An Evaluation of Career Pathways Program Implementation in the New Mexico Department of Corrections

Prepared for:

The New Mexico Department of Corrections Education Bureau

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Background

In 2007, the New Mexico Department of Corrections (DOC) received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice under the Edward Byrne Memorial Grant Program to implement the Career Pathways (CP) program in its correctional facilities. The CP program uses educational and vocational services available within the corrections system and a variety of other State resources to assist inmates in the identification of barriers to employment and the steps required to overcome those barriers (CNMCF 2007). The primary program goal is to promote offender reentry success.

This study is an evaluation of CP program implementation in New Mexico correctional facilities. In particular, we examine staff perceptions and knowledge of the CP program and their experiences with program implementation. This report details our findings from three focus groups with staff members tasked with the implementation of CP.

Research Design

Focus group research is a data collection method that brings together a group of subjects, usually 5 to 10 people, to participate in a guided discussion with one another about a specific topic. In this setting, the researcher acts as a discussion facilitator, rather than interviewer, allowing participants some degree of jurisdiction over the direction and pace of conversation and topics covered. The focus group method is beneficial when the purpose of the research is not only to retrieve information from knowledgeable individuals, but also to assess subject responses to alternative information and perspectives (Weiss, 1998). This method is particularly suited to the evaluation of the CP program, as our primary objectives are: 1) to evaluate both the similarities and discontinuities in staff perceptions of CP, 2) assess staff experiences with the implementation of CP within and across New Mexico DOC facilities, and 3) to explore ways in which the CP program may be improved.

Corrections personnel were selected for participation in the research because they took part in CP training and/or were tasked with CP implementation within their facility. Using a complete list of CP advisors, we divided potential subjects into groups by both the security level and location of the facility where they work. Once the subjects were divided into these groups, we calculated the ideal number of teachers for each focus group from each facility and security-level to ensure a representative and varied sample. We gave this list of sampling requirements to DOC personnel, who then notified potential participants about the research and asked for volunteers. The DOC also arranged for travel for participants to Albuquerque. The focus groups were held at the Institute for Social Research at the University of New Mexico.

In total three focus group sessions were completed. The groups were arranged by supervision level of inmates that participants worked with: one focus group consisted of staff working with low security level inmates, one focus group consisted of staff working with high security level inmates, and one focus group was mixed, consisting of staff that work with low level security

inmates and staff that work with high level security inmates. In New Mexico, inmates are divided into supervision levels ranging from 1 to 6, where 1 is the lowest level of supervision (largely open movement) and 6 is the highest level of supervision (highly restricted movement). For the purposes of this study, we use "low security inmates" to designate those in levels 1 and 2 and "high security inmates" are those designated as levels 3 to 6. Each focus group interview consisted of 4-5 participants and lasted about 1 and ½ hours, providing us with a total of 14 study participants. These 14 participants came from 7 of the 10 correctional facilities in New Mexico. It should be noted that while our focus group samples did not meet our strict sampling criteria, we believe that they represent a useful cross-section of CP advisors from a number of facilities and supervision levels.

The focus group discussion guide listed questions and probes designed to stimulate discussion on: participant knowledge and beliefs about CP program goals and activities, knowledge and beliefs about the efficacy of CP program, and the implementation of the CP program in their facilities. The discussion guide is attached in Appendix 1. The findings of this research are presented in three sections: perceptions of the CP program, barriers to program effectiveness, and participant suggestions for improvement.

Perceptions of Career Pathways Program

Overall, participants view CP positively. They also have a similar understanding of the general goals of the program. However, focus group discussions suggest less clarity and uniformity with respect to how the specific program activities lead to successful reentry. In this section we discuss how participants articulate the goals, activities, and the plausibility of effectiveness of the CP program.

