

# ***Department of Correctional Education***

## ***“Fighting Crime Through Education”***

Impact of Learning Disabilities on  
the Correctional System

SJR 327-Prisoner Re-Entry

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# Definition of a Learning Disability

- A specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations.

20 U.S.C. §1401(26)(A); 34 C.F.R. §300.7(c)(10)(i) and (ii)

## LD Stats-National Adult Literacy Survey-1992

- 3% of adults age 16 and older reported having a learning disability
- Of those self-reporting learning disabilities, 39% were employed full-time compared to 51% of the general population. The mean salary of persons with learning disabilities was \$14,958 as compared to \$23,131 of those without self-reported learning disabilities.

# Bureau of Justice Statistics

- 68% of state prison inmates did not receive a high school diploma or the equivalency. Of these 66% were identified as having a learning disability.
- In 1997 41% of inmates in state, federal and local jails had not completed high school or a GED as compared to 18% of the general populations.

# Prevalence Rates for LD in Correctional Settings

- Prevalence rates of learning disabilities (LD) range from 12% to 70% for adjudicated youth and adults.
- Dunwant(1982) found 36% of incarcerated youth had LD but were 220% more likely to commit delinquent offenses than normally achieving youth. It was also found that youth with LD displayed higher rates of recidivism and parole failure (Larson, 1988)\*
- Youth with LD are more likely to manifest elements of attentional, academic, social-perception, social-relationship, and self-esteem difficulties.

\*Journal of Learning Disabilities, Vol. 27, No. 4, April 1994 pp. 215-225

# Link Between LD and Delinquency

- Research shows that there is a correlation between delinquent behavior and low academic behavior (Grande, 1988). Conversely, it has been shown that improvement in academic skills through remedial instruction reduces delinquency of adjudicated youth.\*

\*Journal of Learning Disabilities, Vol. 26, No. 6, June/July 1993 pp 417-423.

## ***DCE's Special Education Population***

- As of the December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 Child Count for the juvenile schools, there were 405 students identified as needing special education services. Of these, 103 were identified as having a specific learning disability.
- In the adult schools, as of 7/30/07, there were 145 identified as needing special education services. Of these, 65 were identified as having a specific learning disability.

## DCE's Adult Population

- At least 25% of the adult inmates entering the correctional system in Virginia test below the 4<sup>th</sup> grade literacy level on the Tests for Adult Basic Education (TABE).
- Recent data indicates that there are over 17,000 inmates in the system that do not have either a GED or a high school diploma.



# DCE's Adult Population

- Students over the age of 22 no longer are considered eligible for Special Education services.
- In response to HB 2625 directing the Department of Correctional Education to establish a system for identifying inmates with learning disabilities, DCE is conducting a simple screening with all inmates over the age of 22. To date, we have identified over 900 who may have a specific learning disability.

# DCE's Response to Students with Learning Disabilities

- We do not have the resources to do further diagnostic testing.
- We do acknowledge that a significant number of our students have cognitive deficits.
- We have trained all of our adult academic teachers in instructional strategies for working with adults with learning disabilities (*Bridges to Practice*)
- We have established a process by which we can administer untimed Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and compare that with TABE that are given with the time requirement to establish a discrepancy. This documentation is used to seek accommodations on the GED tests.

## Next Steps.....

- **Providing training to youth and adult staff on a regular basis on LD – friendly instructional strategies.**
- **Reviewing an additional battery of assessments that teachers can utilize to further identify strengths and weaknesses of students with learning difficulties, i.e. VAK, Rosner Test of Auditory Analysis, Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation.**
- **Exploring possible collaboration with human service agencies, such as the Department of Rehabilitative Services and the Department for the Visually Handicapped.**