

Evaluating Education and Training Opportunities in Montana's Prisons

Department of Corrections

Audit Lead: Alyssa Sorenson

Objective

Determine if adult education and career training programs in secure correctional facilities are effectively and equitably provided to improve offender educational attainment and post-release employment outcomes.

Methodology

Interviewed department staff & management

Interviewed stakeholders

Previously incarcerated individuals, Board of Pardons & Parole, DLI staff, OPI staff, OCHE staff, ACLU, staff of reentry nonprofit.

Visited and toured all four adult prisons

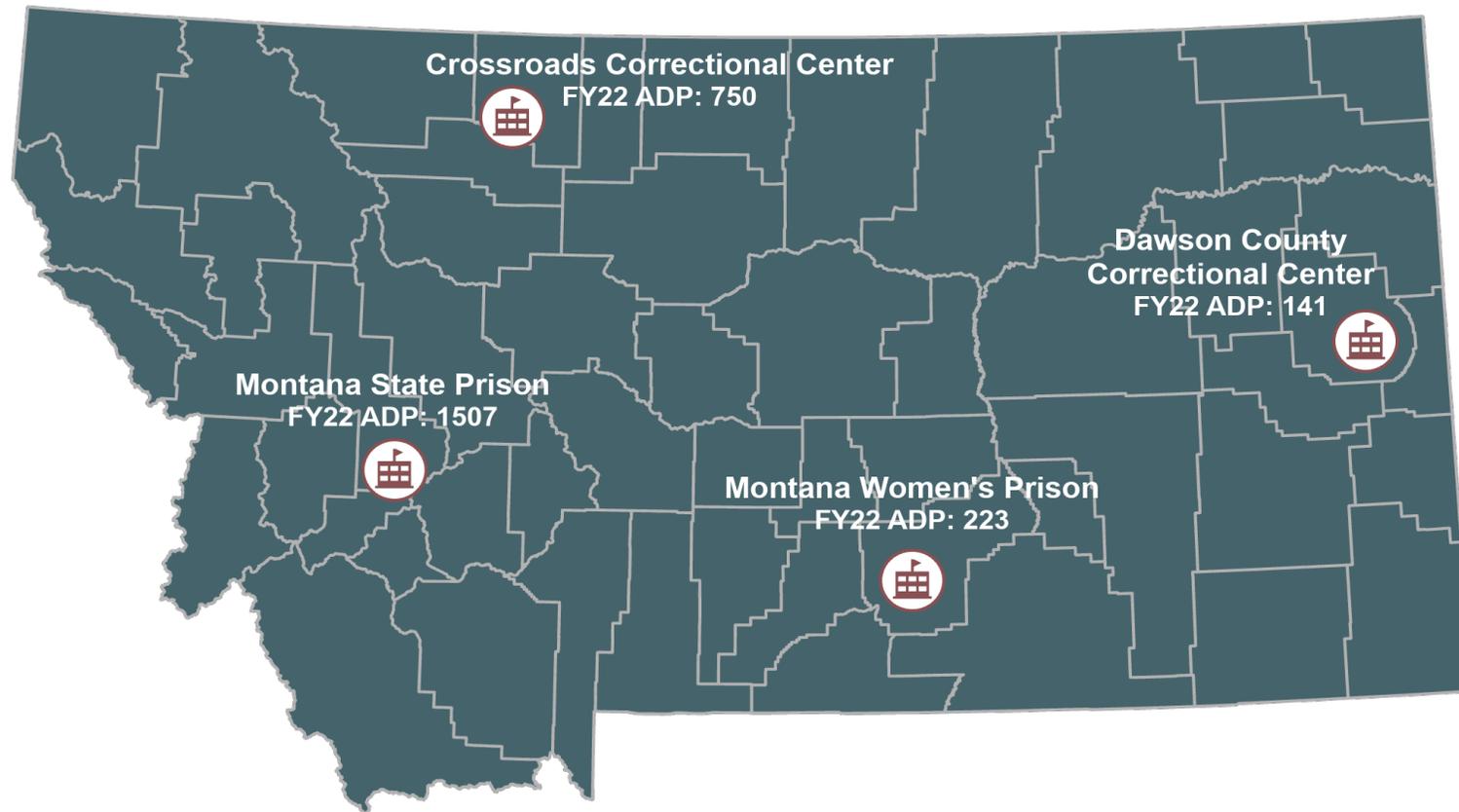
Surveyed 2,380 inmates

48% response rate

Analyzed inmate assignment and student record data

Reviewed existing programs relative to state labor projections

Facility locations & average population



Directly obtaining feedback



Background

Education & training
decreases recidivism rates

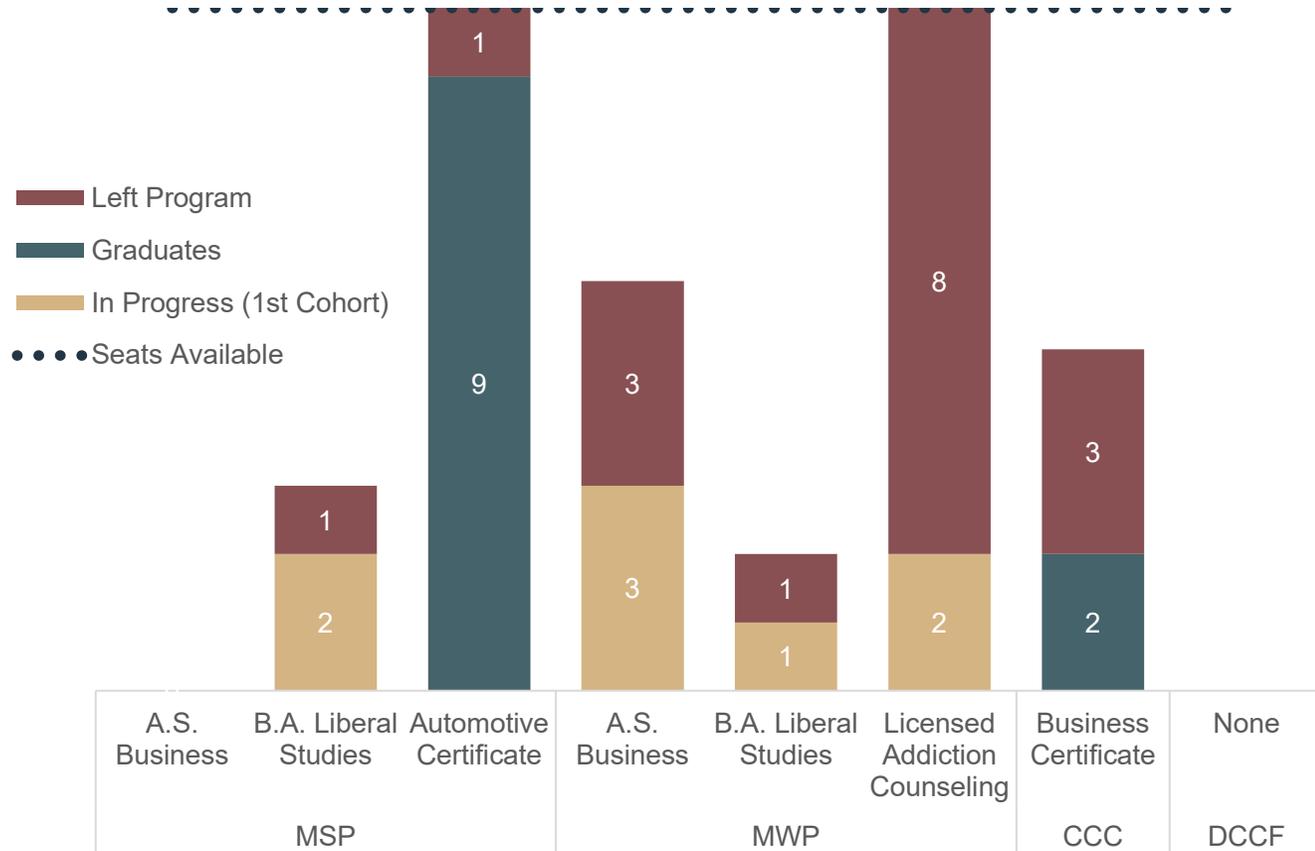
Education Bureau and MCE
Bureau currently administer
these programs for state
facilities

