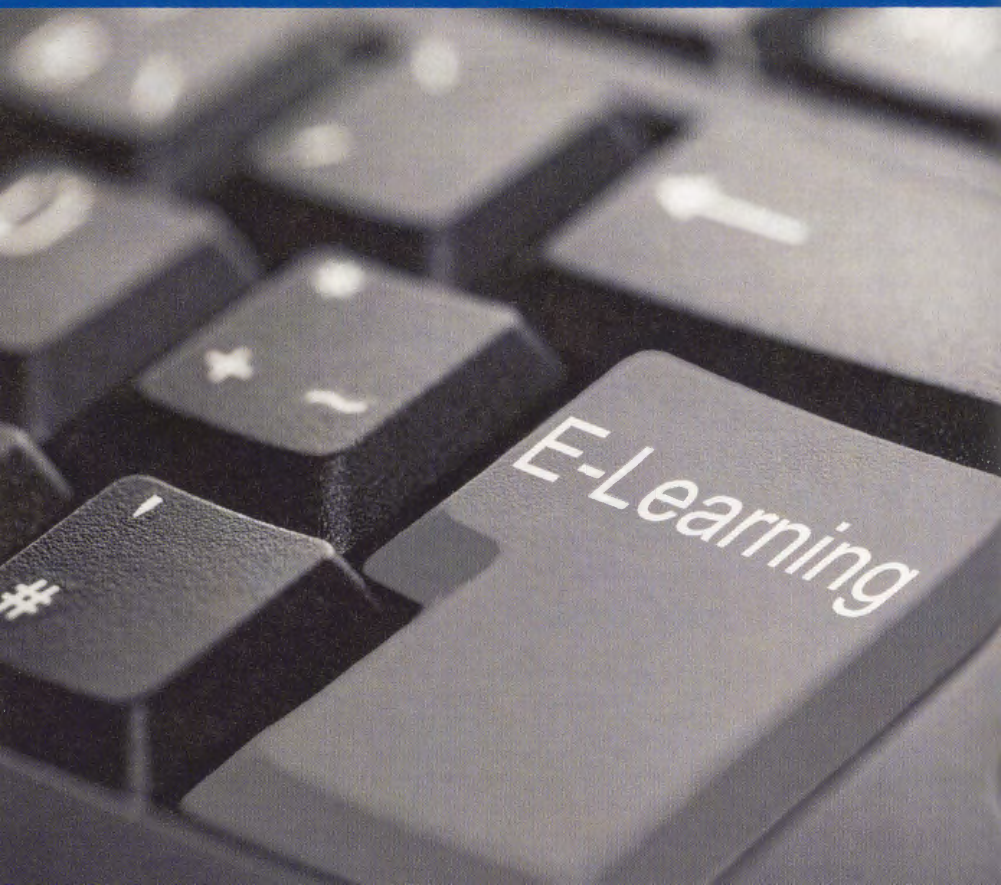
Learning Online in Jail



A Study of Cook County Jail's High School Diploma Program

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Introduction

Youth enter America's criminal justice system lagging far behind their age cohort in virtually all markers of adulthood. Although some prisoners may improve their human capital while incarcerated, most return to their communities with deepened deficits.[1] This deficit is especially visible in education, and especially among jail detainees. In 2007, 68.8 percent of high school students graduated nationwide. In Chicago, 55.1 percent of students graduated overall; this figure does not convey the large gap by race. While 62.2 percent of white students graduated from high school, only 50.9 percent of black students did so.[2] The young population of the Cook County Jail is by far the least educated. From July 2006 to October 2007, 15,507 young men and women from the ages of seventeen and twenty-one were released from the Cook County Jail. Only 34.7 percent of the young inmates released from jail at this time had graduated from high school or obtained a GED.

1. Uggen and Wakefield (2005), 118.

2. Chicago Public Schools Office of Performance (cps.edu/performance).

In the recidivism literature, low educational attainment is found to be one of the consistent predictor of rearrests and probation violations. Cook County Jail detainees face compounded obstacles to successfully reentering society: an average 90 percent of detainees test positive for an illegal drug and present high rates of prior criminal histories. In addition, they are more likely to have been raised in adverse economic and familial circumstances. These early life disadvantages, combined with lower later educational and occupational attainment, increase the likelihood of repeated criminal involvement.[3] These elements, including education levels, likely contribute to Cook County Jail's dire recidivism rates: in 2008, 44 percent of those inmates who were convicted and served their sentence were returned to the jail within one year. Further, 53 percent of those inmates who were released on probation returned to the jail within one year. If Cook County does not equip inmates with the tools of reentry, it fails to stop the cycle of poverty and violence experienced by its most vulnerable populations, and by extension continues to endure the social and economic costs of crime.

Impediments to educating inmates are numerous. Individuals cycle in and out of the jail at very rapid rates, making targeted intervention difficult to implement. Youth between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one face jail sentences anywhere from a week to a year, though the median incarceration is three months. These young offenders enter with a wide range of experience concerning high school: while some dropped out and may be years behind in their schooling, others were attending school when they were arrested and may be a few credits shy of receiving their high school diploma. Finally, practical concerns such as the need to obtain income may take precedence over education. Each of these concerns may influence a student's motivation to complete course work. This educationally "hard-to-reach" population becomes even more elusive once released, where the chances of returning to education are low.

Cook County Jail's current educational programming encounters

3. Lochner (2010).

difficulty incorporating these life elements into a coherent intervention. The York Alternative School, the high school mandated by a Cook County –consent decree to offer high school education to inmates twenty-one or younger, is operated by teachers in several divisions of the jail and serves an average of 300 students on any given day. However, results are difficult to quantify, because youth enter and leave the school unpredictably, due to shifts among divisions, court dates, and other interruptions. The school operates independently from drug treatment or cognitive therapy, and does not help students overcome self-defeating behavior. Preparation for the General Educational Development (GED) exam is a second option for inmates: while the computer-based format allows students better access to the preparation, the content of the GED does not offer skills for college coursework and provides little economic benefit.[4]

These obstacles to learning—the structure of the jail, the diversity of its population, and the dearth of sustainable learning programs—can be surmounted by the use of technology. Computer-based learning has the capacity to reduce stigma for low-performing students, by providing them with privacy and individualized curricula, and it can also improve computer literacy. Structurally, it responds more effectively than traditional classroom teaching to the correctional setting. Computer classes reduce the number of instructional staff, allow for a flexible schedule, and reach a greater number of students.[5] The post-release situation of inmates can also be improved: inmates can more easily continue computer-based learning once they are released.[6] Technology offers new

4. Economists Heckman, Cameron, and LaFontaine found that individuals obtaining a GED are indistinguishable from high school dropouts in terms of their performance in the labor market. Both earn annually 37 percent less than their high school graduate counterparts.

5. McKay and Murphree (2009).

6. Batchelder and Rachal (2000).

flexible options to serve the incarcerated youth of Cook County Jail effectively: technology permits us to service students at every academic level, in a multitude of settings, and at a low cost.

To address the lack of high school education and account for students' needs, the Cook County Jail has introduced an innovative approach to young drug-dependent offenders. The High School Diploma Program (or HSDP), initiated in February 2009, provides computer-assisted online classes to an average of seventy qualified nonviolent inmates in coordination with intense supervision and cognitive therapy. In this paper, I evaluate the capability of the HSDP to provide high school education to offending youth by (1) analyzing participants' socioeconomic and educational background, program results, and social perception of online learning in the HSPD, (2) assessing its social benefits to inmates by the creation of a positive educational culture and post-release opportunities, and (3) exploring current and potential impediments to implementation of the HSDP for jail staff and organization. Through this analysis, I establish computer-based high school programming as a feasible and more successful alternative to traditional correctional education in jails.

Students in this "virtual high school" acquire a high school degree, rather than the General Education Development Diploma, and the school stresses that the next step of education is college. It relies on computers labs, rather than a teacher-classroom setting, to provide courses to students. It is embedded in two overarching programs, the Day Reporting Center and the Cook County Jail, and ultimately provides off-site computer-lab locations for continued learning. These components will be more closely examined in the background section.

Background

The "virtual high school" is innovative by its philosophy, its use of computer-assisted learning, and its collaboration with several correctional departments. In this section, I first provide a brief history of correctional

education, in particular the shifting correctional culture and the resulting reduction in educational options for the incarcerated. Next, I assess the existing research on two aspects of computer-assisted learning as it relates to the one employed by the High School Diploma Program: distance learning and computer-instructed learning. Finally, I describe institutional aspects of Day Reporting Centers and the political context of jails to identify the complexity of program goals essential to understanding the obstacles faced by the HSDP.

A. Correctional Education: A Shifting Philosophy Towards Rehabilitation

Education as Rehabilitation

Education in America's correctional system has been present since the eighteenth century. In the original setting of the penitentiary, penance was to be found in educational programs centered on moral and religious instruction. Beginning in 1876, the Reformation era stressed the idea of rehabilitation through training and education. For the next century, such programs were viewed as "correcting" the inmate. Between the 1960s and 1970s, education programming was further developed: rather than offering only literacy classes, prisons began offering high school education, General Education Development (GED) diplomas, and college courses. During that time, thirty-two states developed General Education Development (GED) diploma programs, and twenty-five states began to offer college-in-prison instructional programs.[7]

The "Nothing Works" Doctrine

The rehabilitation movement lost momentum by the mid 1970s. A study conducted by Robert Martinson, assessing all of the evaluations of criminal rehabilitation programs between 1945 and 1967, found that none of these programs had any effect on recidivism rates. Martinson's tentative conclusion, "nothing works," ushered in an era of pessimism in penology

7. Gehring, 46–55.

and public opinion.[8] Martinson later retracted his conclusion for being based on evidence from nonexperimental studies, but his original point made a lasting impression on opinions about rehabilitation.[9] Funding for educational initiatives was severely reduced after the 1970s. Other existing government programs such as Pell Grants, which funded higher education for prison inmates, were revoked under the 1995 Crime Bill.[10]

Education in America's Correctional Facilities

The current emphasis on crime control is evident in the present state of educational programs in prisons, which are much more developed than in jails. Certain mandates do exist: prisoners without a high school diploma or equivalent are required to take literacy classes. However, most educational programs are voluntary, limited in scope,[11] and threatened by "an increasingly hostile, anti-education, anti-inmate climate."[12] Today, correctional education programs in American prisons reach less than half the prisoners in the course of their incarceration.[13] Jails are not included in this figure, as little up-to-date data exists on correctional education among the jail population. Bureau of Justice statistics provide figures from over a decade ago: 54.8 percent of jails in 1999 provided secondary education programs, noticeably lower than the percentage of federal or state prisons. Only 14.1 percent of people housed in local jails participated in an educational program, and only 8.6 percent participated in a GED or high school program. This situation is mirrored in Illinois's correctional facilities: the number of inmates benefiting from

8. Avio, 143–175.

9. Martinson (1974), Martison (1979).

10. Ubah, 73–85.

11. Allen, R. (2006).

12. Anderson (1999).

13. Chicago Metropolis 2020, "Correctional Education Programming" (2009).

in-prison education has steadily declined as funding has decreased.[14] Finally, education programs tend to be in traditional classrooms, in effect reducing access, flexibility, affordability, and post-incarceration educational opportunities.[15]

Computer-based learning can potentially respond to these last shortcomings. In this following section, I examine the development of computer-based learning in the correctional setting, as well as several studies of computer-based learning programs displaying mixed results.

B. Computer-based Learning: Mixed Results in Prisons

The Development of the Computer-based Approach

While significant fears about prison security initially prevented use of technology for instructional purposes, this method has been increasingly recognized as providing answers to the pressing issues of underserved populations, understaffed prison schools, and the high budget and space costs associated with offender students. Since the 1970s, computer-based education has gained popularity in America's prisons.[16] Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) is among the most widespread, but distance-learning technology is especially popular for connecting offenders to educational communities. Programs such as Ohio's Transitional Education Program and Wisconsin's College of the Air provide academic programming broadcasts to forty-four prisons via the Transforming Lives Network satellite.[17]

Distance Learning

The computer-based instruction utilized by the High School Diploma Program is a form of low-tech distance learning. In distance learning, a

14. Ibid.

15. McKay and Murphree (2009).

16. To date, my research has failed to find computer-assisted learning programs in jails.

17. McKay and Murphree (2009).

teacher broadcasts classes to students from a distance. According to reports by UNESCO,[18] distance learning constitutes a major strategy employed by developing countries for expanding access and raising quality of education under cost-effectiveness goals. For example, "radio schools" broadcast lessons to provide basic literacy and numeracy skills to adults and children in rural areas of Colombia, Bolivia, and Brazil. Distance learning is mainly used to supplement regular school settings. However, studies of such programs have not focused on the efficacy of education but on implementation. Such research, primarily consisting of observational studies, does not consider the potential benefits of computer-based instruction.[19]

Computer-instructed Learning

In the HSDP, courses are not merely broadcasted to the students: they are complemented by online interaction between teachers and students. The Aventa Learning software used by the HSDP constitutes Computer-instructed Learning (CIL), in which teachers communicate with and provide feedback to inmates online. CIL has been used for instruction of literacy courses, Adult Basic Education, and GED. CIL holds several *potential* benefits for improving student achievement because of its individualized method of delivery. That is, students are each assigned to a computer where they take open-entry open-exit classes, earning credits at their own pace.[20] Yet the research conducted on CIL is often of poor quality: very few studies have tried to assess potential positive or negative impacts of CIL on children with different characteristics. The limited research does indicate diverging opinions on the value of using CIL over traditional teaching methods. For example, Means a et al. (200) found in a meta-analysis of thirty-one high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental studies between 1993 and 2000 that the use of CIL increased test

18. UNESCO (2002).

19. Mayer (2011).

20. Batchelder and Rachal (2000).

scores by an average of 0.35 standard deviations for reading and 0.45 standard deviations for mathematics. However, in a more recent study Batchelder and Rachal (2000) examined seventy-one adults between the ages of eighteen and fifty-three taking ABE courses using CIL for a total of eighty hours. They concluded that CIL produced no statistically significant differences in achievement over traditional methods of instruction in terms of increasing reading and mathematics skills. In both of these cases, the studies either contained weaknesses in design or relied on small samples, rendering results statistically insignificant at general levels.[21] While the full effects of using CIL have yet to be determined, at least the computer-based program did not worsen the quality of instruction compared to traditional methods of instructions.