<u>Goals & Activities</u>

There is general consensus among participants on the broad goals of the CP program. The majority of participants agree that CP falls under the general umbrella of reentry programming. Specifically, they identify the primary objective of the program as preparing inmates for employment following their release from prison. While the broad goals of reentry are plainly articulated, the specific goals of the CP program are less clear. One participant suggests that the goal of CP activities is to help students recognize that they have "options" and to provide them with the tools necessary to identify career interests. Others suggest that goals of program activities are not well understood by program staff, especially given the overlap with other reentry and education programs (i.e. Success for Offenders After Release or SOAR).[1]

Participants describe CP activities as consisting of a series of computerized assessments and modules. Scheduling and proctoring these computerized assessments constitutes a substantial part of their duties as a CP advisor. Few participants are able to provide a clear, sequential list of primary activities involved in CP programming. Those who could have engaged in some inter and intra-facility planning. For example, one participant reports that within the facility they developed CP guidebooks to help students complete program activities. The participants

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[1] The issue of CP overlap with SOAR was a recurring theme in the focus group discussions. We will address this in more depth in the section on barriers to program success.

involved in CP planning or implementation activities seem to have a better understanding of how the various program components work together.

There is also some variation in participant responses regarding where CP activities take place. For example, participants who work with low supervision inmates generally report that CP activities are completed in a classroom setting. Participants working with higher supervision inmates report that due to movement restrictions CP activities often have to be conducted on a one-on-one setting. This created obstacles to completing program activities, specifically finding the time to meet with and mentor students.

A number of focus group members suggest mentorship is a large component of the CP program. While some identify the ways in which CP advisement impacts student progress, most focus on how this role changes the nature of "student-teacher" relationships within corrections education programming. CP activities provide teachers with information about students' prior education, work history, and motivations for participating in education programming, which allows the teachers to provide more detailed and personalized advice and information to their students. Some participants note that prior to the implementation of the CP program, restrictions on personnel-inmate interactions prevented them from accessing this type of information about students. These participants further articulate that knowing why a student wants to participate in education programming increases their capacity to advise and motivate students. They also report that the recent change to a single consolidated database of education information facilitates advisement as well. Some participants state that being a CP advisor involves more than just moving students through paperwork. For this program to be beneficial, the participants suggest that students need one-on-one consultations that involve much more than those technically required by CP programming elements. These participants suggest that this is an important part of making the program work, but they are limited in terms of time and training. One person stated that it is difficult to "spend quality time with [advisees] and not just pencil whip it." Others did not mention mentoring as an aspect of the program. Additionally, some participants specifically indicate that they are not qualified to mentor students on career issues. Time and training issues will be addressed in depth in the section on barriers to effectiveness.

Plausibility of Effectiveness

Participants in all three focus groups express the belief that the CP program has potential to help inmates. Often, this is phrased as "I think it could be a good program" or "Career Pathways is a good program, in theory." In discussions focusing on program effectiveness, participants specifically address two factors: the mechanisms linking program participation to student success and the population for whom the program works best.

There are some differences between participants who work with low level supervision inmates and those who work with high level supervision inmates in the articulation of mechanisms linking CP to successful reentry. Those working with lower level inmates are generally more optimistic about how the program can work. These participants provide several examples of the mechanisms that connect CP program participation to reentry success. For some CP is articulated as an effective way to teach students to be introspective about their interests and skills. One participant states that inmates have either not "had the opportunity" or have not taken

"the time to choose what they're going to do" in terms of employment and CP can "help someone carefully select something that really is suitable to them." Participants note that this introspection, while ultimately a positive experience for students, is not necessarily easy, because the students are being asked to reflect on not only their skills, but also on their deficiencies and past mistakes. However, the opportunity to make choices in an environment designed to restrict individual decision-making is empowering to students and promotes interest in the CP program.

Others suggest that CP grounds clients in procedure-based decision-making regarding education and future occupational choices. Procedure-based decision-making has two benefits. First, it facilitates mentorship between teachers and students by integrating structured program activities with regular meetings with program advisors. Second, immersion in a procedure-based decision-making program provides students with an exportable skill that they can use after release for making a variety of life choices. Focus group participants also suggest that participation in the CP program can increase inmate interest in education more broadly. Elaborating on the procedure-based aspects of CP, one participant suggests that program activities "kind of captures [the students] and once they're successful, wow, you really can't keep them away from education." Another participant notes that combining procedure-based decision making with advisement increases student commitment to education. In other words, CP can empower students who get excited about education once they realize they can choose something and work toward it.

