational programs reduces recidivism. The authors defined recidivism as re-arrest, re-conviction, or re-incarceration within three years. All three of these categories were lower for program participants in all three states in which the study was conducted than non-participants. On average, the recidivism rate for the three states was nine percentage points lower for participants than non-participants, which was statistically significant. Considering that program participants were slightly more likely to recidivate, these statistics are note-worthy. Although participants still committed violent crimes at a higher rate than non-participants, they were 50% less likely to do so after they were released from prison after having participated in an educational program. Program participants were

slightly more likely to continue participating in educational, counseling, and/or substance abuse programs after being released. The authors also tracked the wages earned by the released offenders for three years following their release. In each of the three years participants earned higher wages, even though the non-participants were more likely to have been employed prior to being incarcerated. The authors conclude that there is strong support for the hypothesis that correctional education programs reduce recidivism rates and are a wise investment for correctional departments (Steuer, Smith, and Tracy, 2001).

A 2009 report by the American Correctional Association concluded that offenders who complete the GED program in prison are 25% less likely to return to prison than offenders who do not complete the program. This same newsletter reports that offenders who completed a vocational program were only 15% less likely to recidivate than offenders who did not complete a vocational program, and completers of substance abuse programs were only 6% less likely to recidivate than non-completers (Peterson, 2009).

### **Differences in Employment Status and Wages Between GED Holders and Non-GED Holders**

The lack of education and employable skills has a compounding impact on offenders. A person without a high school diploma or G.E.D. and no employable skills is more likely to turn to a life of crime to support their self and their family. This, in turn, leads to a higher likelihood of being incarcerated. Having a criminal record and spending time in prison makes it more difficult to find a job after being released (Apel and Sweeten, 2010; Jenkins, Steurer, and Pendry, 1995).

Offenders are less likely than the general population to have held a job prior to being incarcerated. In a study of offenders released from Ohio, Illinois, and Texas prisons Visher,

Debus, and Yahner (2008) found that 68% of offenders held a job in the six months preceding their incarceration. The national unemployment rate hovers between five and ten percent (Labor Force Characteristics, 2012). The average hourly wage of offenders who were employed prior to being incarcerated was nine dollars (Visher, Debus, and Yahner, 2008).

Tyler and Kling (2006) conducted a study of prisoners released from Florida prisons between 1994 and 1999. They compared GED holders (offenders who earned their GED in prison) against both offenders who participated in a GED program but did not earn their GED, and all offenders who left prison without a GED (those who participated in a GED program and those who did not). The purpose of the study was to figure out how much of an impact, if any, earning a GED in prison makes on amount of wages prisoners earn after they are released. The results show that earning a GED in prison is significant for minority (African American and Hispanic) offenders, but not for white offenders. Additionally, any significant differences in wages between inmates who earned their GED while incarcerated and those who left prison without the credential fade to virtually nothing in the third year after release.

Tyler and Kling (2006) found drastically different mean quarterly earnings for white and minority offenders. White offenders who earned their GED earned \$220, \$380, and \$404 more per year in the three years after serving their prison sentence, respectively, than white offenders who did not earn their GED. However, minority offenders earned \$972, \$832, and \$156 more per year after their release, respectively, than minority offenders who did not earn their GED. The difference in the first and second year earnings for minority offenders who earned their GED is significant; the third year difference is not.

While the earnings of minority offenders decrease over time, the difference in earnings of white offenders increases over time. Tyler and Kling (2006) offer no reason why this occurs, but

it is the opinion of the author of this thesis that white offenders have a better chance of being hired for jobs that offer upward mobility, while minority offenders do not. Minority offenders who have their GED are able to find work sooner after being released from prison, but over time, minority offenders who did not earn a GED find work and start earning similar wages. Since minority offenders have little chance to advance in their line of work, the difference in earnings rapidly decline in the third year after release.

Tyler and Kling (2006) also analyzed data regarding the earnings of offenders based on their score on the GED exam. They found no evidence to support the hypothesis that a higher score on the GED exam results in higher wages after release. Tyler and Kling write that this indicates that passing the exam has a “signaling effect.” This term refers to the idea that passing the GED is a signal to employers about the competency level of the individual, as well as their ability to understand and follow directions. The results of the individual are not analyzed and compared to other individuals who passed the exam in order to determine how much more or less competent the individual is. This is logical due to the fact that employers who would be hiring individuals whose highest level of education is a generalized equivalency degree would be hiring the individual to do entry level, labor-intensive jobs that many times require a low degree of skill.

