



FY2008 RECOMMENDATION/FY08-BP54 EXPLORE LONG DISTANCE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Status: Partial Implementation

Actions/Updates

2023 UPDATE (JUNE)

During the FY 2023 Legislative Session, Senate Bill 2023-158 to reauthorize the Colorado Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ) was postponed indefinitely on May 7, 2023. Therefore, with the sunset of the Commission, all activities of the CCJJ ceased on June 30, 2023.

No further monitoring of CCJJ recommendations will occur.

2013 - 2022 UPDATE

The Colorado Department of Corrections continued to explore and develop educational and training opportunities and programs.

2012 UPDATE

The Department of Corrections continues to use the traditional teacher/classroom set-up in delivering courses and has made very little progress in moving to any distance education approaches. This is due primarily to budget issues, though there are other barriers, including the fact that the teacher/classroom approach serves as a prison management function in addition to the education function and so would have to be addressed with any changes. But any change in this approach or expansion to new opportunities for offenders would require funding, and since last year, the education division's budget has been significantly cut (over 20% reduction this fiscal year from last). Moreover, one of the education programs for which distance learning would have been particularly appropriate was the CIOPP program (Colorado Incarcerated Offender Post-secondary Program), and funding for that program in particular was cut entirely by the federal government. The DOC does continue to be interested in exploring ways of making distance learning both effective and efficient. The Department of Corrections, the Department of Higher Education, and in particular Red Rocks Community College (Gateway Program) and Pueblo Community College (HOPE Bridge program) continue to actively work together to increase education opportunities for offenders and ex-offenders.

2011 UPDATE - OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE ACTION STEPS

CCJJ member Inta Morris to pursue and develop an action plan regarding this recommendation. Inta will meet with both the Red Rocks and Pueblo Community Colleges, both of which have put together offender education programs.

2010 UPDATE

No implementation. Officials from the Department of Corrections report that its Division of Education has explored the possibility of long distance learning opportunities for offenders. However, due to security issues they are not currently able to allow for web-based programming in facilities. DOC has researched and reviewed demonstrations from companies that believe their product would work with appropriate fire walls. The DOC reports it is still exploring those options.

Where a long distance learning program would be most beneficial for DOC offenders would be in college course offerings. However, current statutory mandates do not allow the department to pay tuition for college academic courses. The expense of providing such courses would have to be borne by the offender. In summary, while the Department will continue to research such offerings implementing any such program is not feasible at this time.

2009 UPDATE - ACTION/IMPLEMENTATION

This recommendation has been the subject of further review. Formidable technological and cost challenges have been assessed by DOC. One program allows offenders the opportunity to take self-paced renewable energy courses from DVDs and upon completion, offenders are guaranteed a job interview with one of three companies participating in the project. Two facilities are operating pilot web-based programs in collaboration with local community colleges.

New DOC initiatives resulting from this recommendation include exploring the Cisco Networking Academy that provides on-line courses (by October 2009); increasing collaboration with the community college system to increase the number of inmates obtaining GEDs (by October 2009), and incorporating labor market information obtained in response to Recommendation GP-23 into distance learning strategic planning (by November 2009).

As a result of the additional information obtained since this recommendation was first issued, the Commission encourages DOC and the Department of Higher Education to further explore web-based distance learning opportunities for inmates. Progress on this recommendation should be reported to the Re-Entry Oversight Committee. In addition, the pilot programs should be evaluated for effectiveness specifically in terms of academic outcomes, compared to traditional educational delivery systems. If the findings are favorable, efforts should be undertaken to expand web-based programming to other facilities. The Commission acknowledges the associated costs, and the need for funding to promote higher educational opportunities for offenders.

2009 UPDATE - IMPACT

Information, if available, on DOC's current and proposed initiatives will be presented in future Commission reports.

2009 UPDATE - BARRIERS

The Department of Corrections reports multiple challenges including fiscal, staffing, and technological barriers. Specifically, DOC facilities will have to be wired to broadcast long distance learning; computers, equipment, and bandwidth will need to be purchased for offenders and proctors to participate in classroom learning centers, as well as network systems and outside connections; firewall systems require expansion. These costs could easily exceed \$1,000,000.

Description

Technological advances should be explored to provide long distance learning opportunities so that to individuals registered in these classes will not lose time or momentum when transferred to a different facility.

Agencies Responsible

Department of Corrections, Department of Education, Department of Higher Education

Discussion

Implementation of this recommendation is underway but full implementation requires significant resources. Recidivism studies show that offenders with higher levels of education are more likely to remain crime-free when they return to the community. The passage of HB 09-1264 is consistent with the Commission's statutory mandate to "focus on evidence-based recidivism reduction initiatives..." [C.R.S. 16-11.3-103(1)].