Nonetheless, a review of existing studies has revealed that much more research is needed to understand the actual effects of computer-based education in the correctional setting. For our purposes, the above studies provide several useful points of comparison with the HSDP in terms of its computer-based approach and post-release services. This study of the HSDP will offer useful information on the state of jail education programming that is currently lacking in the literature on correctional education.

C. The Structural Characteristics of the HSDP

The HSDP is embedded in the structure of the jail and the Day Reporting Center, which are bound by organizational and political institutions extending far beyond their physical boundaries. This background is crucial for understanding and overcoming the issues of implementation.

Organizational Components of the Cook County Jail

Due to its nature as a pretrial facility, the Cook County Jail houses a highly transient population, varying with respect to age, gender, drug dependency, mental illness, and criminal standing (pretrial detainees,

21. Mayer (2011).

convicted felons, and misdemeanants can coexist). As the HSDP operates in six divisions of the jail and continues to expand, its participants present a variety of educational, criminal, and drug dependency backgrounds. In addition, each division has a varying level of supervision by law enforcement officers. HSDP must work within different goals, incentive structures, and correctional cultures. In the most developed site of the HSDP, the presence of a drug treatment program necessitates coordination with the HSDP.

The Political and Social Context of Jails

American jails are embedded in the sociopolitical network of the criminal justice system. The jail's activities are supported by funding institutions and criminal justice agencies, such as the court system involving judges, police, and prosecutors. These actors have the power to directly affect the jail's population through more or less restrictive strategies. In the courts, judges have a wide discretionary role, in which they can enact less restrictive bail policies.[22] Judges are a crucial linchpin of the HSDP, as they have the power to mandate participants to this program and require successful completion. For example, judges court-ordering students to the HSDP can incentivize students by shortening or ending probation if they receive their high school diploma, or sentencing them to brief stays in the lock-down divisions of the jail if they fail to successfully complete any classes.

State correctional agencies are intimately tied to the jail. While jails are a local government function, they are the pipeline that connects inmates to state prisons. This link is crucial for educational programming in the correctional setting. Indeed, high school education programs in jail allow for young inmates to enter college-in-prison programs. This triple layer of political and social control surrounding jails means that jails necessarily suffer from "organizational inertia"[23]: the sheer number

22. Thompson (1991), 19.

23. Thompson (1991), 19.

of institutions involved in the implementation, application, and enforcement of programs creates a situation which is extremely difficult to alter from the top down.

In addition to this structure, employees of the Cook County Jail are under union control. Representatives from the Cook County Sheriff's Department report that of the 3,500 Cook County Jail employees, about 95 percent are members of six labor unions. The largest union is the Teamsters Local 700 union, which coordinates efforts for all 3,000 correctional officers of the jail and is one of the largest locals in the country. Political pressure enacted through collective bargaining affects the institutional culture of a public organization and its ability to incorporate new programming. Further discussion of this issue will be included in the policy recommendations section of this paper.

Day Reporting Centers: An Intermediate Sanction

A subset of the participants in the HSDP has been court-ordered to Cook County's Day Reporting Center (DRC): special attention is given to these participants because the DRC is the original site of creation of the HSDP. DRC participants must meet several legal requirements for participation: they cannot have current or past serious violent charges or bond amounts that exceed $150,000.[24] Past studies of the DRC have found that the majority of participants are relatively young, single, unemployed African American men, with 60 percent with at least one current charge for felony drug law violations. In addition, the vast majority are repeat offenders (more than half had six or more arrests prior to participation) and exhibit signs of substance abuse and dependence.

After they are selected into the DRC, participants must report daily to the center between the hours of 8 AM and 3 PM, remain drug-free, attend daily cognitive-therapy classes, and abide by strict curfews enforced through electronic-bracelet monitoring. Failure to abide by DRC's rules can result in an immediate return to incarceration. Furthermore,

24. Olson (2000).

sentences to the DRC are short: while the average length of stay is forty-nine days, almost two-thirds spend fewer than thirty-one days in the program.[25] These aspects highlight the concept of "swift and certain" sanction, which has a strong theoretical basis. Kleiman and Hawken, in their evaluation of Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement, show that a clearly understood and implemented behavioral contract, here the certainty of returning to incarceration because of a positive drug test, increased the perceptions of the certainty of punishment, thereby deterring future deviance[26] and shaping behavior.[27] Evaluations of DRC have found that inmates in this program have very few rearrests, failure-to-appear rates, and drug use, which were very high at intake.[28] This correctional element influences the behavior of HSDP participants and their success in this academic program. Below is an overview of a typical day at the HSDP, in order to provide a sense of the interaction between the HSDP and the CCDRC's drug treatment program.

D. Operation of the High School Diploma Program

The HSDP operates differently based on the division. HSDP participants are either enrolled at the Day Reporting Center (DRC) or in the jail. Each participant is enrolled in the Aventa Program for two hours per day, either in the morning or the afternoon class, in a room of ten students and two mentors on average. Each participant also attends the drug treatment program provided by the Gateway Foundation.

25. Olson (2000).

26. Grasmack and Bryjak (1980), Paternoster (1989), Nichols and Ross (1990), Taxman (1999).

27. Farabee (2005).

28. Olson and Lurigio (2000).

A Typical Weekday is as Follows:

Time	Item
8:00	Check-in
8:00 – 9:00	Morning meeting for all CCDRC participants
9:00 – 11:00	Computer-based instruction for HSDP morning class participants. Group therapy[29] for HSDP afternoon class participants and other CCDRC participants
11:00	Lunch for all HSDP and other CCDRC participants
11:30 – 1:00	General meeting for all CCDRC
1:00 – 3:00	Aventa classes for CCHSDP afternoon class participants. Group therapy for morning class participants and other CCDRC participants.
3:00	Discharge for all participants

The HSDP is managed primarily by the Director of Reentry Policy. She is aided by one administrative assistant. The program has eight mentors, coming from a variety of backgrounds. All have had previous experience working with youth, whether as teachers in a traditional school, as youth counselors, or as GED proctors. Mentors receive training in Aventa Learning prior to managing the classrooms and serve as proctors and academic tutors for students needing additional help. There are on average one to two mentors per class of fifteen students.

This overview of correctional education, computer-based learning, and structural aspects of the jail and Day Reporting Center has sought to illustrate the philosophy and organization behind computer-based high school programming in the jail. In line with these elements, the following section on methodology exhibits a focus on programmatic results, inmate and staff perceptions of the HSDP, the CCDRC, and the jail as a whole.

29. Also known as track: drug treatment program provided by the Gateway Foundation.

Methodology

The Cook County Jail's High School Diploma Program constitutes an instrumental case study of secondary correctional education in a jail. The mixed methods strategy undertaken here, in which quantitative and qualitative data are combined into a single research study, has several advantages. First, by conducting surveys of twenty-five active program participants, I focus on their individual benefits and struggles while in the HSDP, therefore offering a more complete understanding of these inmates' decisions with regard to educational options. Second, by conducting interviews with jail directors and program staff, I am able to more deeply examine the social and organizational perception of the HSDP, as well as compare the views held by jail employees to that of inmates. These interviews allow me to explore the hidden costs of such a program. Finally, I collected and analyzed aggregate quantitative data on participants' length of stay in the program, academic history, and performance while in the HSDP. I also examined program costs. This research approach allows for multiple sources of evidence and compensates for the potential weakness of the quantitative data by the inclusion of descriptive information, which depicts subjective meaning that can be missed in purely quantitative research.[30]

Qualitative Data

I conducted key informant interviews with program directors, administrators, and mentors. The program directors include two senior directors, administrators, and three classroom mentors. The one-on-one interviews were conducted at the jail and varied between twenty-five minutes and one hour. I asked questions falling into three categories: (1) creation and implementation of the program, (2) administrative, organizational, and cultural trends in the program, and (3) instructional hurdles concerning characteristics of the target population. Please refer to Appendix B for sample interview questionnaires.

30. Christensen (2011).

Quantitative Data

I catalogued data on a first sample of former participants from a variety of Cook County documents, Chicago Public School (CPS) transcripts and Aventa (the online high school course provider) individual reports. In order to protect participants' criminal and education history, this information will be presented under aggregate form. High school transcripts provided information on high schools attended: type of school (selective enrollment, neighborhood, or alternative school) and location (city or suburban). Court orders presented information on the judge overseeing the case and the status of mandate to the program (whether the individual was court-mandated to the HSDP or participated on a voluntary basis). Chicago education-assessment tests provided data on participants' reading and mathematics skills against a national benchmark (national percentile) and their placement in terms of academic level. Finally, Aventa credit reports supplied information on each individual's courses taken, time spent taking class, completion rate, final grade, and total credits earned during the stay in the program.

This method of collection has several drawbacks. First, due to the program's recent creation (February 2009), the sample of participants is too small to conduct a random sampling. As of July 2010, only 220 inmates had enrolled in the HSDP. Of these, fifty-four participants were enrolled for a very short period of time (less than ten days) due to the program's initial implementation issues, and another fifty-four were still actively enrolled in the program. As a result, programmatic results (credit earnings and performance) were recorded for only 112 participants who had enrolled for more than ten days and who had been discharged from the program as of August 2010. Second, participants were not systematically or randomly selected into this program. Judges may have court-mandated inmates to the program based on their academic history. Nonetheless, court cases in Cook County are randomly assigned to judges, therefore controlling for the effect of judges and attorneys.

I catalogued program costs through Cook County invoices to the Cook County Sheriff's Budget office and requests for funding from the Inmate Welfare fund. This gave great detail as to the type and amount of program expenditures from the start-up costs to budget planning for future programming. Finally, I conducted a survey of twenty-five active participants[31] of the HSDP in the Day Reporting Center, hereby referred to as the HSDP survey.

Population

The population includes twenty-five inmates on electronic monitoring who are court-ordered to attend the Day Reporting Center division of the Cook County Jail of Illinois, which has eleven divisions and houses a total of over nine thousand inmates. On average, two hundred inmates attend the Day Reporting Center daily. Table 1 presents the distribution of current participants of the HSDP in each division of the Cook County Jail. My survey population represents 32 percent of the population of the HSDP.

Table 1. Distribution of Population Enrolled in HSDP in Cook County Jail (as of February 2011)

Jail Division	Number of Students	Percentage
Day Reporting Center (DRC)	48	61.5%
Pneuma Institute	15	19.2%
Department of Women's Justice Services (DWJS)	7	9.0%
Boot Camp	3	3.8%
Pre Release Center (PRC)	3	3.8%
Department of Corrections 6 (DOC 6)	2	2.7%
Total	78	100.0%

31. This sample is unrelated to the first sample of 220 participants for whom I collected the administrative and Aventa data. Due to the highly transient nature of the population, I was unable to link administrative information and survey responses.