Participants working with high supervision inmates agree that these mechanisms are plausible, but are less optimistic that these dynamics can lead to the same outcomes for inmates under strict supervision. These individuals articulate a number of implementation problems that restrict the utility of the program. We discuss implementation issues in the next section. These participants also suggest that inmates under higher levels of supervision are less likely to respond well to education programming. This issue is addressed largely in the context of defining what makes an inmate a good CP student.

In addition to supervision level, focus group participants identify a variety of characteristics that are associated with inmate participation and success in CP programming. Again, we observe a great deal of variation among participants in their perceptions of what makes a good CP student. Some suggest that student motivation is necessary for successful program participation, whereas others suggest that motivated students are the students who need CP the least. Interestingly, opinions on what makes a good CP student often mirror the goals of the program itself—motivation to make a change, being independent, actively participating in programming, having a good attitude toward learning/education, etc.

A few participants suggest that CP programming is inappropriate for some inmates. For example, one participant states that some inmates are not competent to participate in programming due to severe drug abuse and/or decreased cognitive function. Furthermore, some inmates are not believed to be good candidates for CP because they are either not ready or generally unwilling to change. One participant notes that, "if you look at the clientele we work with; turning them into career focused individuals is very difficult." Participants also indicate that some inmates already have career experience and/or job skills. For those inmates who intend to return to their prior occupations, the CP program may be of limited value.

Barriers to Program Effectiveness

Regardless of their perceptions of the CP program, all participants note barriers to program effectiveness. These barriers can be organized into three primary categories. First, focus group participants suggest there are a number of institutional resource obstacles to program implementation, including limited staff training for CP, work time constraints, and technological resources. Second, participants identify some institutional characteristics that may inhibit program effectiveness, focusing largely on the issue of balancing security and privacy. The third set of barriers is related to the structure of educational programming in correctional facilities more broadly.

<u>Implementation</u>

Training

Nearly all focus group participants agree that they are inadequately trained to implement the CP program. Most participants indicate that they attended a training seminar in Ruidoso. While some link this to CP training, others are unaware that the seminars were specific to the CP program. Even among those who identify this as CP training, the majority indicates that training consisted of receiving a binder of forms and general instructions on paperwork duties and bureaucratic obligations. One participant explicitly notes that they "could not connect that training in Ruidoso in 2007 to Career Pathways." Several other participants express agreement with this sentiment. Moreover, participants indicate that this training did not address the "spirit of the program." This was problematic, as many participants believe that the "spirit of the program" is what makes CP special. They also indicate that the training failed to provide them with a clear understanding of the role of a CP advisor. Focus group members also report that they were told that there would be follow-up to the Ruidoso training, but this never materialized. And finally, some participants note that there was an extended period of time between the Ruidoso training session and actual program implementation. Overall, participants suggest that the original training should have been conducted by people with experience in the implementation of the CP program (they recognized that different facilities have different approaches), but they feel the training should focus on program goals and philosophy. In general, focus group participants indicate that they learned how to implement CP from "experience, not from attending the seminar."

Participants also identify a gap in training when new staff members are hired. These individuals are required to implement the CP program, despite receiving no official training. In one instance, on the job training is described as being restricted to the passing of the CP folders from one coworker to another.

Resources

The focus group participants suggest that a lack of resources limits the effectiveness of the CP program. Specifically, participants discuss issues involving a number of resources, including time, personnel, and access to technology.

Participants from all focus groups mention time constraints as a barrier in the implementation of CP. Specifically, participants suggest that there are two types of time constraints: limits to programming time and limits to preparation and paperwork time.

In terms of programming time, some participants indicate that they have trouble arranging time slots for CP activities. While all participants are at least aware of time constraints, some participants are more concerned about programming time than others. For example, for those with students in low supervision settings, freedom of movement allows a more flexible schedule for CP activities and advisement. Conversely, where student movement is restricted, blocks of time have to be created in staff and student daily schedules to arrange for the completion of CP activities. One participant describes this difficulty, stating "they are only out of their pods during certain periods of the day where we conduct classes," suggesting that they are occasionally forced to choose between conducting CP activities and normal classroom activities.

