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FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF A SAMPLE OF  
OFFENDERS WHO EARNED HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMAS  
WHILE INCARCERATED

At the request of the Department's Assistant Director of Education, this report examines the return rate of a sample of offenders who earned high school equivalency diplomas while incarcerated.

The highlights of this report are presented in the following Executive Summary and illustrative graphics.

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## HIGHLIGHTS

### 1. Purpose of Research

At the request of the Department's Assistant Director of Education, this research report was designed to generate statistical data pertinent to the basic question, "Is the acquisition of a High School Equivalency Diploma while incarcerated related to the offender's likelihood of return to the Department's custody following release?"

### 2. Sampling Procedure

A representative sample of approximately 12 percent (326) was selected from the total number (2,607) of offenders who earned high school diplomas in 1983. This sample was drawn from a cross-section of 14 male facilities (three maximum, ten medium and one minimum security facilities).

### 3. Follow-Up Procedure

Of these 326 sampled cases, 205 had been released by December 31, 1984. This cut-off date for releases was used to insure a follow-up period of at least 12 months, which is the standard policy in Department recidivism research.

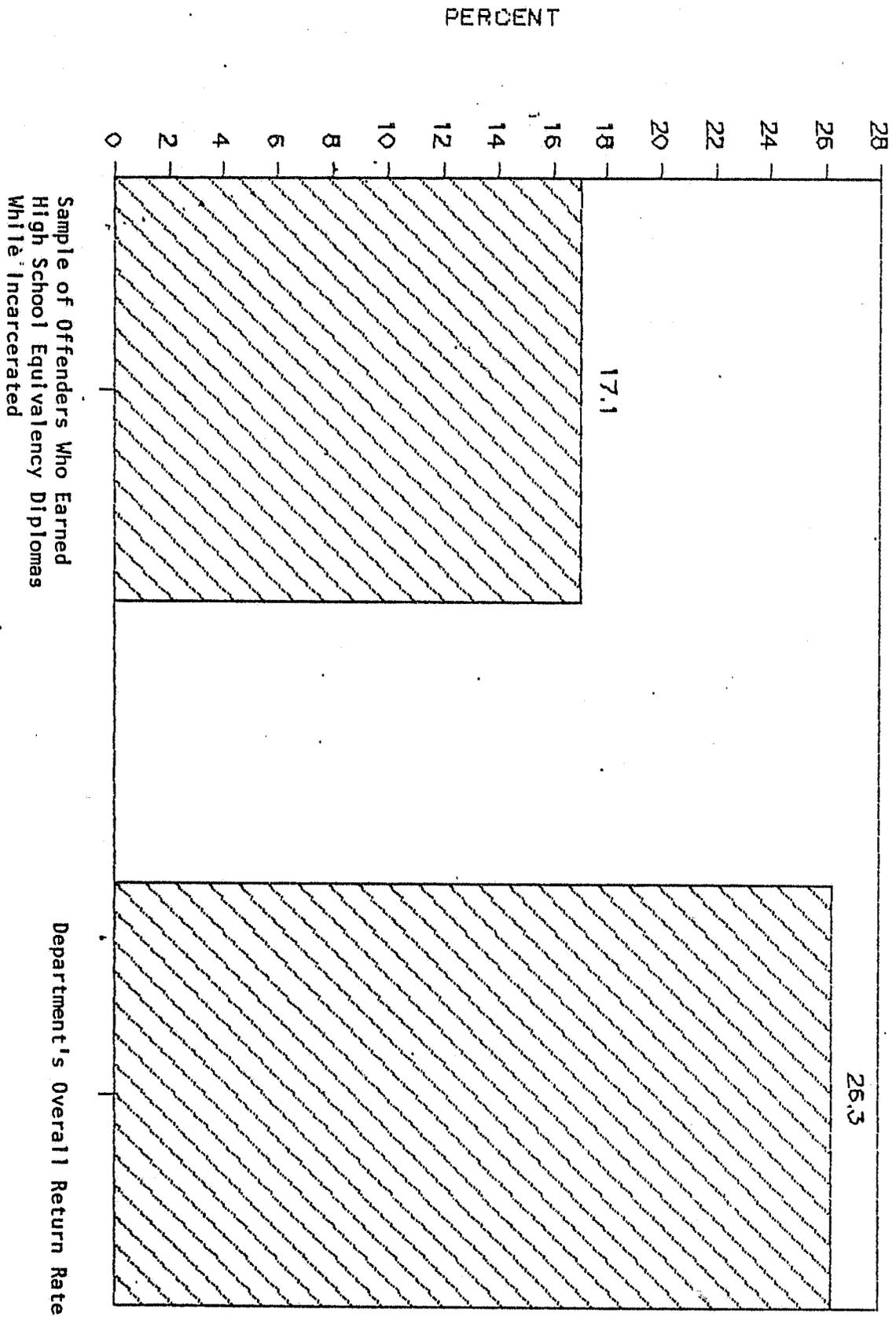
### 4. Comparison of Return Rates of Offenders Who Earned High School Equivalency Diplomas While Incarcerated and Overall Return Rate of Department Releases