Sample

As of February 2011, there are seventy-eight active participants in the HSDP. Of these inmates, forty-eight are in the Day Reporting Center. This study includes the available sample of twenty-five inmates who agreed to complete the survey. One hundred percent of the inmates in this sample were male, 92 percent were African American, and 8 percent were Hispanic. All the participants were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. By contrast, 58.4 percent of Illinois' total prison population is African American, 12.7 percent is Hispanic, and only 8.6 percent is between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one.[32]

While the ethnic and age breakdown does not correspond to the adult population, my survey population does compare to the seventeen- to twenty-one-year-old population of the Day Reporting Center population in ethnicity, repeat offenses, and symptoms of substance abuse or dependence. Specifically, 95 percent of inmates in that age range are African American, 4 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Caucasian. Eighty-six percent had been arrested at least once prior to the current charges that placed them in the CCDRC. In my sample, 96 percent of participants had been arrested at least once prior to the current charges. While no question in the survey asks about the type of crime they were charged with, data for the CCDRC participants between 2009 and 2010 reveals that 82 percent of individuals between the ages of 17 and 21 were charged with drug-related crimes. Specifically, 59.5 percent were charged with Possession of Controlled Substances (PCS), 14.2 percent with Delivery of Controlled Substances (DCS), and 8 percent with Manufacturing or Delivery of Controlled Substances.[33]

32. Illinois Department of Corrections. These numbers reflect the Illinois prison demographics as of June 30, 2009.

33. Data obtained from Attendance Records of the Day Reporting Center from January 2009 to June 2010.

Method of Data Collection

Inmate participation in the survey was voluntary. The initial pretesting period of four current participants resulted in a simplification and reduction of the survey, which initially took thirty minutes to complete. The revised version was administered to twenty-five other current participants during three classroom periods and took fifteen minutes to complete. The questionnaire was distributed to twenty-five inmates who volunteered to answer the questionnaire in two classrooms of the HSDP in the Day Reporting Center. All participants signed two consent forms (found in Appendix A). Surveys were administered anonymously.

Instrument

Survey questions were designed to gauge the respondents' experience of high school prior to their enrollment in the HSDP, their family's relationship to education, and their perceptions of the HSDP. Some questions were modeled on items from other surveys, such as the Education and Offender Survey (EOS), the National Dropout Questionnaire (April 2003), and the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) Prison Background Questionnaire (2003) from the National Center for Education Statistics. Thirty questions were divided into five categories.

1. *Demographic characteristics*
2. *Family background*
3. *Prior involvement with the criminal justice system*
4. *Prior high school experience*
5. *Opinions on the High School Diploma Program*
6. *Opinions on other educational programs*

The remaining questions on the questionnaire were concerned with gathering background information on the respondent. Please refer to Appendix A for the survey and references to these questionnaires.

Results and Discussions

A. High School Diploma Program Survey: Results and Discussion

I. Results

1. Demographic Characteristics

The twenty-five participants surveyed were male inmates between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one enrolled in the Day Reporting Center. Ninety-two percent characterized themselves as African American; the remaining 8 percent characterized themselves as Hispanic. Seventy-six percent were court-ordered to the program by the judge and 24 percent volunteered to be in the program. The distribution of time spent in the program was highly varied. For example, while 96 percent of the respondents had spent a total amount of more than thirty days in the program, only 44 percent had spent more than ninety days in the program (the average length of an academic term at CPS).

2. Socioeconomic Status

Levels of socioeconomic status were gleaned from questions on student's family background and welfare participation. Students reported on the educational attainment, family expectations, and criminal history of their parents. A majority declared that their parents had received a high school diploma (or equivalent) or less: 95 percent of mothers and 90.5 percent of fathers had earned at least a high school degree. Mothers were found to be slightly more educated than fathers, with 39 percent having earned a college degree or higher versus 23.8 percent for fathers. Family expectations concerning education were high: 88 percent of students reported that their family expected them to graduate from high school. However, parents had also been involved with the criminal justice system: 56 percent of students declared that at least one of their parents had

spent time in jail, prison or other correctional facilities.[34] With regard to social program participants, 76 percent of the respondents declared never having received food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or rent subsidy. It is important to note that welfare participation may not be an accurate measure of socioeconomic status, as low-income young men are often not eligible. However, 37.5 percent of the participants reported having children, an additional descriptor of low socioeconomic status. Finally, 20 percent of the respondents reported having been diagnosed or identified as having a learning disability.

2. Prior Involvement with the Criminal Justice System

While no information was collected on the type of crime that lead to the participants current incarceration, questions did gauge students' criminal history by the total number of arrests and the length of time spent in a correctional facility. All participants had been arrested or taken into custody at least once for any offense and had spent at least thirty days in any correctional facility before being admitted to this facility (including all time served in jail, prison, or another facility).

3. Prior High School Experience

All participants had attended high school, with 56.0 percent having declared attending eleventh grade. Participants were also asked about the high-school credits they earned prior to enrolling in the HSDP. Interestingly, participants' credits do not have the same distribution as the last high school grade they attended. This may indicate that some students may have attended a certain grade in their last high school but not had the high school credits required to be in that specific grade. See Graph 1 for the students' reported high school status and actual status (based on reported number of high school credits). The differences in distribution between the reported and actual status indicate that, over-

34. On this question, incarceration of mother and incarceration of father were not distinguished.

all, students declared themselves to be in a higher high school grade.

Respondents also reported the last high school they attended. The names of the school they reported were classified by type (neighborhood, magnet, charter, or alternative[35]) and by performance.[36] Fifty-seven percent reported having last attended a CPS low-performing, neighborhood high school, and 26 percent reported having attended an alternative Chicago high school.

4. Indicators of At-risk Behavior in High School

Student behaviors during high school, such as chronic truancy and drug use, were evaluated to find evidence of youth at-risk behavior. Eighty percent of respondents reported using alcohol or drugs at least once per week, and 87 percent reported skipping classes sometimes or more while in high school. See Graph 2 for these behaviors, including the percentage of respondents who attended a low-performing Chicago public high school and the percentage who dropped out of high school for reasons other than being incarcerated.

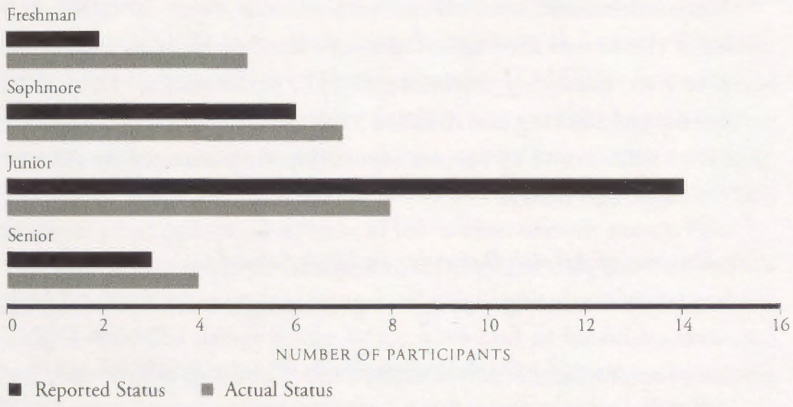
Respondents were also asked to give their opinions on their time in high school. Questions pertained to perceptions of teacher skills and support provided, as well as their desire to attend vocational classes. A majority had a positive attitude toward their counselors and teachers. However, 61 percent reported needing more individual help.

Answers to the question, "What was the main reason you stopped your public or private schooling when you did?" were varied. The answer "sent to jail, prison, or detention center" was the most commonly cited

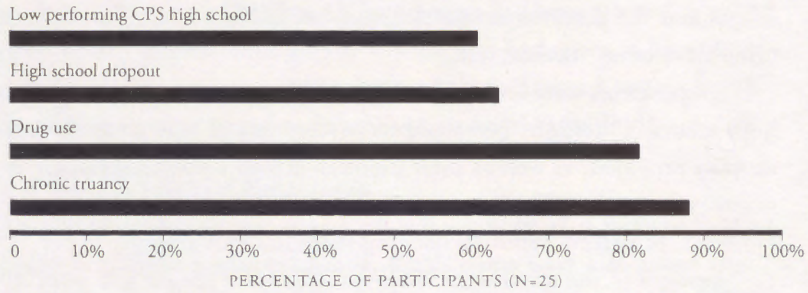
35. Alternative schools are defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2002) as a public school that "addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational schools."

36. School performance was determined by ranking of last available ACT scores (2010) as reported on the Illinois State Board of Education Web site. This method was suggested by Ryan Crosby, director of accountability at Chicago Public Schools.

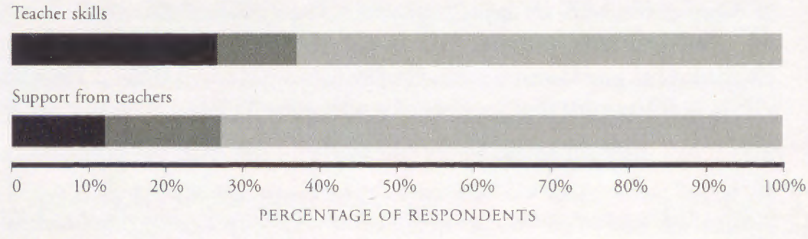
Graph 1: Students' Misperceptions of High School Credit Earned



Graph 2: Students' Social Experience in High School



Graph 3: Student Opinions about Last High School Experience



reason for stopping school (40 percent), indicating that 60 percent dropped out of high school for reasons other than incarceration. As the ranking in Table 2 shows, the reasons for quitting school were widely distributed.

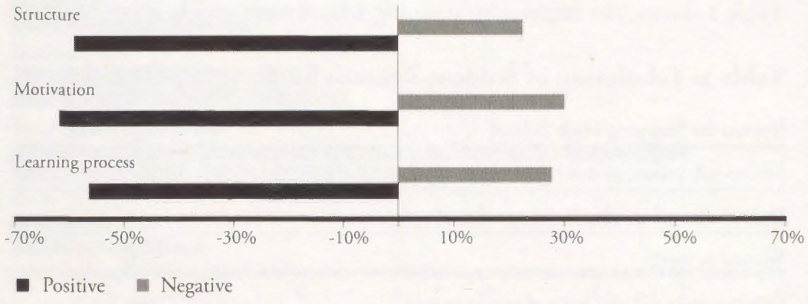
Table 2: Tabulation of Student Reasons for Stopping High School

Reason for Stopping High School	Percentage (N=25)
Sent to jail, prison, or detention center	40%
Did not do well in school/ did not like school	36%
Wanted to work	36%
Family reasons (illness/death of family member)	24%
Expelled from school/ asked to leave	16%
Got someone pregnant	4%

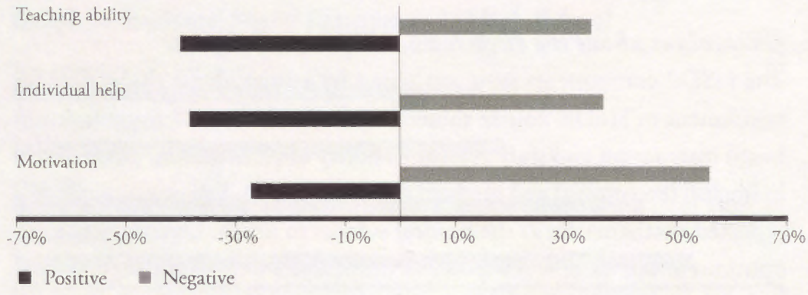
5. Opinions about the High School Diploma Program

The HSDP components were evaluated by asking about the reason for enrollment in HSDP, course subjects taken, and views of the computer-based instruction and staff. A large majority of students had taken classes in English (80 percent) and mathematics (60 percent). Seventy-nine percent reported mathematics as the hardest subject to finish. Overall, students' opinions about using a computer to take classes were negative. A majority of students disagreed or strongly disagreed that using a computer helps them learn better, motivates them more, or gives them a better structure than a classroom with a teacher. As interviews with mentors will reveal, students may negatively view the computer-based instruction for two reasons: many are not familiar with using computers and may be frustrated by that barrier, and lessons are presented in large blocks of texts sometimes lacking in sufficient examples, making content assimilation difficult for already struggling students. Students' opinions concerning mentors were more widely distributed. Respondents presented split views about mentors' ability to teach. This may be due to the fact that mentors do not have a teaching certificate and may lack the training to teach. Nonetheless, a majority of students declared

Graph 4: Student Opinions about HSDP's Computer-based Component



Graph 5: Satisfaction with Mentors (Student Opinions about HSDP Mentors)



that the mentors motivated them to finish their work. This issue will be discussed in a later section on mentors' roles as counselors.

With regards to the administrators and directors, most students agreed that the staff motivates them to finish their work. In addition, most disagreed that the staff put pressure on them that kept them from doing school work. Still, a majority disagreed that the administrators and directors give them information on other educational programs.

6. Opinions on Other Educational Programs

Two sets of questions pertained to other jail education programming, the York Alternative High School (the traditional high school of the Cook County Jail) and the General Education Development (GED) program. Participants who had also enrolled in the York Alternative School, were asked to compare their experiences at York and at HSDP. Only four respondents had been enrolled in York; all preferred the learning experience[37] in the HSDP over York. Students' opinions about the GED were split: while 52.1 percent of students reported that they would rather take GED classes, 43.5 percent disagreed. A majority of students (52.1 percent) believed that a GED diploma is easier to get than a high school diploma. Yet, most students (52.1 percent) did not agree that they could get a job more easily with a GED than with a high school diploma.

7. Post-release Plans

With respect to post-release plans, students cited obtaining a job most frequently (76 percent). However, upon examination of results, students who declared getting a job as their priority also declared that they would continue their education by either continuing their classes at the HSDP off-site location, returning to a traditional high school, getting a GED, or going on to college. Hence 96 percent of students declared that they would continue their education in some form, with only one respondent (or 4 percent) declaring that he would stop classes entirely. This ranking also shows that only 20 percent of respondents would continue classes in the HSDP at an off-site location. However, 36 percent did report wanting to return to a traditional high school to finish their high school degree. Hence a majority (or 56 percent) of respondents declared wanting to obtain their high school degree as a goal, versus 20 percent who declared that they planned to obtain a GED.

