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Ohio's youth prisons push education, graduation

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By [Alan Johnson](#)

The Columbus Dispatch • Friday January 2, 2015 4:04 AM

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Being locked up doesn't mean Ohio juveniles escape getting an education.

New statistics show that 115 juveniles incarcerated in Ohio Department of Youth Services facilities in the 2013-14 school year graduated, 29 with high-school diplomas and 86 with a high-school equivalency certificate.

The Correctional Institution Inspection Committee, a watchdog state agency for adult and juvenile prisons, reported recently that 727 youths received school services during the year.

The Department of Youth Services has its own school district — the Buckeye United School District — which has an annual budget of \$12.7 million. The district must adhere to the same standards as other schools overseen by the Ohio Department of Education. A high school is in each of the three juvenile detention facilities, and students must take and pass the same graduation tests as those in the outside world.

Since the 2009-10 school year, 919 juveniles graduated with a high-school degree or earned an equivalency certificate, according to the committee's report. The number has gone down each year as the number of offenders in youth prisons shrank dramatically.

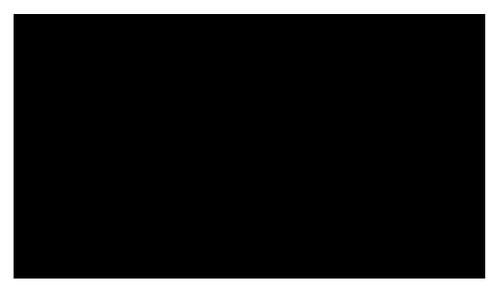
Youth Services spokeswoman Frances Russ said the agency doesn't have long to deal with youth offenders since the average stay is 10

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months. The average age in DYS facilities is 17.

“We also have opportunities for them to get involved in apprenticeship programs,” Russ said. “We need them to complete their education if possible before they leave us.”

The agency has building trades, horticulture, green energy, computer repair and culinary/cook programs. New apprenticeship programs will focus on facilities management, landscaping and dog training.

Because many offenders fell behind or dropped out of school, about half are on individualized education programs to provide special-education services, the report said.

Although one might imagine that attendance in a prison school wouldn't be a problem, average attendance was between 85.9 percent and 94.7 percent in the past school year, with a small percentage of “unexcused absences.”

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