The signaling effect brings up an important question. Does an academic education program develop and hone an individual’s skills, making them more capable of earning and keeping a job, or does it simply serve as a signal to employers about the skills an individual has? In other words, an individual’s skills may not have actually been developed or honed by participating in an academic program, but rather, the academic program may have simply

provided the opportunity for an individual to take the GED exam, which they would not have done on their own. Research has not yet been conducted on this question.

According to a 2006 study published by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) offenders who earned their GED while incarcerated return to prison at a significantly lower rate than offenders who were admitted to DOCCS with a high school diploma or GED. The study tracked the return rates of all offenders released in 2005. 32% of released offenders who earned their GED while incarcerated returned to a New York State correctional facility, while 38% of offenders who were admitted with a degree returned to state custody.

Zgoba, Haugebrook, and Jenkins (2008) followed 403 offenders released from New Jersey state prisons between 1999 and 2000. These offenders were split into two groups: 250 of these released prisoners had earned their GED while incarcerated, and the other 153 did not earn their GED but were chosen to be part of the study because they matched the GED group on several characteristics linked to recidivism (gender, race, employment and marital status, drug and alcohol histories, type of instant offense, release age, prior arrests, prior convictions, prior incarcerations, and length of sentence).

These prominent studies indicate that minorities from urban populations are over-represented in prisons, approximately two-thirds of offenders are rearrested, and academic education programs are most effective in reducing recidivism. Chapter three discussed how articles for this thesis were found and selected, as well as how they were analyzed.

### **Chapter Three. Methodology**

The purpose of this thesis was to analyze research pertaining to the effect that earning a GED while incarcerated has on recidivism rates. To do this it is necessary to analyze studies conducted specifically on admissions statistics, employment statistics prior to and following incarceration, recidivism, and programs available to offenders while they are in prison. Each individual in prison has unique and complex needs. A combination of physical, mental, spiritual, social, and programmatic needs must be met for an offender to effectively change the underlying reasons he or she is incarcerated. Meeting such a diverse and complex array of needs is difficult for both a prison system and the incarcerated individual. The research conducted on these areas are critical for administrators who have the power to implement changes that make prison a safer place that is more conducive to helping individuals better themselves.

#### **Data Inclusion Criteria**

I used the following databases to locate research articles on the topic: Academic Search Complete, Educational Research Complete, ERIC, PsychINFO, and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection. The New York State Public Library database was used, as well as Google Search Engine. Peer reviewed, full text articles dating back to 1990 were searched for with a variety of combinations of search terms. Education specific terms included “GED,” and “education.” Search terms specific to prison included “prison,” “incarceration,” “correctional facility,” “post-release,” “recidivism,” “re-entry,” “rehabilitation,” “criminal,” “programs,” and “employment.”

#### **Study Design and Participants of Selected Articles**

I discovered seventeen articles, four books, and four websites that included relevant information on prison education programs, prison programs other than education, recidivism

statistics, admission statistics, and employment statistics of released offenders. The information that was gathered was analyzed in order to gain insight into the current state of prison education programs, and how effective they are on reducing recidivism.

All but two of the pieces of literature were quantitative studies. The majority of researchers used state prison databases, unemployment insurance databases, and interviews with offenders to collect information. The most significant and popular studies (based on the number of times they were referenced in other researchers' studies) were longitudinal studies conducted in several states and factored in topics such as pre-admission statistics, in-prison programming, and post-release follow-up. The information I analyzed disaggregated statistics by race, age, sex, level of education, offense type, level of participation in different programs, and number of incarcerations. Studies that compared offenders who participated in and/or completed a GED program to offenders who did not participate in and/or did not receive their GED while incarcerated used a control group that was similar in all other characteristics to the design group.

Of the two articles that included qualitative data, one interviewed released offenders to gather information regarding their in-prison programming and family/living situation information, and the other interviewed prison officials to gain insight into the obstacles these individuals thought their prison system faced.

Chapter four is a more in-depth discussion about the results of the literature used in this thesis. The pieces of literature were analyzed and compared to other pieces of literature to gain better insight into the effect that earning a GED while in prison has on recidivism rates.