The focus group participants also note that CP preparation and paperwork require a large time investment. Regarding preparation, some participants indicate that they want additional time to prepare for meetings with students. In particular, they express that it is important to do research on job availability for felons, etc., but often have a hard time incorporating this activity into their schedules. All participants agree that the paperwork associated with CP advisement is excessive. The focus group participants describe multiple issues related to paperwork and filing. First, teachers are supervising students in multiple programs and each program has a separate file with a distinct collection of paperwork associated with it. Not only does CP require its own hardcopy file, which adds to the paperwork associated with the staffs' primary teaching responsibilities, CP advisors must also enter all of the files into a computer database. When describing the time associated with data entry, one participant notes, "it took 8 hours. I came in on a Saturday and it took 8 hours to update the computer with all of my records."

Not only does the paperwork take time, focus group participants repeatedly note that teachers have a large work and responsibility load and that being a CP advisor adds to that burden. Some state that they "already had full-time job." To a large extent, participants express favorable attitudes toward the advisor role, but because of the time constraints, their ability to implement the program is limited. Participants indicate that they believe that the administration does not have an accurate conception of how much time the CP program takes to implement. One participant notes that "when people say they don't have enough time, it's not because they are lazy or incompetent", but instead adding CP to existing activities and record keeping requirements stresses already overburdened teachers. The focus group participants largely believe that the administration in and outside of the facility "think that [CP advising] does not take up most of our time" and that time is a non-issue. One participant notes that she was specifically told by a DOC administrator that CP activities should "not take up any time." This participant disagrees with this sentiment, stating that "in order to know these guys you need to talk to them. 15 minutes is not enough."

Both of these time constraints are amplified when education departments are short on staff. Members of all focus groups note a need for additional personnel. Staff loss and turnover create

discontinuities in program implementation. Participants note that additional personnel are needed to make the CP program work.

In addition to time constraints, participants suggest that their departments lack the material resources necessary to successfully implement the CP program. Providing computer access is a primary resource concern. Given that CP has a computer driven curriculum, student access to computers is crucial to program implementation. Computer labs minimize this access issue, but only to the extent that students have some amount of freedom of movement and that the computers are available to them. However, computer access is not evenly available to all students. Instructors teaching courses in computer laboratories can more easily incorporate CP activities into their daily schedules; however, instructors teaching in other environments report having difficulty getting computer time for their students. This obstacle is especially acute for teachers working with high supervision inmates. These instructors have to take laptop computers to their students, which not only increases their time commitment but also requires an adequate supply of laptops.

Related to computer needs, participants also indicate that they encounter problems in executing and evaluating student assessments. In particular, there are two issues: the registration of assessment software and a breakdown in the system of score reporting. Some participants report that licensing updates to the Choices software creates a gap in program activities. When the software is updated, it often takes an extended period of time for the software registration to be completed. In some cases, instructors either substitute an alternative assessment for Choices or skip the Choices component altogether. In terms of score reporting, focus group participants identify a specific breakdown between student completion of ACT's Work Keys and the receipt of a Career Readiness Certificate (CRC). Some report that they are not receiving the scores for Work Keys and their students are not receiving the CRC. The participants suggest that this is a problem because the students are asked to engage in a series of tasks for which they receive no feedback. Moreover, this decreases the advisor's ability to guide students in selecting career options.

Institutional Environment

Education programming in the prison environment is difficult. In addition to the obstacles for CP advisement posed by movement restrictions associated with supervision levels, focus group participants also note that the occurrence of lockdowns creates unpredictable disruptions to their daily activities. Another example of an environmental constraint involves moving programming materials to students through security checkpoints. For example, one participant recounts an incident in which security discouraged the practice of making a laptop computer available to a high supervision inmate in his cell. Participants largely accept these constraints as part of their working environment, but point out that these issues increase the amount of time needed to complete CP activities.