Past reorganizations, short
tenure of current leadership,
and external challenges

Programs offered

First year of Pell/PEP enrollment - page 4

Classes and work programs by prison - page 6



Tracking and Monitoring Inmate Education

Data management is important

Monitoring Effectiveness

Necessary to target efforts to reduce recidivism and to maximize use of resources

Monitoring Compliance

Assessing adherence to contracts and federal grant requirements

Providing Individual Records

Easily allowing stakeholders and participants to access certificates and transcripts

DOC cannot report participation

Incomplete

No central access/tracking of programs, missing programs, difficult to track milestones

Inconsistent

Naming conventions, inconsistent enrollment tracking

Inaccurate

Illogical date ranges, incorrectly identified information, duplicate entries

Data management practices

Frequent Changes

Lost years, missing programs, no milestones

Incomplete Data Transfer

Naming conventions, inconsistent enrollment tracking

Unclear Roles/Processes

Program data management is not established in procedure or in staff responsibilities, inability to centrally track programs

Recommendation #1

The department identify information needs, develop roles and procedures, and develop a method to track and maintain data with the implementation of the department's new management information system.

Department Response: **Concur**

Supporting Successful Offender Reentry

Education is cost effective

Studies show...

28-32% decrease in recidivism

Estimated \$1 of investment results in \$5 of savings in reduced recidivism

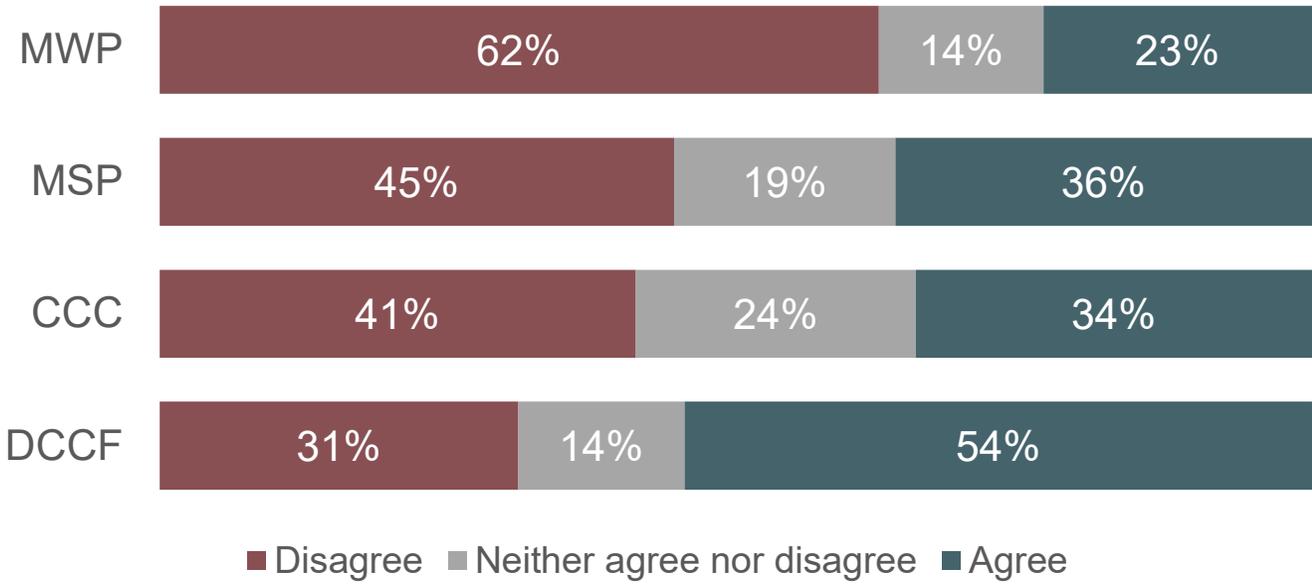
Montana would avoid \$21.6 million each year in incarceration costs based on a 28% reduction in recidivism rate

