General Education Development and Prisons: Examining the Role of the GED in the Connecticut Prison System

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What is the role of the GED program in Connecticut in awarding high school diplomas to Connecticut residents?

More specifically what is the role of correctional facilities in preparing, testing, and helping candidates successfully complete the GED program?
Significance of Research Question

- Very few people know about correctional facilities and the Unified School District #1 despite its importance.
- There are currently 507,514 Connecticut residents over the age of 16 without a high school diploma.
- Public schools are ranked and compared, why should the GED programs not be looked at and ranked as well?
Taking and passing the GED is a significant achievement for many people:

- The majority of [high school] dropouts report that they tend to “believe that they don’t have control over their lives…[while] graduates felt that they had a great deal of control over their lives, a belief known to promote educational achievement…Nearly one half [of dropouts] felt ‘useless at times’, one-third thought they were ‘no good at all,’ and nearly one-quarter ‘didn’t have much to be proud of’” (Schwartz, Wendy. “School Dropouts: New Information About an Old Problem. 1995)
Background Information

- The GED is a relatively new way for people to earn a high school diploma.
- It is becoming increasingly necessary to have a diploma in order to be competitive in the labor market (2003 State Dept of Ed GED Report).
- Research indicates that participation in prison education programs reduces recidivism.
Thesis

The General Educational Development (GED) program in Connecticut is a highly organized program that provides all residents of Connecticut the opportunity to earn a high school diploma. Connecticut’s prison system, referred to collectively as Unified School District #1, is an integral part of the GED program and is the most effective program in preparing candidates to successfully complete the GED
Research Methods and Primary Sources

- Research Methods:
  - Qualitative analysis

- Primary Sources:
  - 2002 and 2003 GED Testing Program report
  - Contact with State officials
Where is Unified School District #1

- Established 1969
- School district within the Dept of Correction
- 12,983 students
- 18 facilities
- 124 teachers
- 41 vocational instructors
- 10 principals
- ABE, GED, TESOL, Spec Ed, Vocational
Evidence and Analysis

- **USD #1**
  - Average daily enrollment in GED classes: 3,548
  - 510 GED’s awarded 2002-2003
  - Pass rate of 67.3%
    - Hartford Public Schools
    - Total enrollment in Public High Schools: 4,201
    - 544 high school diplomas awarded 2000

- **State of Connecticut**
  - 5,420 people took the test
  - 2,952 successfully passed
  - Pass rate of 61.5%
Evidence and Analysis (cont.)

- USD #1 prepares and has high overall pass rates for candidates who do not have high success rates at passing the GED on the basis of race, age, and previous education
  - Minorities have much lower pass rates on the GED
  - Prisoners in Connecticut are disproportionately minority

Citation: 2003 GED Testing Program Report CT Dept of ED, Hartford Primer and Field Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>GED Pass Rate (%)</th>
<th>% of Prison Pop.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>78.96</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>42</td>
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Evidence and Analysis (cont.)

- In CT: 16-18 yr olds had a pass rate of 81.7% and 19-20 year olds had a pass rate of 69.8%. The two highest pass rates when the data is broken down by age
  - 50 percent of the people who took and passed the GED test were under the age of 21 in the state
  - Only 36.5% of USD #1 GED candidates are under the age of 21
- The longer one has been out of school the harder it is to pass the GED
- People over the age of 25 make up 30% of those taking the test but represent less than 25% of those who pass the test
  - The average age of USD #1 GED candidate is 26
    - 26-29 year olds had a pass rate of only 51.3%
  - Average age of a GED candidate in CT: 24.9
- Citation: 2003 State Dept of Ed GED Testing Program Report
Most likely to pass the GED if the 11th grade is completed (2003 State Dept of Ed GED report)
- 60% of CT GED candidates have completed the 10th and 11th grade and less than 32% have finished less than 9th grade

Participants in USD #1 perform, on average, at the 6th grade level (USD #1 Annual Performance Report)
- Individuals who attended school until the 9th grade or less had a combined pass rate of 55%
- Finishing 10th grade or above had a combined pass rate of 65%
Evidence and Analysis (cont.)

- Despite the disadvantages that inmates face, the prison system has some of the highest pass rates when the data is analyzed.

- Reasons for taking the test: Early Release
  - Pass rate 73.8%, the 3rd highest

- How you heard about GED: Prison official
  - Pass Rate 63.1%, 4th highest

- How did you prepare for the test: Correctional Facility
  - Pass Rate 67.3%
  - The largest number of candidates prepare for the GED in public school adult education classes which had a pass rate of 61.3%