## **Chapter Four. Results**

Research in the past thirty years on the impact that earning a GED in prison has consistently reinforced the conclusion that academic education reduces recidivism rates (Apel and Sweeten, 2010; Brewster and Sharp, 2002; Flanagan, 1994; Harer, 1995; Harlow, 2003; Martinez and Eisenberg, 2000; New York State Department of Correctional Services, 2006; Nuttall, 2003; Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 1995; Zgoba, Haugebrook, and Jenkins, 2008). This conclusion has been reached across the country, and by both state research departments and independent researchers. More importantly, academic education is particularly salient for young, first time offenders convicted of drug or property-related crimes with low levels of educational achievement (Batiuk, et. al., 2005; Brewster and Sharp, 2002; Flanagan, 1994; Martinez and Eisenberg, 2000; Nuttall, 2003; Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 1995; Zgoba, Haugebrook, and Jenkins, 2008).

Flanagan (1994) conducted a major study to assess the impact of prison-based education programs on offender behavior in Texas. Two of the three components of the study was an analysis of sixty studies on prison education, and their own research into the effect that academic and vocational program participation have on inmate misconduct and reincarceration.

Flanagan's review of sixty studies on prison education programs produced results consistent with the conclusions of the author of this thesis. Flanagan concluded that: (1) offenders who participated in secondary education programs return to prison at a lower rate than offenders who do not participate, (2) ten out of fourteen studies on college education showed a strong relationship to reduced recidivism, and (3) vocational education programs result in lower recidivism, lower parole revocation rates, better post-release employment patterns, and better institutional disciplinary records for participants compared to non-participants (Flanagan, 1994).

Flanagan made additional conclusions. The longer an offender participates in an academic program, the greater the program's impact. Programs that provide follow-up after release are more likely to succeed. The most stable predictors of recidivism may be age at first arrest, age upon release, ethnicity, gender, living arrangements, family ties, current income, and history of drug and alcohol abuse (Flanagan, 1994).

After the review, Flanagan conducted research through a sample of 14,411 inmates released from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice – Institutional Division in 1991 and 1992. Variables recorded and accounted for include age, race, sex, marital status, educational achievement, criminal history, and institutional disciplinary history. Recidivism was defined as a return to a Texas state prison. The follow-up period lasted between fourteen and thirty-six months, depending on when the inmate was released and when the study was concluded (Flanagan, 1994).

Flanagan (1994) reports two major conclusions: (1) inmates at the lowest educational levels benefit the most from an academic program, and (2) inmates who participated in an academic program for 300 hours or more had significantly lower recidivism rates than those who participated less than 100 hours, suggesting that a minimum required number of hours of program participation should be determined. The report approximates that if academic programs are targeted at offenders with the lowest levels of education and who have long enough sentences to participate in the program, then recidivism can be reduced by thirty-three percent. The report also states that academic program participation is beneficial to offenders of all educational levels (Flanagan, 1994).

Batiuk, Lahm, McKeever, Wilcox, and Wilcox (2005) conducted a study in which they compared the effects of different types of correctional education programs, with a specific focus

on discerning the relative effects of college versus non-college education. Nine hundred seventy-two inmates who were released from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correctional Services between the years of 1989 and 1992 were included in the study. The authors suggest that college education has a substantially stronger positive effect on recidivism than do the GED and vocational education programs. Recidivism was defined as a return to an Ohio State prison.

There was a 62% difference in the recidivism rate of inmates who participated in a college education program when compared with inmates who did not participate in any educational program. Although the authors' purpose was to compare the effects of college, GED, and vocational education rates, they do not include explicit numerical data on to what degree GED and vocational education programs impact recidivism rates. The author of this thesis used a graph in the publication to estimate that 83% of inmates in vocational education recidivated, 80% of GED students recidivated, and 100% of inmates in neither program recidivated. These numbers are unusually high compared with the findings of other studies, especially the 100% of offenders who were not enrolled in any educational program returning to prison. The authors also did not specify whether inmates listed in the GED and vocational programs satisfactorily completed their program or if they merely participated in it (Batiuk et. al, 2005).

Participation in a college program was the only educational program found to result in a significantly lower recidivism rate when compared to inmates who completed no educational program. The authors suggest that federal grants should be re-instated to inmates pursuing a college education (Batiuk et. al, 2005).

Brewster and Sharp (2002) analyzed the effect that academic and vocational programs have on recidivism in Oklahoma. They tracked 5,752 offenders who entered prison without a high school diploma or GED and 11,813 offenders who had the option to participate in

vocational programs. All offenders were released between 1991 and 1994. Their study concluded that earning a GED while incarcerated has a significantly positive effect on recidivism, but completing a vocational program has a slightly negative effect on recidivism. Recidivism was measured as a return to the Oklahoma Department of Corrections within three years.