Based on 2022 recidivism from 2019-2021 released cohorts, 5-year average sentences



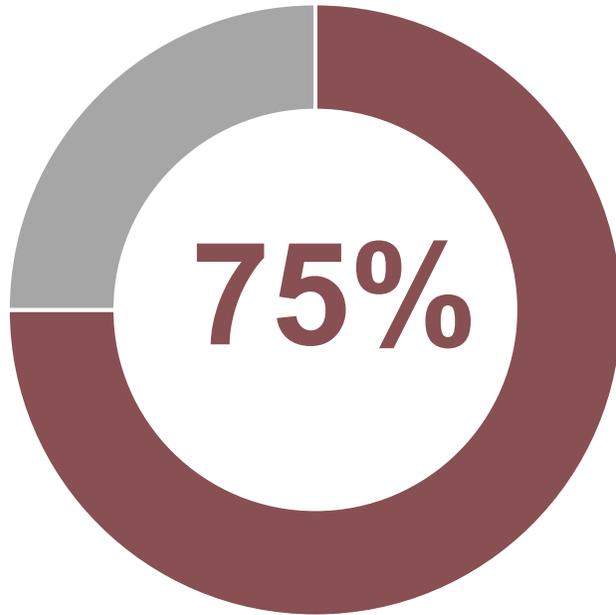
Programs vary by facility

Inmates who said they “can participate in education or jobs”