37. As evaluated by motivation, structure, and teaching ability at York.

II. Discussion

The findings from this survey provide a more complete demographic, social, and motivational picture of participants in this program. As noted above, 60 percent of these participants had dropped out of school for reasons other than going to jail or prison. This is consistent with findings on previous participants in the HSDP. Research on high school dropouts has conceived of dropping out of school as a process resulting from a combination of familial, individual, and school experiences that shape individual decisions.[38]

1. Family Background: Indicators of Social Capital

A majority of respondents declared that both their mothers and fathers had only a high school education. Furthermore, 56 percent of students reported that at least one of their parents had been incarcerated. While these two indicators are not sufficient to determine family socioeconomic status, they do contribute to understanding the social capital that students were exposed to through their families. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the aggregate resources linked to the possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.[39] An individual has access to a certain amount of social capital through the size of his or her network and through the volume of social capital other persons in that network possess. Educational qualification constitutes a type of institutionalized social capital that parents can transmit to their children. Furthermore, Entwisle and Hayduk (1988) showed that the social context developed within families and the classroom shaped and maintained academic performance. Specific family characteristics, such as single-parent households, unstable family environments, lower family socioeconomic status and income, and social ability within the family, were all found to be family antecedents of

38. Garnier, Stein, and Jacobs (1997), 397.

39. Dika and Singh (2002), 33.

dropping out.[40] Parental involvement with the criminal justice system can be considered an indicator of an unstable family environment.

Surprisingly, 80 percent of respondents declared that their families expected them to graduate from high school. Coleman (1988) expounds on this type of social capital: social capital can take the form of level of trust, as evidenced by obligations and expectations. Coleman used High School and Beyond (HSB) data to show that greater amounts of social capital, evaluated by presence of two parents in the home, lower number of siblings, high parental educational expectations, and intergenerational closure, lead to lower incidences of dropping out of school. They found that dropout rates were negatively related to parental expectations and aspirations.[41] Based on these findings, one would expect reportedly lower family expectations to graduate from high school than was found.

2. Negative Social Pressures on At-risk Youth

Respondents presented a multitude of risky behavior as related to school and crime. In terms of educational attainment, 20 percent reported having a learning disability. This percentage is much higher than the national norm of 4 percent to 6 percent. This suggests that students of the HSDP may have special educational needs. A majority of participants reported using drugs and skipping classes while in high school: this finding is consistent with the above literature. Individual factors predicting dropping out of high school other than cognitive ability include inconsistent attendance, failing classes, and adolescent drug use.[42] According to Mensch and Kandel (1998), adolescents who use

40. Brooks-Gunn, Guo, and Furstenberg (1993), Franklin (1992), Harris (1983), Haveman, Wolfe, and Spaulding (1991), McLanahan (1985), Rumberger (1983), Svec (1987), Weng, Newcomb, and Bentler (1988).

41. Carbonaro (1998), Teachman, Paasch and Carver. (1996).

42. Barrington and Hendricks (1989), Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman (1989), Entwisle and Hayduk (1988), Holmes (1989), NCES (1993a), Scheinder, Svetivilas, and Baker (1994), Smith and Shepard (1988).

drugs and those who drop out of high school share similar characteristics, such as lower commitment to conventional values and institutions. Prior use of cigarettes and illicit drugs were found to be statistically significant increase as markers of risk of dropping out.[43] Finally, all participants had been arrested or involved in the criminal justice system before entering this program. The combination of the above factors portrays these HSDP participants as academically hard-to-reach youth.

3. Attitudes towards Prior High Schools

Overall, students had a positive impression of teachers and counselors. A majority of students reported feeling as if they belonged in high school. This result is consistent with the finding that only 36 percent reported dropping out of high school because they did not like or did not do well in high school. However, more than 50 percent reported needing more individual attention than they received. These findings may indicate that while students retained positive impressions of their last experience in high school, their educational and cognitive needs may not have been well served. Finally, the reported high schools attended were overwhelmingly low-performing, large neighborhood schools. These trends are consistent with the literature on criminal justice involved youth, but more research is needed to determine whether these schools belong to the list of "dropout factories" in Chicago.[44]

4. Opinions of the High School Diploma Program

Overall, students viewed the use of computers for instruction negatively, expressing that they would learn better and be more motivated with a traditional classroom structure. This finding could indicate that computer-based learning is not viewed as an effective method of instruction. However, the opinions about mentors were generally positive, suggesting that mentors do provide the additional help that students need.

43. Mensch and Kandel (1988).

44. Balfanz and Legters (2004).

Views of the other staff (administrators and directors) were also promising, as a majority disagreed that this staff prevented them from doing their work. These results would suggest that the staff is viewed as competent and helpful toward the students.

5. Other Educational Opportunities

Respondents were asked about the two other available education programs in the Cook County Jail, the York Alternative High School and the GED program. The response rate was too low to provide any realistic conclusion. Questions concerning the GED did reveal interesting opinions. A slight majority declared that they would rather take GED classes than high school classes. Conversely, a slight majority did not think that they could get a job more easily with a GED than with a high school degree. This last result may suggest that students may not understand the actual value of the GED diploma or the high school degree in the job market.

6. Post-release Plans

Nearly all students reported planning to continue education in some form (GED, high school classes, or college), indicating motivation toward continuing their education, especially toward the completion of a high school degree. However, 76 percent also reported wanting to get a job. This finding reflects the multiple priorities and needs that these students are facing when making their decision about continuing their education. In addition, a majority of students indicated that staff did not provide them with information about post-release education opportunities: this may indicate that more effort needs to be undertaken to better connect students to education programs before they are released from Cook County Jail's custody.[45]

45. While the Chicago Public Schools does provide post-release education services for students returning from the Juvenile Justice System, such as placement in a local school, alternative school, assistance with earning a GED, or work-training programs, it does not systematically offer those services to students released from the Cook County Jail.

These findings suggest several key points about the population being served, the HSDP's pedagogical elements, and the challenges of the post-release situation. This subset of the HSDP population has the characteristics of at-risk youth in a number of dimensions, from their family situation to their experience in high school to their participation in drug use and criminal activity. The combination of social disadvantages and behaviors also puts the students in a high-risk category for recidivation once they are released from the jail. Family characteristics are crucial for providing these youth with a model of behavior and social capital: their parents' low educational attainment and criminal history are likely to have contributed to these students' criminal involvement and disconnection from education. Students' experience in high school may have been generally positive, but it is likely that, in addition to their individual behavior, the students struggled because of their special education needs. The HSDP's educative components seem to evoke mixed attitudes on the part of the inmates: while the computer-based instruction does not overall motivate or provide a better learning process to students than would a traditional classroom, the mentors seem to complement computer-learning especially by motivating students to complete their classes. In addition, a majority of students plan on continuing their education in some form once they are released, suggesting that the HSDP may enable students to reconnect to education. Nonetheless, the few variables describing socioeconomic status, such as welfare participation and having children, and the students' opinions that they are not well informed about post-release educational programming, suggest that these individuals face many external pressures that may prevent them from seeing education as a viable and useful opportunity for gaining money. These considerations will be addressed in the policy recommendations section of this paper.

B. Administrative Data: Results and Discussion

I. Results

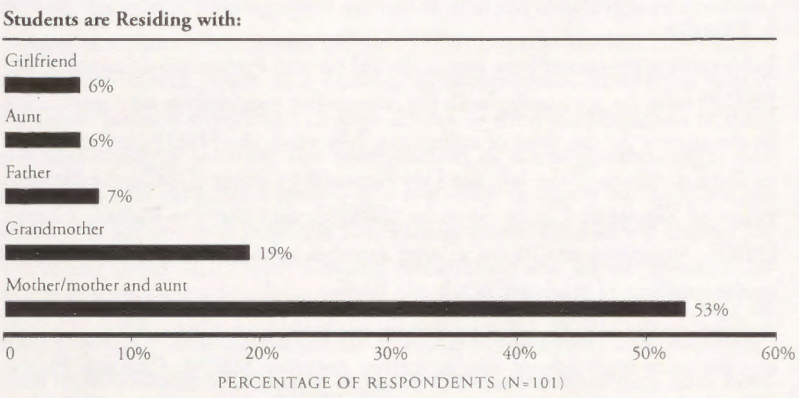
Information presented here was collected on 220 former participants of the HSDP[46] who do not overlap with the twenty-five participants who responded to the survey. At the time of collection, July 2010, the HSDP operated only in three divisions of the jail: the Day Reporting Center (DRC), the Department of Women's Justice Services (DWJS), and the Pre-Release Center (PRC). Aggregate results on a large number of participants allow for an understanding of students' academic background and credits earned while enrolled in the HSDP. Information on students' incoming academic standing includes high school credits before entering HSDP, Chicago Public Schools assessment tests upon entry into HSDP, and attributes of the last high school attended. Program results focus on the number of credits earned, time taken to complete classes, and grade obtained while in the program.

1. Demographic Findings

Elements of participants' court orders, signed by judges, yielded information on the youth's demographic background such as age, gender, place of residence, and persons they resided with while enrolled in the program. The average participant entered the program at age nineteen. An overwhelming majority (97 percent) reported Chicago as their place of residence and were male (86 percent). Of the participants for whom the court orders were available (46 percent), information was collected on the judge who appointed them. While twelve judges appointed the 101 inmates to the HSDP, three account for 78 percent of the program participants. These 101 inmates also declared the person that they would be residing with while enrolled in the HSDP. The results presented in Graph 6 underline the single-headed nature of the household: only 2 percent (not included in the graph) reported living with both their father and mother.

46. Note: incomplete or missing documents for participants resulted in varying sample sizes per result (not always a total of 220 participants). The N (number of participants) is specified for each statistical result.

Graph 6: Students' Household Situation



2. Academic Background

Most of the participants have attended some high school before their incarceration. Only 40 inmates entered the program with zero credits, representing 18.3 percent of the program population. Nonetheless, more than half of the students, or 55.7 percent, had high school freshman status: that is, they had earned between 0.5 and 4.5 high school credits. As the targeted population is between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one, participants with freshman status were at least two years behind academically. This section presents findings on three fronts: Chicago Public School diagnostic tests (upon entry), high school credits upon entry, and high schools (types and performance characteristics).

i. Chicago Public Schools Diagnostic Tests

CPS offers reading and mathematics online diagnostic tests in order to compare the participants' reading and mathematics scaled scores to the average scores for various grade levels in the national norm group. The diagnostic tests are offered three times a year. Due to the highly fluid population of participants in the High School Diploma Program, test scores were recorded for thirty participants, all in the DRC program. Participants were administered either the grade 9, 10, 11, or 12 test, depend-

ing on the high school credits they had upon entrance into the program. Table 3 displays reading scores per grade level (grades 9 through 12): all scores (unless otherwise indicated) are out of 100. The table indicates that in most sections of the reading tests, the average score for all participants ranges between the fortieth and fiftieth percentile.

In every category, students are well below the passing 60 percent mark, except for ninth graders in long passage. In addition, overall reading scores and reading percentile rankings show a downward sloping trend across grades, indicating that, for example, students who are taking the grade-12 test are much further behind the national average than are students taking the grade-9 test.

Table 3: Diagnostic Test Reading Scores[47]

Grade	Vocabulary	Fiction	Nonfiction	Long Passage	Overall Reading Score	Reading Percentile Ranking
9 (N=14)	47.5	57.71	50.21	63.29	56.86	45.57
10 (N=9)	46.11	59.67	44.44	55.33	52.33	37.89
11 (N=4)	26.5	53.75	36.25	38.5	31.5	35
12 (N=3)	21.67	45.33	29.33	31	25.67	N/A
Average (N=30)	41.7	56.53	44.53	54.37	49	42.57

The Grade Level Equivalent (GLE) of overall reading scores is also calculated for each student.[48] On average, these students are two years behind their grade level. However, the results vary enormously, between seven years behind and one year ahead.[49] Indeed, 40 percent of the students tested at or above grade level, while 53 percent were three years behind grade level.

47. CPS does not release city-wide scores for Scantron testing, so a comparison between these students and other CPS students was not possible.

48. Note: calculated here are losses in academic years. Years out of school are not accounted for.

49. Standard deviation is equal to 2.1 years.

Overall mathematics scores are considerably lower than overall reading scores, as evidenced by the comparison between overall reading percentile ranking (42.6 percent) and overall math percentile ranking (26.91 percent). All scores displayed in the Table 4 also show the lower range of results, between the twelfth and the forty-fourth percentile. GLE calculations show that, "on average", students are more than four years behind their grade level. Results range from ten years behind to one year ahead,[50] with 17 percent of students two years behind, and 77 percent of students more than three years behind. Table 4 displays mathematics scores per grade level.