Forty-eight percent of offenders entering the Oklahoma Department of Corrections did not have a high school diploma or GED during the time of the study. Of those offenders, eighteen percent earned their GED while incarcerated. When broken down by offense type, the GED program was most salient for offenders convicted of criminal distribution of a controlled substance (Brewster and Sharp, 2002).

Brewster and Sharp (2002) found that the closer completion of an educational program (academic or vocational) is to an offender's release date the more beneficial the program is. This is particularly important for offenders in vocational programs since vocational skills are lost if they are not utilized. Additionally, having a job and earning a legitimate income upon release decreases the chance than an offender will return to criminal ways to make a living. The authors found that offenders who completed a vocational education program had shorter survival times outside of prison (Brewster and Sharp, 2002).

The State of New York Department of Corrections and Community Services (DOCCS) (2006) conducted a study on 5,966 offenders released from New York State prisons in 2005. Offenders who earned their GED while incarcerated were compared to offenders who were admitted to a state facility with a high school diploma or GED, and to offenders who were released without a high school diploma or GED. Offenders under the age of twenty-one were compared with offenders older than twenty-one. Recidivism was defined as a return to New York State incarceration within three years.

The results are consistent with the majority of other studies on the topic. The study reports that overall, 31% of offenders who earned their GED while incarcerated returned to custody, while 38% of offenders who left with no degree returned, and 37% of offenders who were admitted with a degree returned. These results are statistically significant (State of New York Department of Corrections and Community Services, 2006).

The results for offenders under the age of twenty-one are particularly noteworthy. Forty-five percent of under twenty-one offenders who earned their GED while incarcerated returned to prison, while 54% of offenders released with no degree returned, and 50% of offenders admitted with a degree returned. These results are statistically significant (State of New York Department of Corrections and Community Services, 2006).

Harer (1995) conducted a study in which he attempted to explain why educational programs result in lower recidivism rates. His hypothesis stated that prison education programs have a “normalizing” effect on offenders. Normalization, as Harer writes, is the process in which an individual acts in more pro-social ways, as opposed to criminalization, which is the process in which an individual acts in more anti-social, criminal ways (Harer, 1995). If Harer’s hypothesis is correct, then prison officials should focus on creating a prison environment that fosters normalization (e.g., providing prison industries, furlough programs, employing female corrections officers, allowing due process in cases of offender misconduct, keeping offenders connected to their families). Two other explanations for the effectiveness of education programs on recidivism rates are: (1) earning a GED or higher learning degree increases the chance an offender will find work post release, and therefore not return to prison; and (2) that other characteristics of offenders explain educational participation/attainment and lower recidivism. Harer’s results, as he interprets them, show that offenders who participate in educational

programs have lower recidivism rates due to the normalizing effect educational programs have on offenders (Harer, 1995).

Harer's research was conducted on a sample of 619 inmates released from federal prisons, all of whom were in prison for at least a year. Variables found to increase recidivism include the number of prior convictions, heroine and alcohol abuse, and violation of parole. Variables found to decrease recidivism include employment prior to incarceration, being allowed to participate in a furlough program, being released with a job lined up, age (the older a released inmate is the lower chance of recidivating), living with a spouse after release, and prison education program participation (Harer, 1995).

Harer's results are similar to those found in other studies. Forty-five percent of inmates who did not participate in any educational programs recidivated, while 30% of inmates who participated but did not complete an educational program recidivated. Inmates entering prison with a high school diploma but did not participate in any educational programs recidivated at a rate of 39%, while inmates entering prison with a high school diploma but who did participate or completed at least one educational program recidivated at a rate of 25% - a 14% reduction in recidivism. Inmates without a GED who participated in at least one educational program recidivated 8% less frequently than inmates without a GED who did not participate in any educational programs. Recidivism was defined as re-arrest, re-conviction, or return to federal prison. Educational programs include academic programs including college courses, vocational courses, and social skills courses (e.g., parenting class). Harer (1995) found that educational program participation significantly reduces recidivism.

Harer (1995) concludes that participation in educational programs significantly reduces recidivism regardless of post-release employment, but he does not address his other hypothesis,

that other characteristics may account for the lower recidivism rates of inmates who participated in at least one educational program. He also concludes that the reason educational programs reduce recidivism is because of their normalizing effect on inmates (1995).