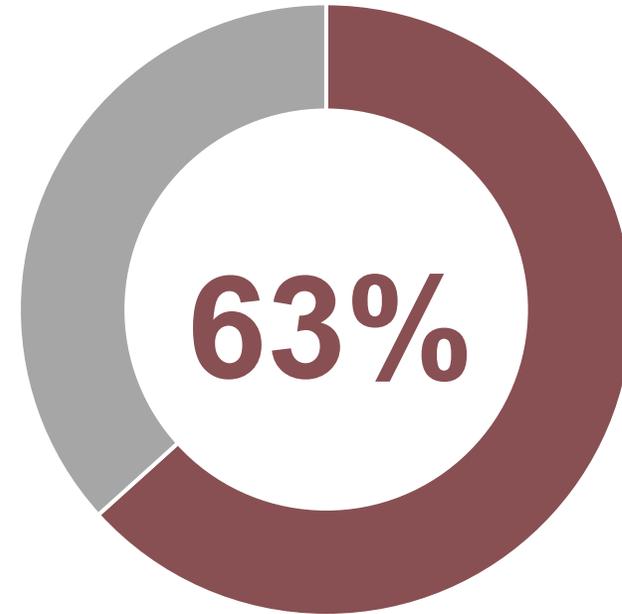


Programs do not meet demand

Over **75% of inmates** did not take part in education for more than one day

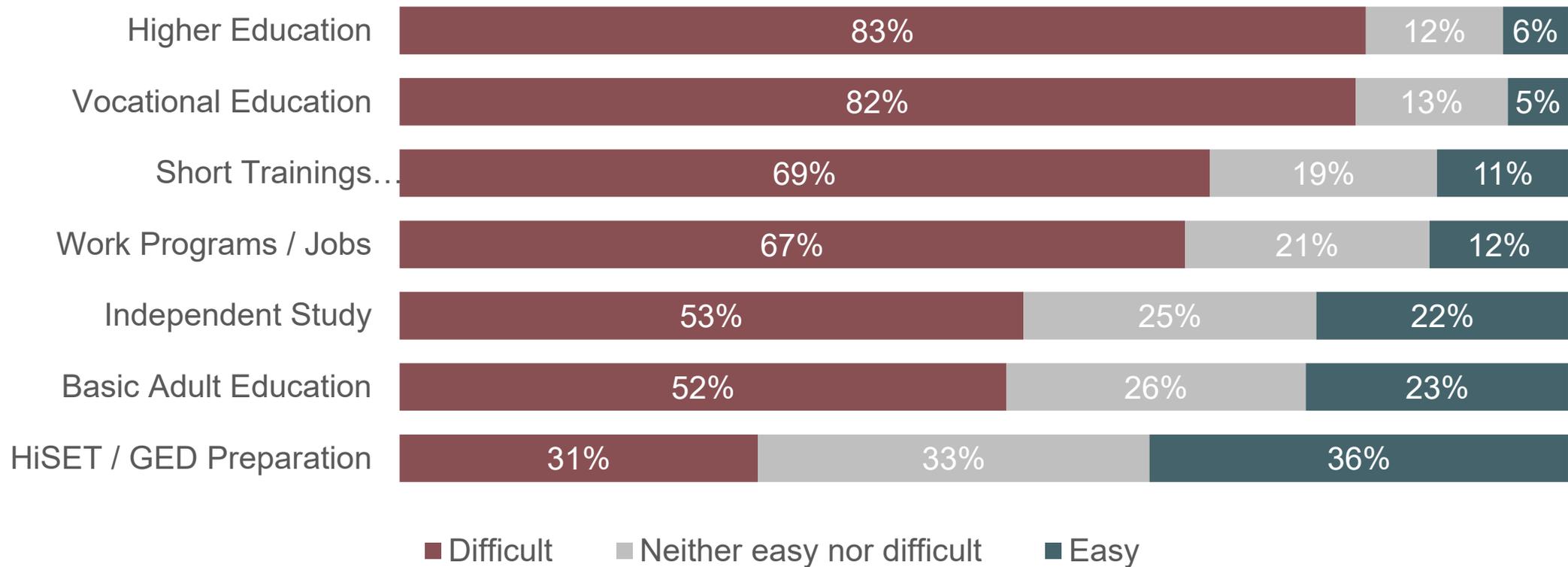


Over **63%** of inmates haven't entered class or a work program



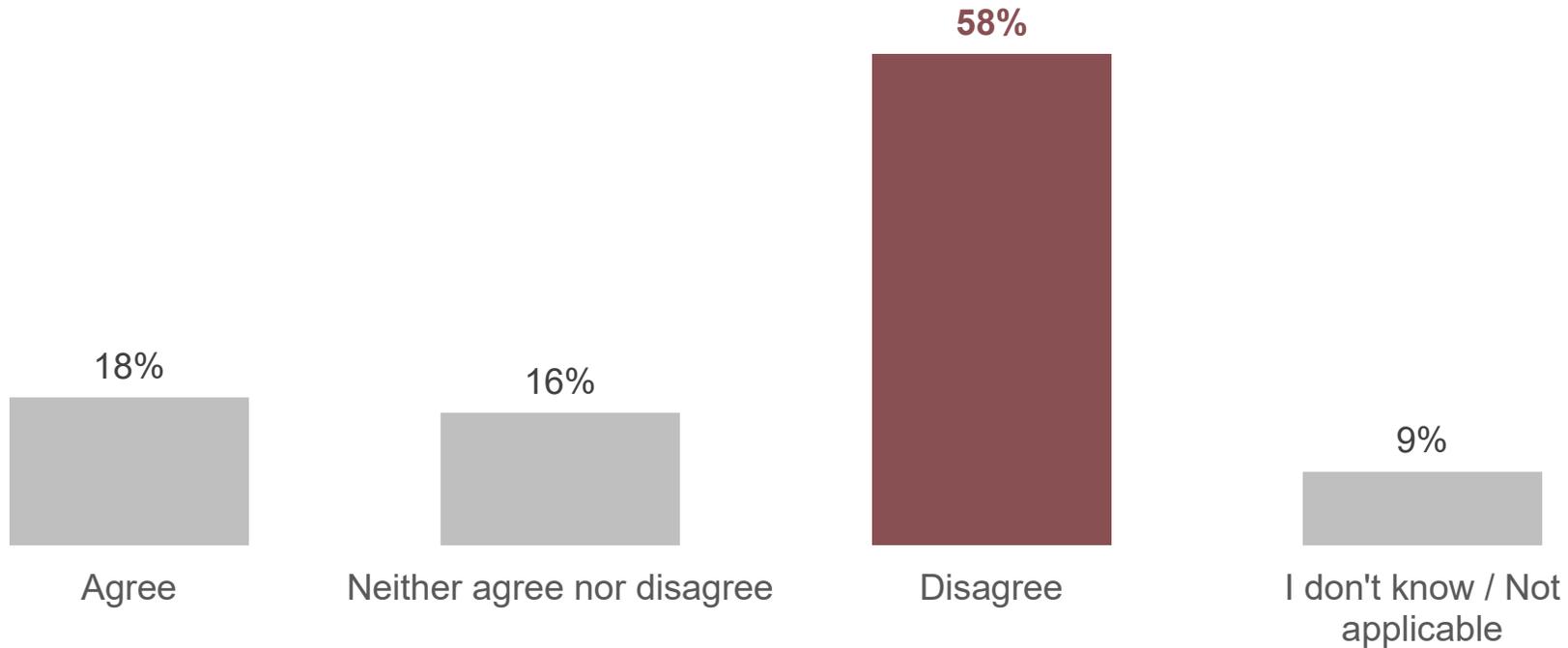
Difficult to access programs

Inmate response to "how easy is it to get into these programs?"



Programs not always beneficial

Inmate response to "classes will prepare me for a career after release"



Programs not evaluated or optimized

Program evaluation

Limited review of programs based on inmate outcomes