More specifically, many focus group participants state that CP program activities require a certain amount of privacy, which at times is compromised by the presence of security personnel. Given that CP advisors are dealing with a population that already has "trust issues," participants believe it is important to build trust. A few participants note that security access to student

information is problematic. For example, one participant describes the process by which he has students construct a "list" used for personal reflection. He notes, however, "if we ask them to do a list, which is very, very personal, security can go and look at it. And they don't need to be looking at it." These privacy issues are problematic, as one participant notes that this type of incident "could really, very rapidly can destroy the trust" that is crucial to program success.

Participants suggest that student turnover is another obstacle to program implementation that derives in part from the institutional environment. Specifically, they note that when inmates transfer from one facility to another there is a lapse in the student's program participation. This delay is articulated as resulting largely from the delay in transferring the inmate's student files from one facility to the other. In addition, the constant infusion of new inmates into the CP program means that each CP advisor has students at various stages of program completion. While CP is a program tailored to individual students, this increases the time necessary for teacher preparation for CP activities. Student attrition issues may also be the result of inmate loss of eligibility for program participation due to a new infraction, early release of inmates, and program switching within the education department. We report participant perspectives on program competition in the next section.

Structure of Education Programming

Parallel Programming

Corrections education departments administer a variety of programs. Focus group participants identify a number of education programs available to inmates, including: Adult Basic Education (ABE), Special Education, and College and Vocational Training courses. All focus group participants are involved in the administration of these education programs and believed that education is important to reentry success. They also discuss reentry specific programs like SOAR, Pre-Release, and Cognitive Education. In general, they view education and reentry programs as two distinct areas of programming. CP is a reentry program; however it is being implemented within the education environment. The blurring of education and reentry programming associated with the implementation of CP creates some degree of confusion about programming more broadly. Participants identify two organizational issues that stem from the infusion of reentry activities in education programming.

First, they note competition between programs both for participants and time. Inmates have a number of programming options, which create competition for student recruitment. This is particularly troublesome for CP, as most of these programs offer Lump Sum Awards (LSAs) and CP does not. In general, participants indicate inmates are more likely to enroll in programs that offer LSAs.   For some instructors, the lack of an LSA means that they have trouble meeting their CP student quotas. Generally, CP advisors have found creative ways to recruit CP students. For example, some vocational instructors enroll their entire class in CP. Others use CP as a prerequisite for LSA programs. Overall, focus group participants do not seem to think that offering LSAs for CP participation is a good idea. One participant states, "it doesn't have a lump sum attached to it, that's a good thing, I hope it never does." The rational for keeping CP lump sum free is that program effectiveness depends on students taking the program seriously. They suggest that LSAs would lead to the recruitment of students who are not serious about the CP

program. In terms of time, all of the focus group participants are responsible for CP and other educational programming activities. When forced to choose between CP and other activities, many of the participants suggest that they are more likely to spend their time working in other areas. For example, one person said, "to me, Career Pathways is put on the backburner because I don't find that it's important to them. I mean, their goal is to get a GED, so that's what we work on."

Second, participants observe some amount of repetition of activities across programs. Many of the CP activities are already part of other reentry initiatives. One implication is that students get frustrated and bored when asked to complete the same activities over and over again. One participant elaborates on this, saying that "it's really confusing and frustrating for a lot of these guys… I think we really need to stand back and objectively look at all of these programs and the redundancy and overlap and maybe streamline, if we streamline some of these programs or put them together maybe we would have enough staff to run them all."

These two issues are highlighted in participant reflections on the overlap between SOAR and CP. In some places, CP and SOAR are in contention for the same population of students. One participant repeatedly laments that SOAR is stealing his CP students. This contention between CP and SOAR is the largely the result of two issues. First, participants state that they are unclear who the target population for CP is and how this is different from the appropriate population for SOAR. Second, CP and SOAR have similar objectives and activities. To the degree that this is true, participants suggest that both programs are not necessary. Some suggested that SOAR is the better program, as it incorporates a dedicated coordinator position with more training and a wider variety of prerelease services. For example, participants note that while SOAR is "almost the same as career pathways", they generally recommend that inmates participate in "SOAR because it's a little more complete a program than what career pathways is." Another participant notes that he would not recommend students to CP "when they're eligible for SOAR instead." Depending on the time left on an inmate's sentence, the participant states that he would "encourage them to join SOAR than Career Pathways." In general, participants argue that SOAR is a better program, because the SOAR coordinators are better trained and because it offers a wider variety of services for inmates. Some participants did note, however, that CP can be a more personalized experience for the student than SOAR.