A projected return rate was computed for this sample based on the number of months since their release. The actual return rate (17.1%) of this group was less than their projected rate (26.3%) based on the Department's overall return rate.

### 5. Conclusion

The findings of this preliminary research suggest that acquisition of a high school equivalency diploma while incarcerated may be positively related to successful post-release adjustment (as measured by return to the Department).

# COMPARISON OF RETURN RATES



FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF A SAMPLE OF  
OFFENDERS WHO EARNED HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMAS  
WHILE INCARCERATED

The present report examines the return rate of a sample of offenders who earned high school equivalency diplomas while incarcerated at 14 Department facilities.

Program Description

The Department provides a range of academic education programs for inmates without high school diplomas through day or evening classes and outreach programs. These include Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in English and Spanish for inmates who function below the fifth grade level, English as a Second Language (ESL) for inmates of limited English proficiency, and GED classes in English and Spanish for inmates who function above the fifth grade level.

Initial program placement is based on the results of standardized achievement tests administered upon intake as part of the reception/classification process. Achievement tests are subsequently administered to inmates participating in academic programs to measure progress and to determine eligibility for placement in more advanced level classes.

A screening test similar in form and content to the GED is usually administered to determine readiness for the actual GED test. The screening procedure enhances the individual's chance of passing by providing a realistic testing experience and permits maximum utilization of Department resources.

The Tests of General Education Development (GED) are developed by the American Council on Education to assess skills, concepts and application of knowledge generally associated with each of the major content areas at the high school level. Policies and conditions under which certificates may be issued, and administration of the GED testing program are set in New York, and in all other states, by the state education department. Candidates who meet the requirements receive a high school equivalency diploma which is generally accepted as a credential where a high school diploma is required.

A significant number of inmates earned the high school equivalency since 1979. The chart below indicates that the number rose from 1,777 in State Fiscal Year 1979-1980 to 2,875 in 1984-1985. The decline noted in 1985-1986 reflects the more stringent minimum passing requirements established by the New York State Education Department in September 1985. The inclusion of a writing sample as part of the GED examination in New York State in July 1986 may have a similar effect on the number who pass during the current fiscal year. However, it should be noted that the passing percentage for inmates tested through the Department of Correctional Services is above the average for New York State as a whole (approximately 50%).

<u>State Fiscal Year</u>	Number of Inmates Earning High School Equivalency <u>Diplomas</u>	Percentage of Tested Inmates Who Pass <u>Exam</u>
1979 - 1980	1,777	60%
1980 - 1981	1,830	58%
1981 - 1982	2,118	64%
1982 - 1983	2,607	66%
1983 - 1984	2,858	68%
1984 - 1985	2,875	66%
1985 - 1986	2,655	58%

### Purpose of Report

In view of the substantial program resources allocated to the Department's GED preparation program, the Department's Assistant Director of Education requested the Division of Program Planning, Research and Evaluation to examine the return rate of a sample of these offenders who earned a HSE diploma while incarcerated.

The relationship between high school diploma and various factors (such as lifetime income) is well documented in general educational research. Criminal justice research has consistently found that offenders typically lack a high school diploma. However, there is little empirical research on the impact of correctional education programs (such as GED programs culminating in the acquisition of a HSE diploma) on the recidivism rate of offenders.

In view of this lack of research in this area, the objective of this research project was to examine the return rate of a sample of inmates who earned a high school diploma while incarcerated in comparison to the Department's overall return rate.

### Sample Selection

A threshold question in follow-up studies is the selection of a representative study sample. For purposes of this research, a representative sample of inmates who earned HSE diplomas in a given year was required.