Martinez and Eisenburg (2000) conducted a study that analyzed the relationship between educational attainment in prison and recidivism for 25,890 offenders who were released from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) for the first time between 1996 and 1998. Their results strongly indicate that education has a significantly positive impact on recidivism rates. Inmates with higher levels of education have lower recidivism rates. Inmates who come into the system at the lowest educational levels but advance their education drastically reduce their recidivism rate when compared with inmates with low levels of education who do not make educational advancements. Younger offenders with the lowest educational levels and who are at the highest risk for recidivating based on offense type (property offenses) stand to gain the most from advancing their education. Therefore, the researchers (2000) suggest focusing educational efforts on young offenders convicted of property offenses.

Overall, 84% of inmates in the study did not recidivate within two years, leaving 16% who did recidivate. This recidivism rate is lower than other studies mainly because inmates were only tracked for two years instead of three, and because recidivism was measured as re-incarceration to a state facility as opposed to any re-arrest or re-conviction (Martinez and Eisenburg, 2000).

Inmates who achieved their academic education had lower recidivism rates than those who did not. Achievement was defined as learning to read (increasing grade equivalent score to 4.0 or higher), becoming functionally literate (increasing reading score to 6.0 or higher), or

earning a GED. Inmates who achieved recidivated 11% less than inmates who did not achieve (16% versus 18%) (Martinez and Eisenburg, 2000).

Even for inmates who did not “achieve,” higher educational achievement is linked to lower recidivism rates. Inmates whose grade equivalent was 4.0-5.9 had a recidivism rate of 19%. Inmates whose grade equivalent was 6.0-7.4 had a recidivism rate of 18%. Inmates whose grade equivalent was 7.5-8.9 had a recidivism rate of 16%. Inmates whose grade equivalent was 9.0 or higher had a recidivism rate of 14%. In other words, inmates with a ninth grade education or higher had a 26% lower recidivism rate than those with a grade equivalent between 4.0 and 5.9 (Martinez and Eisenburg, 2000).

There is an indirect relationship between offender age and recidivism rate. The older an offender is at the time of release the less likely they are to recidivate. However, the older an inmate is the lower their educational level is likely to be. This means that older offenders who are in prison tend to be less educated, and the younger an offender is the more likely they are to return to prison. Additionally, older inmates tend to advance their educational level more slowly than younger inmates. For this reason the authors suggest focusing educational resources on younger offenders who both stand to gain more from advancing their education, and are more likely to advance their education more rapidly (Martinez and Eisenburg, 2000).

Younger, less educated property offenders have the highest recidivism rates. Older, more educated inmates not convicted of property offenses have the lowest recidivism rates. Offenders younger than thirty-five with grade equivalent scores below 4.0 recidivate nine percentage points higher than the overall population (25% versus 16%), and eight percentage points higher than offenders younger than thirty-five who are not property offenders (25% versus 17%). This means

that young property offenders with the lowest levels of education stand to gain the most from advancing their education (Martinez and Eisenburg, 2000).

The success of vocational education is linked to academic achievement. Inmates who had a job lined up in a field he or she learned a vocational skill in at the time of their release were 17% less likely to recidivate (15% versus 18%). Inmates were more likely to be able to line up a job if they earned their GED (Martinez and Eisenburg, 2000).

Property offenders are at the highest risk of recidivating, but young property offenders stand to gain much more from educational resources than older property offenders. Inmates younger than thirty-five years with a 9.0 grade equivalent or above had a 40% reduction in recidivism compared to inmates in the same age group with a grade equivalent of lower than 4.0 (15% versus 25%). Inmates older than thirty-five years with a grade equivalent of 9.0 or above had a 17% reduction in recidivism compared to inmates in the same age group with a grade equivalent of lower than 4.0 (15% versus 18%) (Martinez and Eisenburg, 2000).

The authors make suggestions of how policy makers might improve education in correctional facilities. Targeting educational resources toward younger offenders may result in more significant gains than if resources are allocated as they are now. In addition to this, targeting younger offenders convicted of property offenses may be most effective. Allocating resources to fewer offenders over longer periods of time may result in more significant gains than allocating resources to more offenders over shorter periods of time (Martinez and Eisenburg, 2000).

Uggen (1999) conducted a study that attempted to answer whether or not the provision of high quality jobs would reduce criminal behavior among released offenders. The hypothesis was developed out of earlier research that purports that only high quality jobs with adequate pay and

hours or satisfying employment reduce recidivism. That is to say that the jobs offenders currently have after being released from prison are not high quality enough to curb criminal activities.

