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CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION WORK GROUP REVIEW OF THE NORTHSTAR REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

At the request of the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, the Abell Foundation commissioned Northstar Correctional Education Services to review and report on the current condition of correctional education programs in Maryland and make recommendations in the transition from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

The Northstar Report offers a broad range of observations and a variety of recommendations. The report and recommendations were reviewed in detail by the Correctional Education and Re-Entry Work Group Subcommittee Chairs (“CE Chairs Working Group”), representing senior staff from MSDE, DLLR, GWIB, DPSCS and CEA. Of the 42 Northstar recommendations, ten addressed personnel and internal administration issues. These were forwarded to the Internal Administration Work Group for further consideration.

The CE Chairs Working Group analyzed the remaining programmatic recommendations. The results of that review are captured in the attached chart. In sum, the CE Chairs Working Group found that the majority of the Northstar recommendations were addressed in the CE Work Group’s own set of 22 recommendations presented at the Transition Council’s November 12th meeting. The chairs also agreed that several of the Northstar recommendations require further study while four of their recommendations do not merit adoption.

Requested Action:

The CE Chairs Working Group recommends that the Transition Council approve:

1. the adoption of an additional CE Work Group Recommendation encouraging further study of several issues, and
2. make the inclusion of this summary and the attached chart part of the Transition Council’s Final Report.

Background

On October 26-31, 2008, Northstar contractors traveled to Maryland to speak with staff and to observe several prisons in three geographic areas of Maryland: Northstar visited the following sites:

MCI-W – Maryland Correctional Institution for Women
MCI-J – Maryland Correctional Institution – Jessup

MSDE HQ – Maryland State Department of Education headquarters in Baltimore
DOC HQ – Division of Corrections headquarters in Baltimore
OSTC – Occupational Skills Training Center
WCI – Western Correctional Institution
MCTC – Maryland Correctional Training Center
RCI – Roxbury Correctional Institution
ECI-W – Eastern Correctional Institution – West
NBCI – North Branch Correctional Institution

Northstar also met with staff from the following institutions:

ECI-E – Eastern Correctional Institution – East /Annex
MCPRS – Maryland Correctional Pre-Release System
PATX – Patuxent Institution
JCI – Jessup Correctional Institution
MTC – Metropolitan Transition Center
BCCC – Baltimore City Correctional Center
BCDC – Baltimore City Detention Center
MCI-H – Maryland Correctional Institution – Hagerstown
MCI-J – Maryland Correctional Institution – Jessup

Guiding Principles

Northstar reports that three fundamental questions guided their systemic program review and formed the foundation for all recommendations:

1. What is the mission/purpose of this school?
2. What are the services provided to accomplish the mission?
3. What evidence demonstrates that services are accomplishing the mission/purpose?

CE Work Group Chairs Review Process

The CE Chairs Working Group met on December 2, 2008 to review the Northstar Report and thoroughly consider all the recommendations. Their consensus of the recommendations follow:

Northstar recommendation	CE Chairs Working Group Analysis	Notes:
1. Postpone the continuing implementation of the new curriculum until two things happen: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSDE employees have been successfully transferred to DLLR • Instructors and the curriculum committee solicit direct feedback from principals and academic instructors statewide. 	Reject	The statewide curriculum implemented in FY2008 needs to be continued with the modification cited in an MSDE Nov 13, 2008 memo. Additional training will be provided to teachers and principals to support the implementation.
2. Retain or recruit a highly qualified, experienced correctional education director to administer the statewide school system. Singular leadership, with representation from both education and workforce reporting directly to the director, will ensure better collaboration of services.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
3. Maintain the current number of site principals. This site leadership is critical to quality education programs and statewide standardization.	Accept	Addressed in SB 203 and in CE Work Group Recommendations to continue current PIN positions
4. Increase number of teacher PINs to meet student demand and maintain the current level of involvement with community colleges.	Accept in principle but has fiscal implications that require further study	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
5. Pursue accreditation (see <i>Accreditation and Federal Mandates Regarding Education</i> , p. 37).	Accept in principle but has fiscal implications that require further study	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
6. Follow the national trend of beginning exit strategies at entry. In other words, as offenders are assessed at intake, prescriptive programming should begin with the end product in mind and all movement, treatment, and scheduling follows this prescription when possible. Safety and security compels close collaboration with DPSCS's Division of Corrections to effectively implement this recommendation.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations

Northstar recommendation	CE Chairs Working Group Analysis	Notes:
7. Reduce redundancy of services. In an era of funding shortages, a closer collaboration and more transparent communication among Education, DOC, and MCE may expose that similar or identical reentry components are being offered through multiple venues.	Accept, but what was perceived as redundancy is part of a continuation of services model, not redundancy.	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
8. Create Internet work stations for educators at secure locations. In 2008, access to the Internet at one's place of employment is no longer optional, especially for educators. At several locations, teachers only had access to Internet either at their principal's station or at home. At least one site has the principal print out emails to the intended recipient, a laborious and unreliable exercise which eliminates any option of confidentiality.	Accept in principle but has fiscal implications that require further study	Mobile units are an effort to provide internet access with supervision to soon to be released inmates.
9. Avoid tying literacy certificate numbers directly to performance evaluations during this first year of transition.	Reject – basic premise is inaccurate	
10. Explore additional incentives for education participation.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
11. Expand apprenticeship opportunities both behind the fence and post-release.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
12. Research and implement strategies or incentives for acceptance throughout the business community of hiring former offenders.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
13. Expand vocational training at pre-release centers.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
14. Select new vocational training opportunities according to the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer probable employment opportunities post-release • offer broader application to the workforce rather than a specific trades-based program • provide females more opportunities for self-sufficiency and independence • afford opportunities for students to give back to the community through real-world contributions • provide relevant training that keeps students meaningfully engaged • recognize that some offenders will not be released from facilities and require contribution opportunities • align with <i>WorkKeys</i> assessments 	Accept in principle	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
15. Implement <i>WorkKeys</i> and <i>KeyTrain</i> .	Requires further study due to fiscal implications	