Staff Buy-in

Focus group participants suggest that not all education employees have bought into the CP program. The buy-in issue is not a surprise, as some participants suggest that the bureau knew "at that meeting two years ago there was going to be a schism" between staff who would see the program as beneficial and those who would not. The buy-in issue seems largely driven by implementation concerns and not by program worthiness. Again, most participants agree that the program has the potential to help inmates, but several are unconvinced that the program can be widely effective in its current form.

Some focus group members suggest staff buy-in issues in part result from both the manner in which programs are introduced and the delivery of program training. Participants note that "when people get programs from [above] saying implement this and this is how you need to do it

in your facility, it creates a lot of resentment." Several participants suggest that the "top brass" are not aware of their working conditions and therefore unable to understand their frustrations. Ultimately, it does not seem to be the case that the education staff are inherently adverse to change, but rather are adverse to adding programs to existing curriculum without moving toward a programming plan that ties curriculum together coherently. The perception among staff is that new programming is created by administration based on grant funding availability, not based on the needs of the facility, education departments, teachers, and/or students. Participants suggest that some educators are skeptical that grant-driven programs will be around long enough to warrant their investment. Several participants state that they expect the CP program to be replaced with something new in a relatively short amount time. For example, one participant with largely favorable views of the CP program notes that he expects the department to make "another whole shift, and that's what's so frustrating. You just start getting an understanding and then we've got a new deal."

Moreover, some participants indicate that the CP program represents a fundamental change to their job descriptions, as they believe that the Education Bureau is asking teachers to be career counselors. These participants note that the role of the teacher as counselor/advisor is difficult and unclear. Some focus group participants report that they do not feel as though they have been adequately trained to act as counselors. One participant repeated multiple times "we are not counselors." However, some participants view the counseling aspect of CP more favorably. One participant describes being a CP advisor as a professional "growth experience" that allows education personnel to transcend the "narrow role" of teacher.

Some participants state that staff buy-in is also important to student success. When asked to describe what makes a good CP student, one participant responds that students do better in the program when they perceive the staff to be genuinely interested rather than just fulfilling bureaucratic programming requirements. Specifically, the participant suggests that the students who are going to do well in CP are those that are "motivated to make a change" and those that "see us really trying to help them make that change." Continued engagement in CP activities depends upon the student's perception that the teacher is "not doing this because it's a bureaucratic responsibility," but because the teacher projects "the aura" that he or she is interested in making sure that the students do not return to prison. Regardless of whether or not teachers should be tasked with implementing CP, one participant suggests that all education instructors need to see this program as valuable in order to be sure that it is made available to their students.

Participant Suggestions for Improvement

In addition to describing problems that they observed in the implementation of the CP program, focus group participants also made several suggestions that they believe would improve the CP program. Some of these suggestions are generic toward educational programming in the correctional environment (like for example, the need for more education staff and more general resources), while others are more specific to the CP program. In this section, we focus on describing the suggestions made by focus group participants that are directly related to the CP program.

While most suggestions regarding resources can be considered general, participants make several recommendations that are specific to the CP program. Specifically, members from all three focus groups describe a variety of technical and access issues relating to computers and computer software. The frequency and consistency with which these issues are identified suggest that the Education Bureau would be well served to conduct an internal review of their computer resources with the aim of ensuring that each facility has an adequate number of computers and access to the appropriate software packages.

Some participants suggest that each facility have a CP manager or coordinator position, similar to the coordinator position employed by the SOAR program. According to these participants, the combination of inadequate training and time constraints limit teacher's ability to correctly operate as CP advisors. This is problematic for some participants, as they clearly express a desire to do CP correctly, but feel that it is impossible to do so, given their current circumstances. These participants argue that creating a position dedicated to CP advisement would improve both the implementation of the CP program and would allow for other education personnel to better complete their other tasks and duties.