Table 4: Diagnostic Test Mathematics Scores

Grade	Geometry	Data Analysis & Probability	Algebra	Measure-ment	Number/ Operations	Math Overall Score	Math Percentile Ranking
9 (N=14)	17.71	22.50	14.64	13.36	29.71	17.57	27.36
10 (N=9)	17.00	21.50	13.88	13.00	28.50	17.13	26.13
11 (N=4)	16.11	20.44	13.11	12.22	27.11	16.22	24.33
12 (N=3)	28.00	33.33	24.00	22.00	44.00	28.00	N/A
Average (N=30)	18.79	23.62	15.59	14.34	31.28	18.76	26.91

While this sample of students is small, these results do indicate major academic deficits in the core subjects of reading and mathematics. Graph 7 displays these students' low educational attainments as compared to the Grade Level Equivalent (GLE) that they should score in. As mentioned above, the gap between these students' level of competency in mathematics and reading and the national average (represented by the black lines) is found to increase with age in both mathematics and reading.

50. Standard deviation is equal to 1.8 years.

ii. Credits Earned upon Entry

On average, participants entered the program with 6.12 high-school credits, the equivalent of more than one year in high school. This result varies little among the three jail divisions considered.

Table 5: Mean and Median Number of Credits among DWJS, DRC, and PRC

N=219	DWJS	DRC	PRC
Average number of credits	5.52	6.36	5.54
Median number of credits	4.00	4.00	3.50
Number of participants	31	156	32

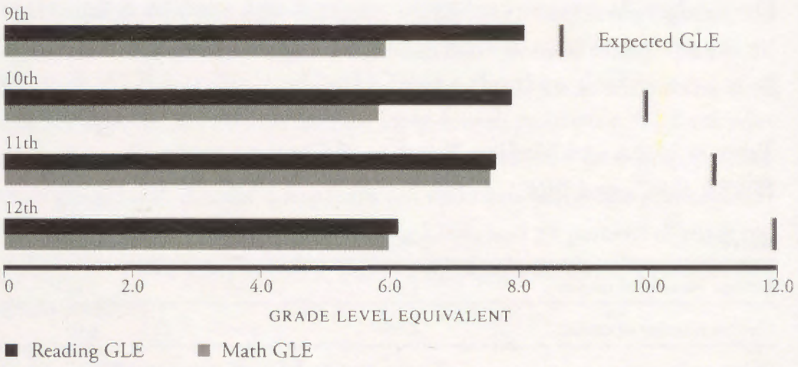
According to their high school credits, participants are considered to have freshmen, sophomore, junior, or senior status. Table 6 presents participants' high school status according to their incoming high school credits. Note that many students may have attended several years of high school but only qualify as freshmen because of their number of credits.

Table 6: High School Status

High School Status	Count	Percentage of Participants (N=219)
Freshman status (0-4.5 credits)	122	55.71%
Sophomore status (5-10.5 credits)	47	21.46%
Junior status (11-16.5 credits)	32	14.61%
Senior status (17+ credits)	18	8.22%
Total	219	100.00%

Female and male participants present a similar distribution of participants attaining freshmen, sophomore, junior, or senior status. Table 7 compares female participants (14.1 percent of total population) to male participants (85.9 percent of total population).

Graph 7: Students Academic Years behind Grade Level



Graph 8: Distribution of Entering High School Credits among Male and Female Participants

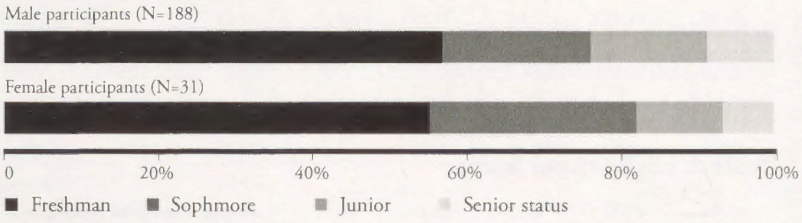


Table 7: High School Status by Gender

	Female Participants (N=31)	Male Participants (N=188)
Freshman status (0-4.5 credits)	17	105
Sophomore status (5-10.5 credits)	9	38
Junior status (11-16.5 credits)	3	29
Senior status (17+ credits)	2	15
Total	31	187

χ^2=1.644; df=3, p=0.649[51]

51. Note: 25 percent of expected frequencies were lower than 5. Use of chi-testing may be inaccurate.

The differences in credit earnings observed between female and male participants were not statistically significant. No further comparison will be made between female and male groups as case numbers for female participants are too small (N=30).

iii. High Schools: Type and Performance Characteristics

Data concerning last high school attended has been obtained for 212 of 221 participants. These inmates come from an array of seventy-five public schools. 89.5 percent of participants attended Chicago high schools. The remaining 10.5 percent came from Chicago suburbs. According to the CPS Demographic and Planning's high school ranking, 85 participants (or 38.8 percent) have come to the DRC from the bottom twenty-three Chicago Public high schools. Graph 9 presents the distribution of students by school type and performance.

Students entering credits were compared across alternative, low-performing, and mid-tier high schools, for which there were enough cases. The differences of credit distribution between these school categories were not found to be statistically significant ($p>0.1$), which means a similar proportion of students with freshman status were coming from all school performance groups.

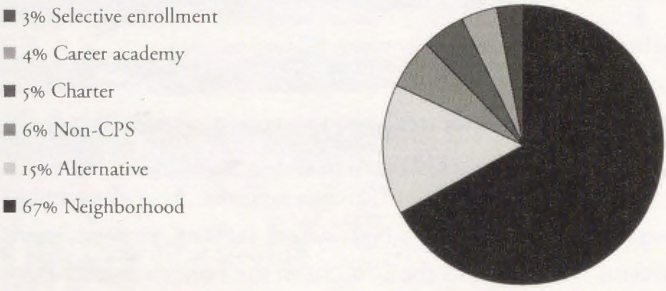
Table 8: Distribution of Students Entering High School Credits by High School Performance

	Last High School Attended (performance)		
High School Status upon Entry	Alternative	Low Performing	Mid-Tier
Freshman	21	71	19
Sophomore	6	28	4
Junior +	5	33	6

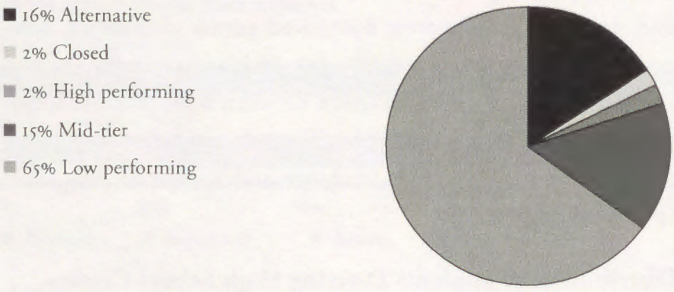
$\chi^2=2.749$; df=4, $p=0.601$

Graph 9: Distribution of Students' Last High School Attended by Performance and Type

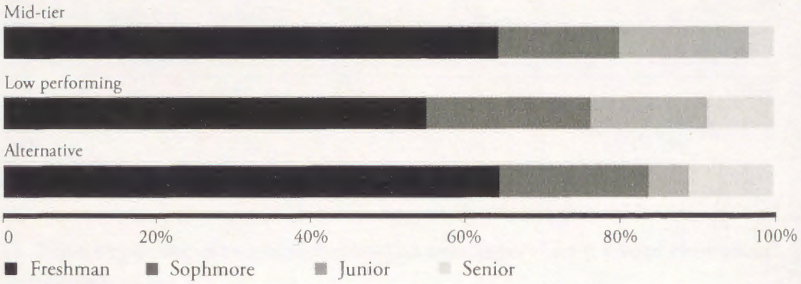
High School Performance (N=177)



High School Type (N=212)

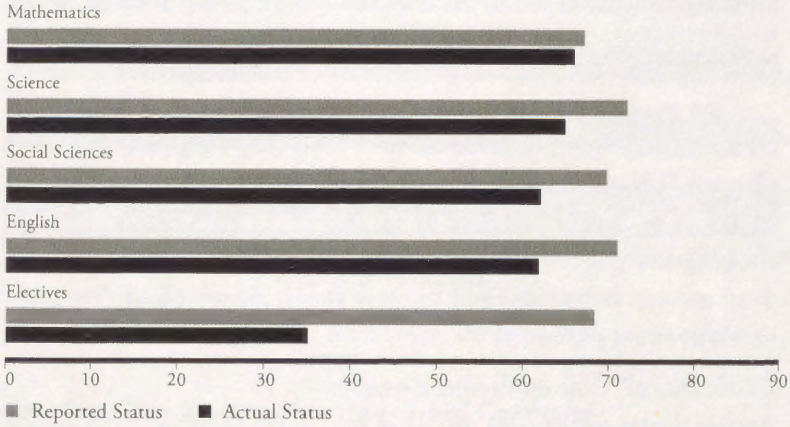


Graph 10: Distribution of Students Entering High School Credits by High School Performance



3. Academic Progress in the High School Diploma Program: An Analysis of Credits Earned

Graph 11: Students' Performance Characteristics by High School Course Subject[52]



Through the Aventa Learning Web site, participants earn 0.5 credits upon 100 percent completion of and passing grade in one online course. This credit system is equivalent to that of the high school credit system, and therefore earns the students 0.5 high school credits. As of August 2010, 112 participants have engaged with the High School Diploma Program and left the program.[53] All data on credits earned, duration of stay, and courses per participants are obtained from Aventa Learning (http://aventalearning.com/), which provides virtual high school courses to the participants.

52. This graph excludes students who earned no credits.

53. As explained in the methodology section, the subsequent results do not include participants who were in the program for less than ten days or who are currently enrolled in the program.

Fifty-eight participants earned between half a credit and six credits. Completion time was examined by course subject (English, science,[54] mathematics,[55] social sciences,[56] and electives[57]). As Graph 11 displays, average completion times varied among the course subjects. The core subjects of English, science, and mathematics took longer on average to complete. It is important to note that the majority of students first take English and mathematics when they first enroll in the program, as those courses took on average sixty-two and sixty-six days to complete, respectively.

The results from this graph also point to the fact that, on average, students completed classes in less time than they would have taken in Chicago Public School's ninety day semester-based courses. Aggregate credits earned will be evaluated by examining the main effects of time in the program, prior high school credits, and students' age. Finally, students earning zero credits will be more closely examined, as they make up a significant portion of the population considered.

i. Influence of Time on Credits Earned[58]

Among the 112 participants, length of time in the program varies greatly, from 10 to 391 days. Notably, fifty-four participants, not included in the

54. Science classes include physics and chemistry.

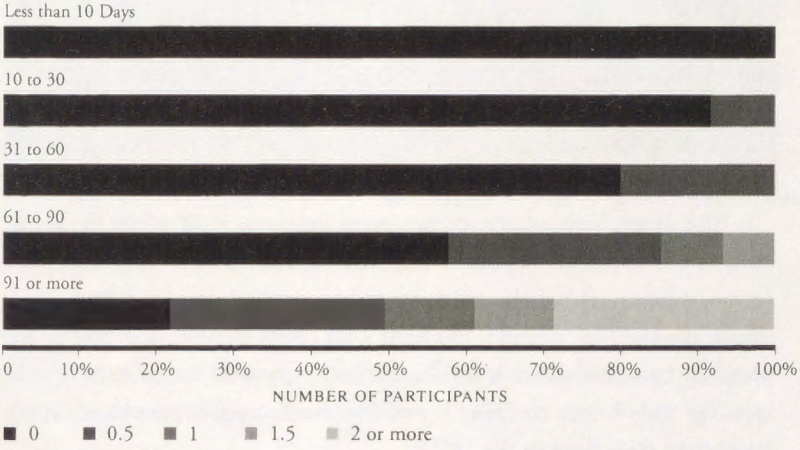
55. Mathematics classes include algebra and geometry.

56. Social sciences include American history, world history, and geography.

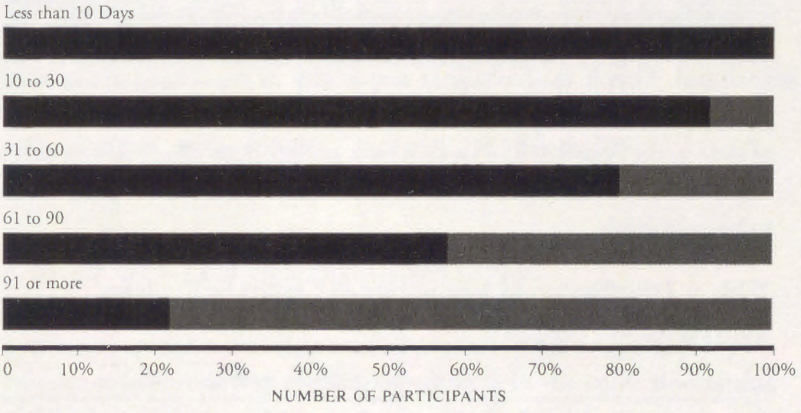
57. Electives include civics, sociology, and Spanish.