Northstar recommendation	CE Chairs Working Group Analysis	Notes:
16. Create an advisory committee for each vocational training program.	Accept	Current policy
17. Facilitate job interviews behind the fence. With DLLR's employer connections, it seems feasible that real-time job interviews could be conducted prior to release.	Accept in principle but has fiscal implications that require further study	See footnote ¹
18. Place One-Stop Shops behind the fences wherever possible with employee liaisons at each.	Accept in principle but has fiscal implications that require further study	Mobile units are an effort to provide services (with supervision) to soon to be released inmates.
19. Validate institutional employment.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
20. Provide specific workforce development training to correctional ed staff.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
21. Increase the number of professional development conferences educators are able to attend from the current level of one per year.	Accept in principle but has fiscal implications that require further study	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
22. Promote professional memberships such as CEA and ACTE (Association for Career and Technical Education) which advocate and provide support for correctional educators.	Accept in principle but has fiscal implications that require further study	

¹ Mock job interviews are conducted behind the fence. At the Occupational Skills Training Center, recommended occupational training graduates eligible for work release have been interviewed on site as well as the worksite.

Although concerted efforts have been made to have employers come in the prisons to interview qualified inmates, it usually does not meet the employers hiring needs to wait for that inmate to actually be released. The employer pool continues to be too small and as an offender workforce community, we have focused our employer engagement primarily on hiring individuals who are available for work as soon as possible.

Northstar recommendation	CE Chairs Working Group Analysis	Notes:
23. Advocate for a certification representative for correctional educators. The centralized process of recertification or licensure renewal appears tedious and frustrating; whereas, educators who may register in local counties with a regional representative rather than through MSDE’s headquarters seem to experience less frustration.	Accept in principle but has fiscal implications that require further study	
24. Streamline data management. This applies to student tracking/ advancement and informational dissemination.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
25. Track offenders post-release into employment and advocate with employers for hiring former offenders.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
26. Align any new education data collection system with National Reporting Standards employed by the US Department of Education.	Accept	Current policy
27. Provide an orientation to basic college skills such as note-taking, study habits, and reading for retention to increase potential student success. The gap between a recent GED completer and someone ready for the rigor of college academics can be enormous. The structure of direct instruction in GED preparation courses does not adequately prepare students for the complexity of college courses or the personal responsibility required for college-level academics. Developmental study skills courses could bridge the gap.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations; Current practice
28. Use the Complete Battery TABE for Certificate Levels II, III, and IV only as those are measured in the School Improvement process. This reduces over-testing students and decreases time out of class for teachers.	Reject – basic premise is inaccurate	
29. Assemble an advisory group once the transition is complete to act as both mediator and guide with respect to on-going communication improvement. In addition to education and DOC representation, this advisory group might include Maryland or non-Maryland experts in correctional custody, administration, education, social work, treatment, case management, labor, both unionized and non-unionized trades, and college academics.	Accept	Addressed in CE Work Group Recommendations
30. Explore early retirement options. Some educators expressed an interest in an early-retirement option in light of this transfer.	Reject – Basic premise is inaccurate	

Promising Practices

The Northstar Report also outlined more than twenty replicable national practices, some of which are already in use in Maryland. The CE Chairs Working Group views five of these recommendations as worthy of further exploration:

- **LACES data tracking system** is an exciting and emerging data tracking system in correctional education (Literacy Adult and Community Education System). Designed with a cognitive psychology basis, LACES addresses the unique data tracking needs of special needs students. Tasks are defined, mastery levels identified (either binary or graded), data fields created, and the LACES system is programmed. Specifically, this system has the capability of tracking micro-measurements. LACES is designed to be a hybrid system and synchronize data from either stand-alone terminals or Internet-based protocols (requiring no Internet for such non-secure locations as teacher desks). Used in a correctional setting, LACES can also track students associated with ABE, GED and ESL programs, including classroom-based activities. LACES also tracks students who are matched on a one-to-one basis and/or small group instruction. LACES tracks outcome measures such as educational gains, goal achievement, and attendance hours. A significant strength of this system is the capability to connect to other data tracking systems such as Parole and Probation, Workforce Centers, Department of Mental Health and Corrections.
- **Iowa's data collection system** captures correctional education data comprehensively, efficiently, and with both end-users and effective retrieval in mind. Iowa's ICON system is a fully integrated data system that tracks offenders from pre-trial, through incarceration, and into parole. It is worthy of a demonstration.
- **Iowa's internal networked system** allows access to offender handbooks, canteen orders, downloaded newspapers, dietary menus, offender FAQ's, schedules and other paper- and staff-saving tasks.
- **Ohio's web design program.** Currently inmates in Ohio are designing websites for actual use on the Internet; uploading is executed off-site by a staff instructor. CEA's entire Transforming Lives Network website was designed without ever communicating by phone with either the instructor or the students. Clients request designs and are given multiple choices. Faith-based and non-profit organizations often cannot afford professional web design but desire a professional look. Through interaction with an outside client, students can learn crucial socialization skills while learning a marketable skill, and potentially securing minimal income.
- **Wisconsin's Job Service Kiosks**, located within the Wisconsin Department of Corrections adult facilities, offer real-time connection to a Job Service website that contains current job openings throughout the state. Offenders can research job openings, access information regarding current job opportunities available by region or city, including contact information to request job applications and set up post-release interviews.

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