Virtually all focus group participants describe a need for and are open to additional training, provided that the training is better implemented than the Ruidoso training sessions. More specifically, some participants advocate for the utility of a best practices approach to training that takes into account the differences across facilities, yet establishes basic standards and acknowledges the value of collaboration and communication. While there is general support for attending future training sessions, the participants indicate that simply having the opportunity to meet and discuss CP and other programming issues with their peers would be helpful. In fact, many focus group participants expressed enthusiasm at having the chance to discuss CP issues in the context of the focus group and found this discussion process to be helpful. Several participants suggested, both during and after the focus group sessions, that they are likely to take some of the information and strategies that they learned from their colleagues back to their home facilities.

In addition to training and communication issues within the education bureau, focus group participants suggest that collaboration with staff from other departments would improve their ability to implement the CP program successfully.   Under the current setup, some participants note that CP work is completed in isolation from their colleagues. These participants suggest that CP could be more effective with follow-up by and collaboration with other corrections personnel. More generally, some participants suggest that the program's potential is inhibited to the degree that there is limited collaboration and/or coordination between education and reentry personnel and programs.   For example, one participant states that case workers should be more involved with the CP advisor. Others suggest that the CP program needs to include more follow-up and should involve probation and parole officers.

Focus group participants suggest that CP advisors are inappropriately evaluated. The current evaluation system is described as a monthly computerized audit that is based on whether or not student information has been entered into the database. Several participants suggest that the issues of entering data in a timely fashion and being an effective CP advisor are largely distinct. For example, one person states that "if you do a lot and don't put it into the computer, it says you

did nothing." The participants' main objections with the current audit system ties into the time constraints associated with being a CP advisor. For many people, entering the data is, at best, a secondary activity associated with being an effective CP advisor that is not nearly as important as the other activities that they conduct. On this topic, one person notes that being a CP advisor is very time intensive "if it's done right, if you're not pencil whipping", but that "if you pencil whip it and put it on the computer they think you're doing a great job." Another participant suggests that the database only needs updating when students reach milestones, as opposed to entering the data on a monthly basis. Focus group participants, while clearly unsatisfied with the current evaluation system, do not offer many direct suggestions on how to address the auditing issue.

And finally, some focus group participants imply that the both the target population of inmates for CP and the staff charged with administering the program should be reevaluated. Focus group members are largely unable to describe an ideal target population for the CP program, but they generally agree the program is not suitable for everyone and that the initial recruitment instructions that they received are not useful. Moreover, participants identify contradictory methods and standards for selection and recruitment, suggesting that CP recruitment varies significantly by both facility and advisor. In terms of staff, many participants (including both ABE and other instructors) suggest that some ABE instructors are often too busy to successfully implement CP. While these concerns are clearly tied to staffing shortages and the current evaluation process, some participants imply that it may only be necessary for ABE instructors to identify potential CP students and funnel them to appropriate personnel. A serious reevaluation of who should and should not be a CP instructor could improve overall buy-in for the program and improve program efficiency.

Conclusion

Overall, focus group members view Career Pathways positively. They agree that it is plausible for CP to assist inmates in successful reentry. A number of participants also report that working with students in a one-on-one setting enhances their capacity to assist inmates in setting, working toward, and achieving education goals and in making future career plans. In a grand sense, there is support for programming like CP. Education personnel seem committed to the goal of rehabilitation. However, they also believe the current structure of education and reentry programming and the institutional setting makes proper implementation difficult.

Regardless of their attitude toward CP, all participants note numerous barriers to program implementation and effectiveness in their facilities. These barriers include:

- A lack of resources to carry out program activities in an efficient and effective manner,
- General time constraints on completing not only program activities but also associated record keeping,
- Institutional characteristics that exasperate time constraint problems, erode student privacy and therefore student-teacher trust necessary for effective advising, and create disruptions to student program participation,
- A lack of clarity on how CP activities should be incorporated into existing education and reentry initiatives (program competition), and

- Unsatisfactory training and guidance on implementation, which is related to insufficient staff buy-in.