Uggen (1999) concludes that African Americans were less likely to find jobs than non-African Americans, and that individuals with more human capital and lower levels of criminal history and substance abuse were more likely to find work. High quality jobs decrease the likelihood of criminal behavior net of prior criminality and substance abuse, other indicators of social position, and alternative employment measures. Just as importantly, Uggen writes that too many jobs are of too low a quality to influence ex-offenders to abstain from criminal behavior (Uggen, 1999).

The research addresses an important ethical question: should high quality jobs be given to ex-offenders who may not deserve them, or should they be given to hard working, law abiding citizens? This question will be addressed in chapter five of this thesis.

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC, 1995) published a study that tracked 18,068 inmates released between 1992 and 1993 in an effort to determine the effect that education has on the correctional population. GED, adult basic education (ABE), college, and vocational programs were included in the study. Overall, the GED program was the most impactful of the four programs. Although the authors conclude that the GED program makes only a “slight” impact overall, their research shows that it has significant effects on young offenders convicted of less serious crimes with no prior incarcerations. Recidivism was measured as a return to the ODRC within two years (ODRC, 1995).

The authors collected data on offenders who achieved (earned their GED), and on those who participated (enrolled in class for ninety days or longer) in an educational program but did

not earn their GED. The ABE program was considered a separate program, which is different than most studies (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 1995).

The overall results for the GED program's effect on recidivism are somewhat strange. The comparison group recidivated at a rate of 32%, while those who earned their GED recidivated at a rate of 28%. However, offenders who participated in the program but did not earn their GED recidivated at a rate of 24%. While this shows that the GED program does impact recidivism rates, it is difficult to explain why those who participated had better results than those who earned their GED (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 1995).

The report states that age at release for GED earners has an important connection to recidivism. The younger offenders are at the time of release the more significant the impact of a GED has on recidivism when compared to offenders of the same age group who did not earn a GED. In the fifteen to twenty age group there was a fifteen percentage point difference in recidivism (29% for earners and 44% for non-earners). The twenty-one to twenty-five age group had a six percentage point difference (29% for earners and 35% for non-earners). The twenty-six to thirty age group and the thirty-one to forty age group had a three percentage point difference (29% for earners and 31% for non-earners) (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 1995).

The report analyzed how earning a GED impacts offenders convicted of different types of crimes. Crime types in this report are "persons," "sex," "property," "drug," and "other." The percentage point difference between the GED earners and non-earners for each crime type is as follows: "persons," 1; "sex," 2; "property," 2; "drug," 14; and "other," 11. Offenders convicted of sex crimes, persons crimes, and property crimes do not appear to benefit from earning a GED,

while offenders convicted of drug or other types of crime benefit significantly (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 1995).

Offenders serving their first sentence in a correctional facility have markedly lower recidivism rates than those serving their second or third sentence. Offenders with no prior incarcerations returned to prison 25% of the time, offenders serving their second sentence returned 37% of the time, and offenders serving their third or more sentence returned 48% of the time. This diminishing effect of the GED on recidivism was also reported by Zgoba, Haugebrook, and Jenking (2008) (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 1995). Vocational education less of an impact on recidivism compared to academic education throughout the report (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 1995).

Zgoba, Haugebrook, and Jenkins (2008) followed 403 offenders released from New Jersey State prisons between 1999 and 2000. These offenders were split into two groups: 250 of these released prisoners had earned their GED while incarcerated, and the other 153 did not earn their GED but were chosen to be part of the study as the control group. The authors (2008) used a variety of characteristics when selecting the control group, including gender, race, employment and marital status, drug and alcohol histories, type of instant offense, age at release, prior arrests, prior convictions, prior incarcerations, and length of sentence. Although this made the control group very similar to the experiment group, it decreased the sample size. The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of GED attainment on inmate recidivism. The authors concluded that earning at least a GED while incarcerated significantly reduces recidivism, but once an inmate has recidivated, the significance of the GED diminishes almost completely, therefore, the authors determined that although inmates who earned their GED recidivated at a lower rate, the credential is not a reliable predictor of recidivism in general. Recidivism was defined as rearrest,

reconviction, or reincarceration in nationwide for six years following release (Zgoba, Haugebrook, and Jenkins, 2008).

