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Prisons, STAR Academy Produce GED Completions

(Pierre) –State prison inmates and juveniles in the state’s juvenile corrections programs received twenty-one percent of the 1,425 General Education Development (GED) High School Equivalency certificates issued in South Dakota during 2004.

A total of 301 state prison inmates and youth in the state run juvenile corrections programs completed their GED last year. 156 of those completions were from inmates at the Mike Durfee State Prison (MDSP) in Springfield, which is one of the state’s GED testing sites. The Durfee State Prison test site produced the third most completions of GED’s in the state last year. Approximately eleven percent of all the GED completions in the state in 2004 were from inmates at MDSP.

Some 1,473 inmates have completed their GED at the Springfield prison since testing began there in 1985.

Twenty-six percent of the inmates entering the state prison system between July 1, 2003 and June 30, 2004 did not have a high school diploma or GED. Department of Corrections policy requires inmates who enter prison without a high school diploma or its equivalent to work toward completing their GED while incarcerated.

"We believe finishing the GED is an important element in self-worth, and that self-worth is an important element in being stable in society," says John McNeill, GED program director at the prison. "Although the immediate teaching goal of Springfield's GED department is to help inmates complete the GED, everything we do is intended to meet our primary goal which is to involve inmates in learning and experiences that will keep them from recidivating and coming back to prison."

"If I could only have one program available to inmates, it would be the GED program," said Bob Dooley, Warden at MDSP. "It’s that important."

The State Treatment and Rehabilitation (STAR) Academy near Custer also assists youth housed there with preparing for the GED testing. Youth may work to earn a GED during their stay at STAR Academy if they are significantly behind in their coursework towards a high school diploma. A total of 65 youth earned their GED through the Career Learning Center of the Black Hills while in STAR Academy programs during 2004. Ninety-four percent of the youth at STAR

Academy who took the GED last year passed. STAR Academy also features an accredited middle and high school known as the STAR Evergreen High School for youth to earn credits toward graduation. In 2004, fourteen high school diplomas were issued to students at STAR Academy.

The GED is a battery of five multiple-choice tests that ask questions about subjects covered in high school. The exam covers reading, mathematics, social studies, science and writing skills. The writing skills portion includes a 200-word essay. Students have two years to complete all five of the tests. If they fail to complete the tests within that time period, they have to start the process over again.

The number of GED completions in calendar year 2004 by DOC facility:

Mike Durfee State Prison	156
STAR Academy	65
South Dakota State Penitentiary	50
South Dakota Women's Prison	30

According to the American Council of Education, about one out of every seven people who receive high school diplomas each year earns that diploma by passing the GED tests.

Ninety percent of colleges and universities recognize the GED. Passage of the GED tests puts a person in the upper 25th percentile in terms of class rank, and lets colleges know the person has the skills and knowledge equivalent to applicants from traditional high schools.

More than 95 percent of employers nationwide employ GED graduates on the same basis as high school graduates in terms of hiring, salary, and opportunity for advancement.

Sixty-five percent of GED test-takers plan to enter college, a university, trade or technical school, or business school during the next year.