58. Aventa Learning provides a start and end date for each course that participants enroll in. Cook County mentors, who monitor the student's progress, have the authority to change an end date to allow for a student to have more time to complete a class or to generate a grade when a student finishes earlier. A mentor may also drop a class for a student who is no longer present in the specified jail division (DRC, PRC, or DWJS). Due to the highly transient nature of this population, mentors may not drop students until a month after these students are no longer active in the division. End dates used for this report are based on the student's last active assignment in each course.

Graph 12: Distribution of Participants by Time Spent in the High School Diploma Program



Graph 13: Distribution of Aventa-earned Credits by Students' Time Spent in Program



total of 112, were active on Aventa for less than ten consecutive days. Of these, thirty participants were active for less than a day (included).

On average, participants spent ninety days in the program. In a traditional high school setting, students have sixty days to complete one course. Accordingly, participants in this program who engage in the program for less than sixty days have a reduced time to finish a course. Graph 12 shows the distribution of participants' time spent in the program and their associated credits.

This graph highlights two important findings. First, while the greatest number of students spent ninety-one days or more in the program, a greater percentage of the students were enrolled in the program for ninety days or less. Second, students who spent sixty days or less in the program by and large did not successfully complete any classes. Credit earnings only began to make significant headway when students spent more than sixty days in the HSDP.

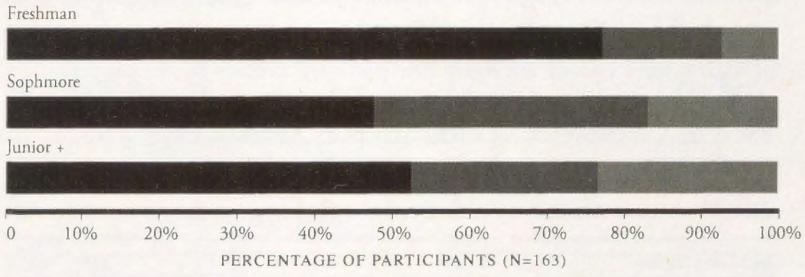
These results are confirmed by a chi-square test on the differences in credits earned among the groups of students who stayed in the program for less than ten days, ten to thirty days, thirty-one to sixty days, sixty-one to ninety days, and ninety days or more. The differences displayed in Table 9 are found to be statistically signicant at α=0.05 (p=0.00). Graph 13 shows that a majority of students start to earn positive amounts of credit at 91 days or more. This main effect of length of time in the program is to be expected; nonetheless, this finding underlines the need to stabilize students' enrollment length if the program is to be successful.

Table 9: Distribution of Aventa-earned Credits by Students' Time Spent in Program

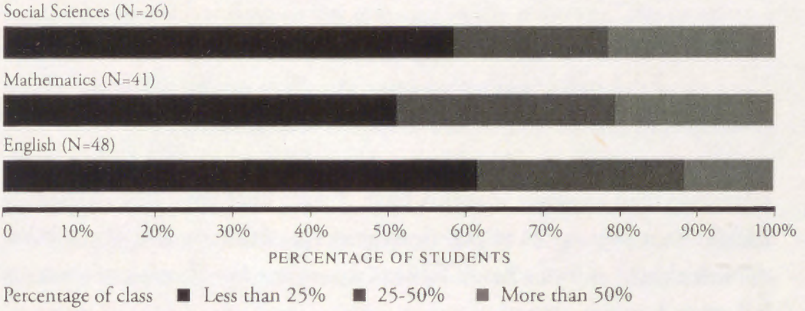
	Number of Days in the Program (days)				
Aventa Credits Earned	<10	10 to 30	31 to 60	61 to 90	91+
0	23	34	28	8	11
0.5 or more	0	3	7	6	38

χ^2=67.692; df=4, p=0.00

Graph 14: Cross-classification of Aventa and High School Credits



Graph 15: Course Completion Rates for Students Earning Zero Credits by High School Subject



ii. Aventa Credits and Prior High-School Credits

Motivation is undoubtedly an important variable in determining the number of credits a participant will earn during the program. It is conceivable that part of that motivation to work in the correction setting will be due to how much work the participant has left to complete. In other words, high school credits upon entry may be an adequate indicator of how well a particular individual will do. Graph 14 and Table 10 present the cross-classification of Aventa credits and high school credits

upon entry. The difference observed between the students who earned 0 credits, between 0.5 and 1 credit, and 1.5 credits or more are found to be statistically significant ($p<0.05$). Therefore, students with a high number of high school credits are more likely to earn credits in the program.

Table 10: Distribution of Participants by Aventa Credits and Incoming High School Credits[59]

	Aventa-earned Credits			
Incoming Status	0	0.5–1	1.5 +	Row Total
Freshman	70	14	7	91
Sophomore	18	14	6	38
Junior +	18	8	8	34
Column Total	106	36	21	163

χ^2=15.338; df=4, p=0.004

iii. Aventa Credits and Students' Age

The age of the participant may have an effect on participants' credit earnings: older students may have spent more years out of school, have more extensive criminal histories, or have different motivations towards schooling than younger students have. Please note that, due to missing data, it was not possible to examine the effect of the amount of years students had been out of school. Table 11 shows the distribution of students by age and credits earned.

59. High school status (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior+) and Aventa credit (0, 0.5-1, 1.5+) categories were created to meet the conditions of using Chi Squared Tests: expected frequencies of this table are greater than five for at least 80 percent of the cells, and no expected frequency is lower than one.

Table 11: Distribution of Credits Earned by Age of Entering Participants

	Aventa-earned Credits			
Age of Participant (years)	0	0.51	1.5 +	Row total
17 to 18	32	11	6	49
19 to 20	58	26	12	96
21	15	4	3	22
Column Total	105	41	21	167

χ^2= 0.964; df=4, p-value=0.91

Chi-square testing resulted in a p-value greater than α=0.05, suggesting that age did not have an effect on the amount of credits students earned.

iv. Participants Earning Zero Credits

Of the fifty-three participants who earned zero credits, a majority (57 percent) spent thirty days or less enrolled in the program. The remaining 43 percent spent anywhere between thirty-three and 185 days enrolled in classes. Nonetheless, many of these students completed at least 25 percent of a high school course. Graph 15 shows for each subject, between 30 and 40 percent of students completed 25 percent or more of their classes.

A look at these students' time spent in the program reveals that, as expected, course completion rates increase for all subjects when considering only students who spent thirty days or more in the program. For example, students on average completed 26.5 percent of the English classes. As expected, this percentage increased to 28.8 percent when excluding students who were in the program thirty days or less.

Table 12: Average Rate of Completion per Subject

Time in Program	English	Mathematics	Social Sciences
10 days or more	26.5%	32.2%	31.3%
30 days or more	38.8%	34.5%	39.0%

Nonetheless, completion rates remain low even when excluding students who spent less than thirty days in the program, indicating that other factors may be at work in explaining the high number of students earning no credits.

II. Discussion and Conclusions

Several conclusions about the HSDP's target population and success with such a population can be made from these findings. Little is known about these inmates' family situation, though a large proportion came from single-family households. Inmate experience in school appears highly varied: inmates attended high schools that differed by type and performance, size, teacher competency, and neighborhood. However, a closer look at students' credits by school performance revealed no main effect on the number of credits students had when they entered into the HSDP: students with lower numbers of credits were not disproportionately coming from low-achieving schools. This may indicate that the students in the HSDP were underachieving in their schools for reasons other than the academic support that their schools gave them, but more research is needed to provide conclusive evidence to that effect. Results from the diagnostic tests for entering students highlight that this student body has some severe academic deficiencies in core subjects, suggesting the need for individual support in the form of tutors or mentors. The general high age and low academic credits of students reaffirm the view that these students are severely behind academically.

In the program, student success is promising but not universal. Participants who are completing classes are doing so in a time period comparable to the time allocated to one course in a traditional high school setting, and are earning solid Cs, well above the adequate passing grade. Students who have earned no credits still complete some work towards one or more high school classes, yet these students accounted for 47 percent of the population. Analyses of the effect of time in the program and high school standing upon entering the program have served to explain part of this variation: students who spent ninety-one

days or more and who had junior status (at least eleven credits) earned more credits than students who spent less time and had fewer prior credits. Nonetheless, 22 percent of participants who stayed for more than ninety days earned zero credits, pointing to the fact that other individual factors such as motivation, cognitive skills, and other structural factors may need to be explored to explain why some students fail to complete at least one course. It is important to remember that, by and large, students have a history of drug abuse and recidivism, which may also help to shed light on the variation in credit earnings. However, students who fail to earn credits may still benefit from the program in other ways. Social benefits conferred by other components of the program, such as the mentors and the computer instruction, will be examined next.

C. Learning in Jail: An Experiment in Discipline and Rehabilitation

Findings on demographic and educational traits of the HSDP participants do not entirely capture the breadth of obstacles that these students face in such an educational program. In the subsequent section, responses in interviews with mentors and jail staff have been collected to provide information on two broad fronts: the social challenges to educating at-risk youth and the HSDP's programmatic responses to overcoming these challenges.

"Taking guys out of the wilderness."[60]

For the majority of its participants, the HSDP constitutes court-ordered education. Unsurprisingly, many participants are initially resistant to learning. In addition, participants arrive with a multitude of behavioral problems, including aggression, lack of motivation, and negative attitudes toward learning. As one mentor explains, "Obviously a lot of people in this program are here because they didn't want to go to school, or didn't like school, or didn't get the help that they needed. It's not like the

60. Mentor.

guys come in and sit down to do the work." Students are said to have an overwhelming lack of discipline and structure necessary for completing classes. This is seen as a problem stemming from the social environment in which students grew up. Another mentor says, "You can't take them from the streets where all they know is illegal activity, with little to no respect, little to no restriction or guidelines. You can't take them from that environment every single day and put them in the program and expect them to be perfect." This "street life" encompasses drug use and drug dealing which, according to the mentors, defined many of the participants' means of income and social status prior to entering the program. Students are often motivated to remain in this lifestyle because of financial pressures from supporting children at a young age. Finally, each mentor notes that students face academic obstacles beyond lack of credit: several of them did not know how to read or manage basic mathematics problems. One administrator suggests that these youth have often been far behind their cohorts in their prior classes, and that as a result they harbor negative attitudes toward school and the HSDP. Throughout the interviews, the factor of motivation was among the most numerously cited factors in understanding the success or failure of students. The above observations add layers to the motivation factor: students present not only early childhood disadvantages, substance abuse, and educational struggles, but are also disassociated from a legitimate life of education and legal employment, both of which are markers of adulthood.[61] These elements undoubtedly contribute to these students' lack of motivation to succeed in education.

Nontraditional Methods of a Nontraditional High School

1. The Mentors' Role: Educator, Counselor, Enforcer

While the mentors' basic role only requires them to act as proctors for the online lessons and test, they must learn to adopt multiple roles to respond to the challenges of educating at-risk youth. According to the Aventa

61. Uggen and Wakefield (2005), 118.

Web site, mentors act as liaisons between Aventa and their schools. They are also present to provide onsite help to students, build relationships with them, and proctor exams.[62] During the interviews, mentors echoed these functions but also added dimensions specific to the jail's population: "technically most of our job would entail being on track with their coursework but these guys are here for so many different reasons. It's a completely different population." In addition to being proctors in the classroom, mentors must also act as disciplinarians and counselors. Just as the mentors noted the lack of discipline in students, they see their role as enforcers to impart "order" in the young men's lives. "We give them a sense of discipline in their life that they've never had from any adult figure in their life." As counselors, they talk to students about their particular struggles, which can range from their court cases to their lives outside of the jail, and motivate them to complete their classes: "So the counseling part comes up when you are trying to rationalize with them the importance of education, the importance of leading a legit life versus staying in a criminal justice system, the importance of being an adult." The mentors also underlined their role as role models, as African American men who lead a life without crime. One mentor explains that he uses his position as an African American male to stress the value of education to the overwhelmingly African American participants:

> We're young black men working with young black men. No one will say exactly that that's what it is, but that's what works best in some situations because we're actually also modeling for these guys in some cases in terms of behavior, dress, attitude, motivation, perseverance. All these different things we are trying to project onto them.

In line with this role, mentors also strive to add informal civic and cultural activities in the learning process. For example, two mentors

62. Adapted from Aventa Web site.

accompanied HSDP participants to service-learning projects such as Safety Town, a driving school for young children, and Think Twice, a crime prevention program for high school students. A mentor recounts this reaction from one participant who assisted children at Safety Town: "[He] kept telling me, that I made him feel normal, not frowned upon for his criminal background or for the way that he looks, like a regular person as opposed to someone who is always talked down upon. He was just normal for that day." Indeed, this comment reveals an important barrier to the rehabilitation of inmates: all participants are and will be labeled as criminals when they return to their communities.

The capacity of the HSDP to adapt to the specific needs of the participants depends on the ability of mentors to perform all of these roles.