Other states leverage external resources

Increased use of colleges, private partnerships, and technology

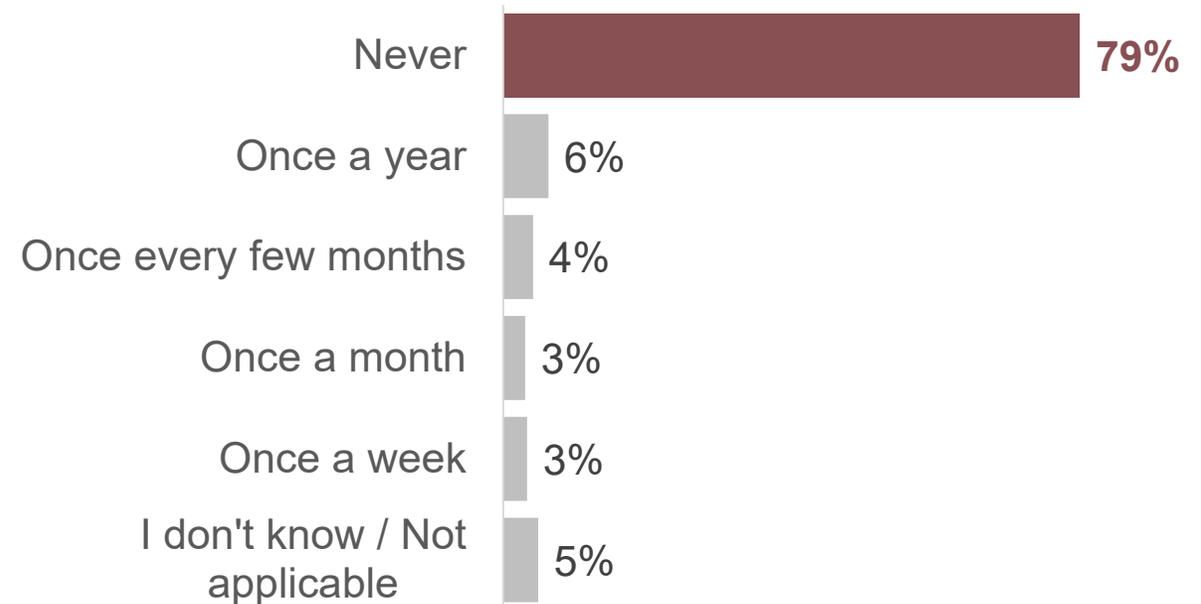
Recommendation #2

The department assess new programs, evaluate existing programs on an ongoing basis, and complete biennial plans to coordinate and identify necessary resources to expand educational and industry opportunities across facilities.

Department Response: **Concur**

Limited guidance provided to inmates

Inmate response to “how often do you meet with staff to discuss your education or career goals?”