Sixty-four percent of the control group (GED non-participants) recidivated, compared to fifty-one percent of GED participants, a difference of thirteen percentage points. The authors also write that being Caucasian, serving a shorter sentence, being older at the time of arrest, committing a violent felony, and being married all mitigated recidivism rates. Black citizens with a history of drug abuse are statistically more likely to recidivate. Having a history of criminal activity increased recidivism, and having a job upon release decreased recidivism (Zgoba, Haugebrook, and Jenkins, 2008).

The overall conclusion of the authors that earning a GED while incarcerated is not an effective tool in predicting recidivism does not necessarily disagree with other research. In fact, it is a conclusion that almost all other researchers included in this meta-analysis reach: Academic education benefits certain groups of offenders more than others. Specifically, young, African American, first-time offenders convicted of drug-related crimes stand to gain the most from earning and/or participating in academic education programs (Zgoba, Haugebrook, and Jenkins, 2008).

The next chapter includes an analysis of the most reoccurring and significant statistics regarding the impact of earning a GED while in prison, as well as the opinions of the author of this thesis on the topic.

## **Chapter Five. Discussion, Conclusion, and Impact of Population**

There are two main questions to be answered regarding academic education within correctional facilities. First, whether or not academic education programs are effective in reducing recidivism, and second, how should an academic education program be designed to make it as effective as possible?

Research shows that academic education is effective in reducing recidivism. All but one of the studies that were analyzed in this thesis report lower recidivism rates for offenders who took academic classes when compared to those who did not. Additionally, approximately nine out of ten federal, state, and privately operated facilities in the United States offer some form of academic education, showing that prison officials – who make policies according to research – agree that offenders will benefit from academic education. Looking beyond the statistics, correctional facilities have an ethical obligation to offer academic education since offenders are much more likely to have a lower level of education than the general population. Participating in or completing an academic education program also helps offenders to be successful in other prison programs, such as vocational education, drug treatment, and transitional programs, among others. With all the research that has been conducted on this topic over the past forty years, the question about whether or not offenders should have access to academic education programs is less important than the next question.

Research shows that younger, less educated, first time offenders convicted of property or drug related crimes stand to gain the most from academic education. These offenders are much more likely to have turned to crime because their lack of education prevented them from earning gainful employment and supporting themselves. Therefore, it stands to reason that if these offenders become more educated while incarcerated, they will be less likely to return to crime

after they are released. Academic education programs should target offenders who fit these characteristics.

However, education should be an option for all offenders regardless of the aforementioned characteristics, or any other characteristics. Any offender who advances his or her education while incarcerated has a better chance of being a productive member of society. The main issue for policy makers is whether or not academic education should be voluntary or mandatory. Voluntary education programs might be more cost effective because resources are less likely to be wasted on offenders who are not genuinely interested in such a program. It can be argued that mandatory education programs are more ethical because although it may not prove as cost-effective as a voluntary program, more offenders would advance their education.

Future research should be conducted to compare the effectiveness of mandatory versus voluntary education programs. Special attention should be paid to the cost-effectiveness of each program. Another important area that has a dearth of research is the percentage of released offenders who earn gainful employment after release, and how much money these released offenders are earning. Knowing how much offenders who complete different programs are making after release will help policy makers gain a realistic understanding of the difficulties facing ex-offenders and how to implement programs designed to help resolve these difficulties.

This thesis stressed the importance of setting realistic expectations of the impact academic education programs, and correctional facilities as a whole, can make on the actions of offenders. This must be understood by professionals working in correctional facilities as well as critics of state and federal corrections departments. Incarcerated adults make their own decisions. If an individual is committed to living a life of crime, then providing education, counseling, and drug treatment programs in a structured environment will do little to change that. Individuals

who do not wholly commit themselves to making fundamental changes in their life will not change regardless of the opportunities that are afforded to them.

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Figure 1 – A Comparison of New York and Nebraska’s Prison

	<b>New York</b>	<b>Nebraska</b>
<b>Total Population of State</b>	19,378,102	1,842,641
<b>Total Prison Population</b>	56,315	5,604
<b>Average Age</b>	37	37
<b>Offenders Who Are Male</b>	95%	92%
<b>Offenders from Urban Areas</b>	72%	48%
<b>Offenders Who Are White</b>	22% (58%)	56% (82%)
<b>Offenders who are African American</b>	48% (18%)	27% (5%)
<b>Offenders who are Hispanic</b>	25% (18%)	12% (10%)
<b>Offenders Convicted of Drug Offenses</b>	15%	12%