2. Computer-based Instruction: A Steep Learning Curve

The instruction by Aventa Learning received mixed reviews: while the computerized component makes learning with the program potentially difficult, certain components in effect created a positive context of learning. Students often have never worked on a computer and must first learn how to manage typing and sending e-mails. Once these barriers are overcome, students must read through large blocks of text, which include examples but do not allow them to directly talk with a teacher if they have questions. They can, however, communicate with their teachers via the e-mail system provided by Aventa. This last point highlights another problem encountered when using computer-based learning in the jail, that of security. All participants in the HSDP, regardless of their jail division, can only access the Aventa Web site on secure computers to prevent unauthorized communications and Web-viewing. Such a restriction poses new challenges to learning. For example, in Division 6, a locked division of the jail and a site of the new branches of the HSDP, mentors cannot bring in newspapers or any electronic device that could enable students to complete their homework. One mentor who currently works with participants in Division 6 notes that such restrictions can impede students' ability to complete research assignments. This barrier highlights

one of the challenges to implementing innovative education programs in a correctional facility.

Nonetheless, computer instruction has enabled one unexpected and welcome development: the frequent feedback in the form of quizzes and tests, reportedly, has had positive effects on students' confidence in taking classes. Many students arrive with a negative attitude but change when they see that they can accomplish something. According to one administrator, students often seek out the approval of the mentor: "They want that attention; they want to hear us say they're doing well." Aventa Learning systematically provides that feedback. Another administrator finds that many students entering with a lack of motivation "change their outlook when they receive a good grade." An interviewed official of the DRC expresses the importance of such a structure in the larger view of aiding participants to readjust to society:

> They are so proud of their grades. Someone is telling them they are competent. They learn that they can learn. These are kids with recidivist criminal histories, and they can feel good about their grades. That's rehabilitation.

This official contends that the systematic reinforcement of achievement has had positive effects on students' approach to learning by creating a "positive peer culture" with regard to school. The computer-based structure better supports students' continued education once they are released from jail.

3. "The question is, will you come back?"[63]: The Post-release Situation

The HSDP focuses its transitional services on continuing education, either through college counseling and prepping or high-school courses: the success of these initiatives, however, often depends on the controls put in place to mediate students' motivation and the other influences to which

63. Official of the DRC.

the student returns. The transitional linchpin of the HSDP is the Pneuma Institute, an online education school outside the jail that allows students to receive an eighteen-credit diploma instead of the standard twenty-four-credit diploma. Students can be court-ordered to attend Pneuma as part of their probation. If this is the case, they also must report back to the Day Reporting Center, continue to be randomly drug-tested, and attend counseling sessions. One instructor sees this mode of transition as the most effective, because mentors can continue to counsel the student on social skills, anger management, and job training. If, however, the student is completely discharged from the jail, "[the mentors] don't really see them anymore, so that mentoring relationship is lost." This instructor highlights that maintaining contact is crucial to reduce recidivism. The situation underlines the need for "a softer transition of external controls," as a DRC official stresses. Indeed, the positive effects of learning may not continue if students return to their old habits: "Regression does take place quickly after they leave the program. How do you maintain yourself [stay clean] when you return to your neighborhood? It's all about internalizing external control. For us, [you and me], we have had years of parental instruction, we internalized it." This opinion is consistent with the social-psychological perspective on crime proposed by Heimer and Matsueda (1997): ex-prisoners face barriers in adopting pro-social identities because the roles they have taken are ones that have been repeated and reinforced over time in relationships. In this view, prison reentry programs can be successful only when the principles learned while in prison are reinforced by social relationships and the environment. Methods that incorporate such external control will be examined in my policy recommendations.

However, two final considerations for implementation of such a program will first be examined, based on interviews with an official of the HSDP and an official of the DRC, as well as informal discussions with an official in the Labor Department of the Cook County Sheriff.

D. Organizational Attributes of the HSDP: Considerations for Implementation

The HSDP's organizational aspects provide important directives for evaluating its implementation strategy in other correctional facilities. In particular, the cultural context in which the HSDP arose is discussed to identify potential institutional hurdles to the implementation process. Culture in this situation refers to the organizational culture of the jail, marked by operational directives, such as correctional goals, institutional constraints, such as legal restrictions, professional norms, such as the presence of unionized workers, and the experience of day-to-day decisions.[64]

The Cook County Jail: Culture of Opportunity?

As the HSDP is embedded in the daily activities of the jail, successful functioning depends on the ability to mesh with the culture of the overarching structure, that is, the balance between correctional control and union strongholds. As a system, the jail operates under a series of standard-operating procedures and goals that conflict with the operation and goals of the HSDP. As articulated by the HSDP official, the foremost goal at the jail is control and security: "The focus at the jail is moving people back and forth to court every day." Correctional officers enforce that objective daily. The DRC official describes the original culture of the Day Reporting Center before he arrived: "The DRC was viewed as the relief valve for jail overcrowding. Any sheriff could lock up an inmate at any time for any reason, and the only education that was going on was the GED program, only two classes of which were functional." In charge of remodeling the drug treatment program of the DRC, this official also spoke about the general adversarial attitudes of the jail staff to any new programming: "The correctional officers' approach to inmates represents a culture working against an environment that fosters growth and rehabilitation." By this, he refers to certain incidences of aggressive behavior

64. Allison and Zelikow (1999).

by correctional officers toward students when the latter became disruptive.[65] Finally, the workers' union represents a strong political obstacle to new programming. This manager recounts that "the union was a big challenge. For the first two years, I couldn't change the staff. I had to gain buy-in from the staff, I had to change the culture." Conversations with the labor relations official also reveal that union issues frequently occur in regards to the creation of jobs for new programming. Specifically, union workers who have been hired for a specific position cannot, under union contract, be redeployed for new services.

In this context, the nature of the HSDP as a new educational program requiring an environment that fosters education and educational specialists seems difficult to implement on a wider scale than at the jail. The HSDP manager, however, provides a balanced position on the possibility of programming but also highlights other legal issues. At the jail, she says, "There are very few places where you could start a new program as easily as here, because there's no review. There's no real chain of command at the jail." This agent evaluated the most feasible educational options for the jail population by closely working with CPS, and says she chose the online option because of its appropriateness for students "who can't handle the social side of high school"; she also discusses the legal impediments to developing an alternative school or a charter school: "We looked at setting up a charter high school here, but there are Illinois limitations on how many seats you could have. Also, the charter model operates on a regular school system, so it doesn't operate continuously the way we would need to be continuous." Furthermore, charter school seats operate on a per-community basis, meaning that seats filled by students in the jail are being taken directly away from students in that community. Hence, while the DRC official underlines the conflicting cultural behaviors at the jail potentially impeding rehabilitative programming, the HSDP representative points to more legal and structural

65. The interviewee did not seek to comment further.

impediments. Still, this program offers one crucial advantage capable of enhancing its viability: the HSDP represents significant financial savings over the existing jail high school.

E. Financial Costs of Current Educational Programs

Computer-based instruction was chosen for the jail in part for its extremely low costs. While it is difficult to estimate the cost of a seat in the High School Diploma Program, because many of the facilities of HSDP are shared with the larger jail of which it is a part, the average annual cost of a seat in the HSDP in 2009–2010 was found to be $3,683,[66] independent of the division under which students were supervised. This figure includes program staff annual salaries and fringe benefits, Aventa program costs per course, and fixed costs of desktop computers and school supplies. (See a total breakdown of the 2009–2010 budget costs in Appendix C.) By contrast, the per pupil budget for students at the York Alternative School, the education program which serves on average three hundred students a year, is $17,072.[67] This figure also does not reflect the costs associated with housing that student in the jail division. The HSDP therefore represents a per-pupil saving of $13,389.

Social costs and benefits of the HSDP can be estimated by comparing recidivism rates of its participants. However, it is currently not possible to account for recidivism rates, as recidivism is measured by re-arrest, reconviction, or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the prisoner's release.[68] The earliest participants of the HSDP have not been released for at least three years. Future evaluations of the HSDP should focus on an outcome study of former participants to account for these potential costs or benefits.

66. Estimate based on a total of one hundred students each earning one credit.

67. Estimate reported by the Cook County Jail.

68. Bureau of Justice Statistics definition.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the results of this research, recommendations first pertain to the programmatic components of the HSDP and second to general reflections for expanding this educational initiative.

A. HSDP-specific Recommendations

The close analysis of participants' credit earnings reveals several areas of need, most flagrant of which are the high rate of academic deficiencies both upon entry and exit of the program. As discussed, this low rate of achievement may have multiple sources, ranging from student-specific behavioral attitudes to structural issues of judicial court-orders and inmate movements between divisions. To resolve this discrepancy, I propose the following recommendations targeted toward ameliorating student behaviors, increasing educational resources, and supporting and promoting coordination efforts among different institutional bodies.

Target Student Motivation and Needs

To better cope with the wide range of needs in reading and mathematics, two crucial subject areas of high school, students with identified learning disabilities should have access to specialized educational help that would be available to them in a traditional high school. A special education teacher does currently work with students at the Day Reporting Center; however, mentors have expressed the need for a teacher focused on developing reading skills who can offer more individual help than mentors are able to provide given the other students in the class. A mathematics teacher also gives targeted lessons to a subset of the participants: this effort needs to be formalized as well. The appointment of two such teachers could be endorsed by Chicago Public Schools. Furthermore, with the current Aventa provider, students may only take high school courses for credit. However, many students face specific challenges. Students with cognitive disabilities are traditionally allowed by CPS to take middle-school classes for high school credit. However, students in the High

School Diploma Program do not have the option to take such classes. Alternative course options for such students should be developed by Aventa or provided by another online education provider. Finally, in order to aid students in their transition from the jail, preparation for college can be provided by trained counselors in order to assess students' interest and enroll students before their release from jail. Such help could be provided by current employees of the Cook County Jail. This measure also responds to survey respondents' complaints about the lack of information on post-release education opportunities.

To address issues of motivation, students must be better introduced to the program, its goals, and its importance for their successful discharge from the jail. Program staff could better incentivize students toward success by enforcing controls already present within the jail, such as tying students' performance into reports to their judges. Upon entry into the program, participants should be given an explicit understanding of program goals: successful completion of a course should be systematically reported to the program supervisor and the participant's judge. Next, a student's progress must be more systematically monitored to identify students falling behind: this could be accomplished by progress reports at thirty and sixty days. If a student does not demonstrate adequate progress at these benchmarks, program staff could then establish a meeting with those failing to complete a class in sixty days in order to evaluate whether the program responds to the student's particular needs. Such efforts are already occurring in an informal manner: systematizing such reports could be a form of "swift and certain" sanctions if the student fails to be cooperative.

Coordinate Educational Goals with Concurrent Institutions

Students' length of stay in the HSDP was flagged as an important problem likely to contribute to low credit earnings. Students take classes for only two hours a day as they also attend counseling sessions. To allow students more meaningful time in the program, HSDP staff must improve communication with the drug treatment program and the judicial depart-

ment. First, counselors from the drug treatment program and mentors of the HSDP must more systematically define students' schedules, thereby enforcing specific times allocated to online courses and group counseling and reducing distractions from learning by students who attempt to bypass the counseling portion of the program. Next, counselors and mentors should be informed of the student's progress in both counseling sessions and in classes in order to better target issues a student is encountering. As both counselors and mentors can provide feedback to the students' judges, such cooperation would better inform a judge about the defendant's capabilities and needs.

Indeed, the judicial component is the final and crucial linchpin to the success of this program. Judges can hold students accountable for their progress within the drug treatment program and the HSDP by tying their conditions of probation to their performance. While the student is still enrolled in the program, judges could order more hours of class per day for the student once he or she achieves a certain level of progress in counseling and in high school classes. Once the student is discharged from the custody of the Cook County Jail, judges can also court-order inmates to continue their education, allowing for a softer transition of judicial control from the jail to the community. Finally, evidence was found to indicate that while twelve judges have ordered participation in the HSDP, three judges currently account for the majority of appointment of students to the HSDP: this indicates a need to educate judges about the program's results.

Such an effort, however, also needs to be accompanied by an expansion of the HSDP's enrollment capacity, which is currently capped at an average of seventy participants. The program has already expanded into six divisions of the jail, allowing more students to access it. Yet, more than thirty inmates are currently on the waiting list to enroll the program. As mentioned in this paper, York Alternative, the traditional high school in the jail, neither follows-up on students nor serves the majority of age-eligible inmates of the Cook County Jail. While more research is needed to determine whether the York Alternative School should be entirely

replaced by the HSDP, the educational and financial advantages of the HSDP suggest that better educational programming does exist for this population. York's astoundingly high budget could be much better allocated to better support of HSDP's efforts with the additional teaching, mentoring, and career counseling mentioned above.

B. Policy Recommendations for Expansion

This program has received substantial support from the Cook County Inmate Welfare Fund, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, and the United States Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Services. This recognition demonstrates the HSDP's potential for garnering political support from a variety of sources, in addition to its potential for successfully capitalizing on inmates' needs and skills. In the effort to expand this program beyond the Cook County Jail to other correctional facilities, however, two final considerations are to be underlined.

Engage Correctional Staff Unions

The culture of the correctional system, both in terms of the primarily punitive goals of the jail and the strong presence of union workers, represents a significant hurdle to new programming and job positions. Specifically, many employees in the jail cannot be reassigned to a different function under union contract laws; however, as this study of the HSDP underlines, the need for counselors and mentors to supplement the computer-based program is great. In considering the expansion of the HSDP into other locations, administrators should engage in negotiations with unions to prevent the current lack of specialized staff.