To secure this representative sample, the Division of Education used existing records to generate an approximately 12 percent sample (326) of the 2,607 male inmates who earned high school diplomas in 1983. This sample was drawn from a cross-section of 14 Department facilities of varying security levels (three maximum, ten medium, and one minimum security facilities).

### Follow-Up Period

It is the Department's standard policy in recidivism research that a follow-up period of at least 12 months is required for valid analysis based on return rates. For this reason, a cut-off date for release from Department custody of December 31, 1984 was set to insure a follow-up period of at least 12 months as of December 31, 1985.

### Follow-Up Procedure

The Department's computer file was then utilized to determine (a) the number of these 326 sampled individuals who were subsequently released before December 31, 1984, and (b) the number of released program participants who were returned to Department custody by December 31, 1985.

### Number of Sampled Cases Released Before December 31, 1984

Of this total sample of 326 offenders who earned high school equivalency diplomas in 1983, 205 were released in 1983 or 1984. These 205 cases were then tracked until December 31, 1985 to determine if they had been returned to Department custody.

### Comparison of Return Rate of Study Sample to Overall Return Rate of Department Releases

The reporting of a return rate for a given study sample is of relatively limited value unless a valid comparison rate is also provided. In view of this consideration, it is the standard policy of Department recidivism research to compare the return rate of study samples to the Department's overall return rate (as well as the return rates of any other appropriate control groups).

For general comparison purposes, the overall return rate of Department releases is used in Department recidivism studies. This overall return rate of Department releases is utilized to compute a projected return rate for the study sample. The approach permits a comparison of the return rate a study sample of and the Department's overall return rate.

### Development of Projected Return Rate for Comparison Purposes

The Bureau of Records and Statistical Analysis tracks all Department releases for a five year period to generate return rate statistics. Using the overall return rate of all Department releases in 1980, a projected return rate can be developed for the program participants based on the number of months since their release.

For example, the sample cases released in 1984 would have been in the community between 13 and 24 months as of December 31, 1985, depending on their respective release dates. Based on the Department's overall return rate, it may be projected that 22.8% of these individuals would be returned to Department custody for a parole violation or with a new sentence by December 31, 1985.

This projected return rate can then be applied to the number of sampled cases released in this period to generate the number of expected returns.

<u>Release Date/Mos. Since Release</u>	<u>Number Released</u>		<u>Return Rate</u>	=	<u>Projected Number Returned By December 31, 1985</u>
1983 (25 - 36 Mos.)	86	X	31.9%	=	27
1984 (13 - 24 Mos.)	119	X	22.8%	=	27
<hr/>					
TOTAL	205	X	26.3%	=	54

It can be projected that 54 (26.3%) of the 205 sampled cases released 1983 and 1984 would have been returned by December 31, 1985.

Comparison of Actual and Projected Return Rates

As illustrated by this table, the actual return rate of this sample was considerably lower than their projected return rate.

	<u>Projected Return Rate</u>		<u>Actual Return Rate</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Offenders Who Earn HSE Diplomas While Incarcerated	54	26.3%	35	17.1%

It is noteworthy that the return rate of this sample (17.1%) was substantially less than their projected rate based on the Department's overall release population (26.3%).

Conclusion

In brief terms, the major finding of this survey may be summarized in the following fashion:

This sample of offenders who earned high school equivalency diplomas while incarcerated had a considerably lower return rate than their projected rate based on the Department's overall release population.

In reviewing this finding, however, it may be argued that these inmates who earned high school equivalency diplomas while incarcerated were more motivated and/or more capable than those who did not participate in these programs and that this factor is related to their future satisfactory adjustment on parole. As such, it could be contended that these individuals might be expected to do well on parole (whether or not they complete a high school equivalency diploma).

On the other hand, it should be noted that the possible existence of this self-selection bias does not logically lead to the conclusion that the provision of GED programs to these motivated offenders is unnecessary or uneconomical. On the contrary, it may be argued that it is the appropriate correctional policy to offer such individuals with opportunity to maximize their potential for successful reintegration into the community.

In view of this possible self-selection bias, this research was designed to analyze the relation of GED program completion and post-release recidivism without attempting to attribute any observed difference wholly to the impact of the program. As such, the lower return rate of the sample of offenders who completed programs may be jointly attributed to the offender's motivation and capabilities and the impact of this (and other) program.

In conclusion, these research considerations caution against any definitive conclusions concerning the impact of the GED program. However, the findings of this report (which involves a representative sample of over 200 releases) do suggest a positive relationship and highlights the value of continued research in this area.