Even with these obstacles, some participants report that CP is working well in their classrooms and facilities. Two approaches to program implementation stand out. First, participants working in facilities where education personnel collaborate with one another to generate facility-specific program plans and materials suggest that CP is an integral part of their education/reentry programming. In addition, some staff report seeking guidance from their counterparts at other facilities and adopting these strategies of implementation. Where collaboration like this exists, participants report less confusion about their roles and express more satisfaction with their work. It seems that this dynamic is most effective where the teachers themselves are involved in deciding how CP is implemented. Second, participants working in departments that have developed creative methods for integrating CP into their existing program structure also report more effective implementation. For example, in some facilities CP is inserted into existing programming as a prerequisite for other education initiatives. This decreases both confusion about student recruitment and program competition. Others have incorporated CP directly into their classroom activities, essentially recruiting all of their students into CP, either formally or informally. This strategy seems to work best for vocational instructors and those who are working in classrooms with computers. Defining a space for CP in relation to existing program sequences may relieve some of the issues with program competition as well as alleviate the stress of dividing staff responsibilities into teaching and advising roles.

Recommendations

The findings presented in this report point to a number of activities that could both improve Career Pathways program implementation and increase staff buy-in. First, we recommend that the DOC conduct a thorough examination of the overlap between CP and other education and reentry programming. As described by focus group members, many CP advisors and students are frustrated by the overlap present in various correctional programs. Some of this overlap is likely necessary and perhaps even useful for student learning. However, a careful analysis of the features and goals of programs offered by the DOC might allow the Education Bureau to better identify program areas that are over and/or under-addressed. This would allow the Education Bureau to streamline, organize, and integrate their program offerings, thereby increasing the efficiency and utility of education programming. Related to this, we recommend that the Education Bureau evaluate CP and other education programs in order to more formally identify the target population for different types of education programming. By more clearly defining the target population for each program, the Education Bureau may be able to better ensure that the students receive appropriate programming while minimizing unnecessary repetition for both students and teachers.

We also recommend an assessment of current technology holdings. Many of the focus group participants note that they lack access to key program resources (desktops, laptops, software). As such, an assessment should produce both a database of material holdings by facility and database of material access by employees. Given the central role of computers and computer software in CP programming, it seems important to ensure that education staff at all facilities

have access to an adequate number of appropriately equipped computers for both record keeping and program driven purposes.

Finally, we recommend that the Education Bureau develop a plan for continuing training for the CP program. The focus group participants appear to have found the process of discussing and sharing ideas about CP to be a useful activity. As such, it may be useful to encourage and make possible collaboration among those tasked with CP advisement within and across facilities. Given the focus group comments, it may be useful to do this both through an annual CP training and by fostering more regular and less structured communication between CP advisers within and across facilities. On a related note, overall CP implementation would likely improve if the Education Bureau also developed a formal training procedure for new employees tasked with CP advisement.

Appendix 1: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Knowledge

1. What are the primary goals of the career pathways program?
2. What are the primary program activities?
3. How do these activities contribute to meeting program goals?

Beliefs

4. How would you characterize the level of success of the past year of career pathways programming?
5. How would you characterize student perceptions of the program?
    a. Do they enjoy participating in the program?
    b. Do they find it helpful?
    c. Do students express opinions about how the program could be improved?
6. In general, how successful can a program like career pathways be?
7. To what extent can career pathways enhance inmate skills?
    a. Improving goal setting skills
    b. Development of strong family relationships
    c. Improving educational/employability levels
    d. Improving social skills and responsibility
8. What kinds of student characteristics affect program participation and completion?
    a. Student Attitude
    b. Student Education History
    c. Student Work History
    d. Student Criminal History
9. What kinds of institutional characteristics have affected career pathways program implementation in your facility?
10. Do institutional characteristics affect student attitude/participation in the program?
    a. If so, in what ways?

Implementation

11. What kinds of training did you receive for implementing the career pathways program?
    a. What aspects of the training did you find helpful?
    b. How do you think training can be improved?
12. What kinds of resources are necessary for successful implementation of the career pathways program?
    a. Which of these resources are available at your facility?
    b. What kinds of resources are needed to improve program implementation at your facility?