Educate About Internet Use in the Correctional Setting

While the Cook County Jail has been receptive to allowing inmates to access the internet in a controlled fashion, it is hard to determine whether internet-based education will be as accepted in other correctional facilities. Gladyse Tailor, the head of the Illinois Corrections Department, reported that while most Illinois correctional facilities do have computer-

based programming, none other than Cook County Jail currently have any program that requires access to the internet. The HSDP should serve as a case study for the successful implementation of controls over the use of the internet in a correctional setting.

Conclusion

Traditional approaches to educating young incarcerated men have failed on two major fronts: accounting for the variability in inmates' social, school, and cognitive background, and offering the means to transition educationally back to society. The High School Diploma Program addresses these issues by adopting an individualized and accountable approach to the students' specific educational needs. Students can and do earn credits toward their diploma, in an environment structured to enable them to change their opinions on school and the opportunities they see themselves having once they are released. Analyses on credit earning did reveal that students were more likely to successfully complete classes when they were enrolled for more than three months, and when they were close to graduating. Yet, individuals who were years behind in schooling and ranging from seventeen to twenty-one years of age were also able to earn credits. Such findings point to the fact that the HSDP represents a feasible, cost-effective educational option for students of all backgrounds, and can be the first step to returning to school after years of hiatus.

This initiative also finds strength because it does not operate in a void: students are simultaneously enrolled in drug treatment, cognitive group therapy, and online high school courses. Indeed, students must often address psychological and addictive behaviors in order to engage with school. That approach continues in the classroom, thanks to qualified mentors who go beyond their role as proctors, to overcome resistant behavior, especially to the use of computers. It now remains to be seen whether this program fulfills its underlying goal, that of engaging students enough to deter them from a delinquent lifestyle. The survey research suggests high risk factors for the participants, in terms of atti-

tudes toward education, familial background, and prior involvement with the correctional system, but lacks the post-release picture of inmates educational and criminal outcomes. Still, the use of technology eases students' transition back to society, closing the gap between services in the correctional environment and the students' communities.

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Appendix A

The High School Diploma Survey

Administered to Twenty-five Current HSDP Participants

I adapted questions from the National Dropout Questionnaire (April 2003) to gauge individual and familial characteristics of high school dropouts.

School behavioral factors were evaluated with three questions:

Question 17: "How often did you skip classes while in high school?"
Question 19: "How many times did you use alcohol or drugs while in high school?"
Question 24 : "Have you ever been diagnosed or identified as having a learning disability?"

Welfare participation and criminal background were evaluated with three questions:

Question 32: "Have any of your parents ever spent time in jail, prison, or any other correctional facility?"
Question 33: "Have you ever received Supplement Security Income, Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or Rent Subsidy?"
Question 34: "Do you have any children?"

Family characteristics and relationship to education were evaluated with four questions. (The first three questions were adapted from the National Dropout Questionnaire.)

Question 20:"Did your family expect you to graduate from high school?"
Question 30: "What is the highest level of education your mother received?"
Question 31: "What is the highest level of education your father received?"
Question 32: "Have any of your parents ever spent time in jail, prison, or any other correctional facility?

Experience in high school was evaluated with a question from the National Dropout Questionnaire, "Please tell me about your time in high school. What do you think about the following?" with five subsequent statements about teachers, counselors, and vocational classes.

Questions regarding individual experience with the Cook County Jail were adapted from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) Prison Background Questionnaire (2003) from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Question 13 and 14 asked about the York Alternative High School in the jail, similar to the NAAL questionnaire questions gauging participation in prison programs.

Question 21 asked about the highest grade of high school that participants completed, similar to the NAAL question about highest level of education prisoners completed. I restated this question to "high-school level" because all HSDP participants had attended high school (per prerequisite of HSDP).

Question 25, "What was the main reason you stopped your public or private schooling when you did?" included the choice "Sent to jail, prison, or any other correctional facility."

Question 26: "Altogether, how many times have you been arrested or taken into custody for any offense?"

Question 29: "Before you were admitted to this facility, how much time altogether had you spent in any correctional facility? Please include all times served in jail, prison, or another facility."

High-School Participants Consent Form

I am an undergraduate student in the Department of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. I am conducting a survey on the Cook County's Virtual High School Program (or Aventa Program). I want to examine the benefits or disadvantages that you have encountered in the HSDP.

Before we begin, I am going to explain why I am inviting you to participate in this survey and how this information will be used. I am doing this research as part of my studies in the Department of Public Policy.

I am interviewing all current participants of the HSDP on a purely voluntary basis. Participation should take about fifteen minutes. If you do not wish to participate, you can refuse to take this survey.

All surveys will be kept anonymous. The results of these surveys will be kept on a password protected computer file, accessible only to me, and will be destroyed at the end of my research. I will not ask you for your name or any information about your specific criminal history, your innocence, guilt or involvement in another other criminal activity. I will only have access to the overall results (combined answer of all respondents) through Survey Monkey. If at any time you would prefer not to answer a question, please feel free to skip it. If you decide to stop participating while taking the survey, please tell me. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me now.

Appendix B

I. Interview Subject: DRC official (30 minutes to 1 hour)

1. Identify institutional mechanisms in the jail: work culture, perception of education programming, and assessment of inmate needs.
2. Describe program process of the HSDP: creation, implementation, maintenance.
3. Describe reception of HSDP: flaws, criticisms, future needs.

Interviewee Background

1. Before we begin talking about the High School Diploma Program, could you please tell me about your professional background? (Length of time as director, previous work experience, career path leading to your position at the Cook County Jail.)

Jail Programming

2. Regarding your experience at Cook County Jail, what do you regard as the greatest issue the Cook County Jail faces today?
3. How would you describe the jail's view of new programming?

4. What obstacles do you see to inmate learning programs today?
5. What can be done to overcome these obstacles?

High School Diploma Program

Let's shift to talking about the specifics of the High School Diploma Program:

1. In what capacity did you aid in the planning and implementation of the High School Program?
2. What brought about the HSPD?
3. What are the HSDP's primary goals? What need does it fill?
4. How was it first received by other officials? By jail staff?
5. In its first stages of development, what were the most difficult challenges it encountered?
6. If the High School Program were scrapped, how would you reinvent it?
7. If budget and technology were no issue, how could money be used more effectively to improve learning programs? To improve this high school program?
8. What sort of public-private partnerships would help to improve inmate learning programs?

Post-Release Situation

1. What are the greatest challenges faced by inmates once they are released?
2. After inmates complete their jail sentences, how would you engage them more effectively to continue their studies?
3. What could be done to reduce inmate learning drop-out rates?
4. In your experience, are there better ways to reduce recidivism than inmate learning programs? If so, what are they? If not, how does the HSDP help the inmates' transition?
5. What can public school systems do to keep students engaged and less likely to turn to criminal activities?

II. Interview Subject: HSDP Official (0.50–1 hour)

1. Describe program structure, mission, and conceptual foundation.
2. Describe implementation process: organizations and individuals involved, structural and cultural hurdles.
3. Describe current obstacles and avenues for future improvement.

Interviewee Background

1. Before we begin talking about the High School Diploma Program, could you please tell me about your professional background? (Length of time as director, previous work experience, career path leading to your position at the Cook County Jail.)

Jail Programming

1. Regarding your experience at Cook County Jail, what do you regard as the greatest issue the Cook County Jail faces today?
2. How would you describe the jail's view of new programming?
3. What obstacles do you see to inmate learning programs today?
4. What can be done to overcome these obstacles?

High School Diploma Program

Let's shift to talking about the specifics of the High School Diploma Program.

1. In what capacity did you aid in the planning and implementation of the High School Program?
2. What brought about the HSPD?
3. What are the HSDP's primary goals? What need does it fill?
4. What collaboration efforts (organizations, officials) were needed to push forward the creation of the HSDP?
5. How was it first received by other officials? By jail staff?
6. How did you overcome resistance, if any, to the program?
7. In its first stages of development, what were the most difficult challenges it encountered?

8. What current processes (administration, inmate motivation, other) work against the success of the program? What works towards success of the program?
9. If budget and technology were no issue, how could money be used more effectively to improve learning programs? To improve this high school program?
10. How do you foresee the expansion of this program to other divisions within the Cook County Jail?
11. Is this program replicable in other correctional settings? Why or why not?
12. Certain policy-makers have argued that resources for correctional education would be of better service to the community if redirected elsewhere. What do you think?

Post-release Situation

1. What are the greatest challenges faced by inmates once they are released?
2. After inmates complete their jail sentences, how would you engage them more effectively to continue their studies?
3. What could be done to reduce inmate learning drop-out rates?
4. In your experience, are there better ways to reduce recidivism than inmate learning programs? If so, what are they? If not, how does the HSDP help the inmates' transition?
5. Your program is in essence fixing a broken educational system by providing education to inmates who should have been better served in Chicago's Public Schools. What can public school systems do to keep students engaged and less likely to turn to criminal activities?

III. Interview Subject: Program Administrators

1. Provide information on direct work with inmates in terms of service provision (other services).
2. Explore administrative and organizational hurdles.

Interviewee Background

1. Before we begin talking about the High School Diploma Program, could you please tell me about your professional background? (Previous work experience, career path leading to your position at the Cook County Jail.)

The High School Diploma Program

1. Could you tell me about your role in the administration and daily activities of the High School Program?
2. What other services do you provide?
3. What services do the inmates have access to when they are enrolled in HSDP?
4. Can you describe for me the enrollment process of a student? What have been some difficulties about this process?
5. What other departments do you coordinate with at the jail for the enrollment and progress of a student?
6. What are some administrative hurdles about the High School Program? (Obtaining transcripts, for example)
7. Could you please describe how the High School Program is associated with CPS?
8. How would you describe the relationship with CPS? Cooperative? Helpful? Difficult?
9. What has been your experience with participants enrolled in the program in terms of their relationship to school and their motivation?
10. What has been your experience with discharged inmates- have they dropped out of any educational program? Have they come to you to seek for help? Have they faced other issues more important to them than a high school diploma?

IV. Interview Subject: Classroom Mentors (13–30 minutes)

1. Provide information on direct work with inmates: common struggles of inmates (academic, cognitive, behavioral), perceived benefits or disadvantages for inmates
2. Express views of HSDP and their role as mentor: comments on effectiveness of structure, mentorship strategy to teacher students

Interviewee Background

1. Before we begin talking about the High School Diploma Program, could you please tell me about your professional background? (Previous work experience, career path leading to your position at the Cook County Jail.)

The High School Diploma Program

1. Could you please explain your role in the program? How long have you worked here?
2. Could you describe a typical day in the classroom?
3. How do you view the HSDP's computer-based method of instruction?

Probes:

Traditional teacher-classroom instruction vs. computer-learning

4. What are the greatest challenges that inmates face in terms of learning?
5. How effective is the HSDP in motivating participants to learn?
6. How do you view your role as a mentor?

Probes:

7. What role do you fill? Educational? Career mentorship? Emotional? If you were to direct the HSDP, what would you change? What would you keep?

Post-release Situation

1. What support does the HSDP provide to inmates in terms of future educational opportunities?
2. After inmates complete their jail sentences, how would you engage them more effectively to continue their studies?

Appendix C

Table 12: High School Diploma Program Budget: 2009–2010

Itemized Budget	Cost/ Unit	Number	Price
Mentor training (Aventa)	$2,500.00	1	$2,500.00
Computers (Desktop)	$639.98	10	$6,399.80
Credit Recovery Block (Aventa- Annual seats reusable for 12 months)	$1,640.00	26	$42,640.00
Elective/semester (Aventa)	$245.00	100	$24,500.00
Lab access to 1 computer with internet access/ per week (Aventa)	$175.00	10 computers, 49 weeks	$8,575.00
Math/ Numeracy (Tier 2/ Tier 3)	$395.00	1	$395.00
Reading/ Language Arts (Tier 2)	$121.47	5	$607.35
Reading/Language Arts support material (Tier 3)	$438.00	1	$438.00
School supplies (textbooks, required reading books, notebooks, pens and pencils, calculators, and head phones with microphones)	$5,000.00	1	$5,000.00
School incentives	$2,000.00	1	$2,000.00
Shipping/ handling (total)	$250.00	1	$250.00
Subtotal — Aventa program $93,305.15			
Under ICJA Recovery JAG Program Grants (Salary/year)			
Reentry Specialist II (Project Coordinator)	$44,000.00	1	$44,000.00
Reentry Specialist I (Case Manager)	$32,000.00	2	$64,000.00
Classroom Mentor	$28,000.00	4	$112,000.00
Subtotal — salaries $220,000.00			
Fringe Benefits- 25% of salary (Sheriff's Office formula)			
Reentry Specialist II benefits	$11,000.00	1	$11,000.00
Reentry Specialist I benefits	$8,000.00	2	$16,000.00
Classroom Mentor benefits	$7,000.00	4	$28,000.00
Subtotal- benefits $55,000.00			
TOTAL Expenditures			**$368,305.15**