

CONCLUSION: The Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) could be providing correctional education and career training programs that are effective in reducing recidivism. However, MDOC program data reported in Offendertrak and by each facility did not match, was incomplete, and included errors. Due to these data quality concerns, the data cannot be used to accurately assess the effectiveness of MDOC's programs.

Background

MDOC is responsible for accepting adult inmates committed by the courts for incarceration, care, custody, treatment, and rehabilitation. As part of its responsibilities, MDOC is required to provide programs, such as correctional education, to prevent, control, and reduce recidivism. On April 3, 2026, there were 17,560 inmates housed in one of MDOC's 24 state, private, or regional facilities in Mississippi.

In CY 2025, program expenditures for state correctional facilities totaled approximately \$3 million, less than one percent of MDOC's total expenditures. MDOC was unable to provide a complete list of program staff at each facility.

Research on the Effectiveness of Correctional Education Programs

The research shows that correctional education programs not only have an impact on reducing recidivism but can also be cost effective. Research suggests that correctional education can reduce recidivism by 13 percentage points.

Additionally, providing evidence-based programs can be critical to mitigating high recidivism rates. However, evidence-based programs must be delivered with fidelity to the critical elements of program design.

Recidivism

Recidivism is the percentage of individuals re-incarcerated within 36 months of initial release. It is the most common measurement used to demonstrate how successful or unsuccessful a correctional department is in rehabilitating its inmates.

MDOC's Correctional Education Programs

MDOC provides the following programs designed to help inmates have better opportunities to obtain employment upon release:

- **Adult Basic Education:** addresses basic literacy and secondary education needs.
- **Post-Secondary Education:** provides college-level courses
- **Career and Technical Education (CTE):** offers education and skills in a variety of vocations (e.g., welding).

Key Findings

- **Program information is not consistently reported in MDOC's data management system and did not match the data reported by each correctional facility in the program inventory, which is also incomplete and inconsistent.**

While program data should be entered into the data management system, less than two percent of the participant, completion, and withdrawal data matched between the two sources.

- **MDOC's data reliability issues are caused by the unreliability of its current data management system and inconsistent data entry practices and program requirements across facilities.**

Data reliability is further hindered by limited oversight and monitoring, no routine audits of program data, and limited training and collaboration.

- **Unreliable program data has an impact on MDOC's ability to measure and report on the success of its programs.**

If the Mississippi Legislature cannot trust the information being provided by MDOC, it may not allocate resources to the most effective programs. Further, program data helps the Parole Board determine if inmates have worked towards rehabilitation and are ready to be released.

Matching CTE Programs to In-Demand Jobs

CTE programs should target industries that are in high demand throughout the state. MDOC currently uses labor market data to match some of its vocations to in-demand industries. However, MDOC could further improve its CTE programs offered by targeting industries expected to experience job growth over the next several years. It is also important to understand that even with programs and certifications, formerly incarcerated individuals can still struggle to obtain employment due to a lack of experience, competition, and additional education, licensure, and certifications needed.

Tracking Post Release Employment Outcomes

The post release employment data collected by MDOC is limited to those individuals released on parole. Other states also struggle to track employment status for inmates not on parole. Some states have worked to address this tracking issue by entering into collaborative agreements and sharing information across databases.

Summary of Report Recommendations for MDOC

Improving Program Data Reliability

1. As it transitions to a new data management system, MDOC should:
 - a. verify that the information in its current system is accurate and complete prior to migrating the data to the new system;
 - b. implement effective application and user controls over the system;
 - c. regularly monitor and audit program information entered in the system to ensure accuracy; and,
 - d. implement end-user training.
2. Work to eliminate the reliance on spreadsheets and other documents to monitor and track programs.
3. Update its policies and procedures or provide additional guidance regarding data collection processes and practices to ensure more consistent and uniform data collection.
4. Determine who will be responsible for entering program information into the system.
5. Once its data is more reliable, it should report to the Legislature on program outcomes and program costs to determine if its programs are not only cost-effective but also reduce recidivism.

Improving Correctional Education Programs

6. Determine if its programs are being implemented with fidelity to program design.
7. Create an inventory of all its programs and publish the information to its website on a regular basis.
8. Ensure that any inmate participating in programs are not transferred to another facility.
9. Continue to evaluate its CTE programs to ensure it offers programs that prepare inmates for high-demand employment opportunities upon release.
10. Continue to encourage colleges and universities to participate in the Prison Education Program.
11. Strengthen its intergovernmental agreements with colleges and universities providing post-secondary education by including additional provisions in the agreements, such as allocation of resources.

Improving Oversight and Monitoring of Regional and Private Facilities

12. Strengthen the language in the agreements with regional and private facilities housing state inmates to require more oversight and monitoring.

Strengthening Post Release Tracking and Reentry Efforts

13. Continue to find opportunities to connect inmates to employers before and after release.
14. Collaborate with the Mississippi Department of Employment Security to determine a way to track employment outcomes for former inmates, including paroled and no-paroled inmates.