Challenges to providing guidance

Reentry responsibilities are unclear

Services not consistently strategically targeted to inmates by need or impact

Reentry programming is limited in availability

Guidance and opportunity improves ability of inmates to prepare themselves for release

Recommendation #3

The department integrate education and career counseling into case management, develop a partnership with DLI to provide inmate reentry services, and design and provide targeted reentry education and services to inmates exiting the system.

Department Response: **Concur**

Monitoring Contracted Secure Facility Services

State pays for contracted facilities to house inmates

Contract facilities are paid a payment based on a per bed per day calculation

Contracts outline expectations of services provided with that payment

Shortfalls in contracted facilities lead to inequitable access to opportunity and decreases education of state inmates

Contracted facilities not meeting requirements

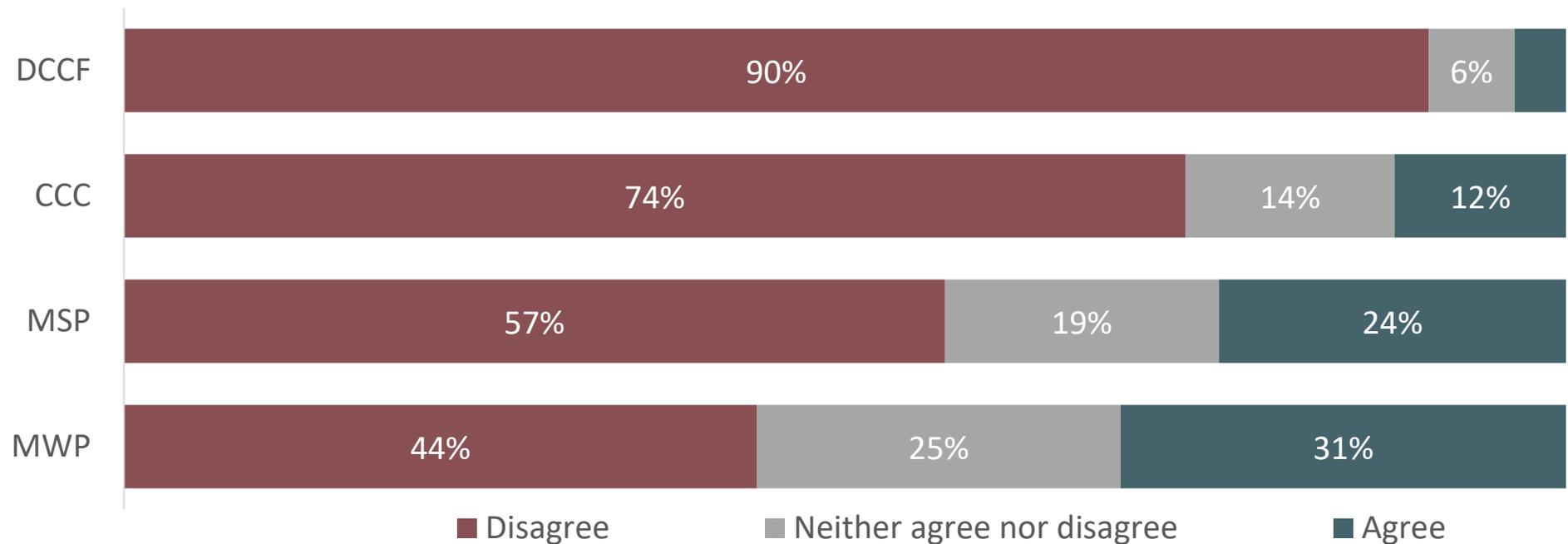
One facility's average monthly required teacher vacancy was 39% 2020-2023

Approximately 40% of one facility's inmates participated in wage earning opportunities, though 90% is stipulated in contract

Another facility had no education programming from spring 2020 to spring 2023

Contracted facilities programs less useful

Inmate response to "classes provide experience that will prepare me for a career after release"



Education related contract requirements not enforced

Roles of different bureaus unclear

Contracting bureau not monitoring or enforcing education related contract requirements

Contract facilities lack direction from the state in appropriate education and job training

Recommendation #4

The department enforce education and job-related contract provisions, monitor program quality and adherence to industry standards, and establish a process to identify and review programs for contracted facilities.

Department Response: **Concur**

Questions?