Figure 2 - Comparison of Educational Attainment of Offenders and the General

	<b>Offenders in Prison</b>	<b>U.S. General Population</b>
<b>Does Not Have a High School Diploma or G.E.D.</b>	41%	18%
<b>Has Attended Some Post-Secondary Institution</b>	11%	48%
<b>Highest Level of Education is Earning a G.E.D.</b>	25%	4%

Figure 3 – Rate of Recidivism of State Prisoners Released in 1994, by Prisoner

<b>Personal Characteristics</b>	<b>Percent Recidivated</b>	<b>Percent Returned to Prison</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	68%	53%
Female	58%	39%
<b>Race</b>		
White	63%	50%
Black	73%	54%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Hispanic	65%	52%
Non-Hispanic	71%	57%
<b>Age at Release</b>		
14-17	82%	57%
18-24	75%	52%
25-29	71%	53%
30-34	69%	55%
35-39	66%	52%
40-44	58%	50%
45 & Older	45%	41%

Figure 4 – Overall Effect GED has on Recidivism Rates by Study

<b>Study and Author(s)</b>	<b>Overall Effect GED has on Recidivism</b>	<b>Definition of Recidivism</b>	<b>Effect GED has on Recidivism of Targeted Sub-Group</b>
Nuttall, J. (2003). <i>The Effect of Earning a GED on Recidivism Rates.</i>	GED Non-Completers: 37% GED Completers*: 32%	Re-incarceration in a NYS prison within 3 years	Under 21 offenders not earning a GED: 54% Under 21 offenders earning a GED in prison: 40%
Zgoba, K., Haugebrook, S., and Jenkins, K. (2008) <i>The Influence of GED Obtainment on Inmate Release Outcome.</i>	GED Non-Participants: 64% GED Participants**: 51%	Re-arrest, re-conviction, or re-incarceration to a NJ state prison within 3 years	NA
Flanagan, T. (1994). <i>Prison Education Research Project: Final Report.</i>	NA	Re-incarceration to a TX state prison within 3 years	NA
Martinez, A., Eisenberg, M. (2000). <i>Impact of Educational Achievement of Inmates in the Windham School District on Recidivism.</i>	Non-Achievers: 18% Achievers***: 16%	Re-incarceration in a TX state prison within 2 years	Under 35 property offenders not earning a GED: 16% Under 35 property offenders earning a GED: 21%
Brewster, D., and Sharp, S. (2002). <i>Educational Programs and Recidivism in Oklahoma: Another Look,</i>	GED Non-Participants: 37% GED Participants**: 38%	Re-incarceration to an OK state prison within 3 years.	NA
New York Department of Correctional Services (2006). <i>Follow-Up Study of Offenders Who Earned GEDs While Incarcerated in DOCS.</i>	GED Non-Completers: 39% GED Completers*: 32%	Re-incarceration to a NYS prison within 3 years	Offenders under age 25 not Earning a GED: 48% Offenders under age 25 earning a GED: 39%
Harer, M. (1995). <i>Prison Education Program Participation and Recidivism: A Test of the Normalization Hypothesis</i>	GED Non-Participants: 45% GED Participants**: 30% GED Completers*:	Re-arrest, re-conviction, or re-incarceration within 3 years.	NA

Figure 4 – Overall Effect GED has on Recidivism Rates by Study (continued)

Study and Author(s)	Overall Effect GED has on Recidivism	Definition of Recidivism	Effect GED has on Recidivism of Targeted Sub-Group
Batiuk, et. al.	NA	Re-incarceration to an OH state prison anytime between 1989 and 2003	NA
Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (1995). <i>Evaluation of the Impact of Correctional Education Programs on Recidivism.</i>	GED Non-Completers: 32% GED Participants**: 24% GED Completers*: 28%	Re-incarceration to an OH state prison within 2 years	Under 21 non-earners: 44% Under 21 earners: 29% Age 21-25 non-earners: 35% Age 21-25 earners: 29% Age 26-30 non-earners: 31% Age 26-30 Earners: 29% Offenders convicted of drug crimes not earning GED: 30% Offenders convicted of drug crimes who earned GED: 16%
Steuer, Smith, and Tracy (2001). <i>Three State Recidivism Study.</i>	GED Non-Participants: 31% GED Participants**: 21%	Reincarceration to a State Facility	NA

\*GED completer – An offender who earned a GED while incarcerated.

\*\*GED participant – An Offender who participated in an academic program but did not necessarily earn a GED.

\*\*\*Achiever – an offender who either became a “reader,” “functionally literate” (as defined by the authors), or earned a GED.