



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VIDEO:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAycHtbHgH4&t=3s>

Inmates complete college courses and High school equivalency programs at 2 state prisons

JACKSON, MS (May 12) – Education is making a comeback in Mississippi prisons to reach pre-pandemic operations through stepped-up re-entry programs.

Today, 39 inmates at Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) received their high school equivalency diplomas, commonly known as GEDs or the newer HiSET, after completing years of secondary education coursework. Inmates also completed classes in business technology and apparel and textiles. Also this week, 18 inmates at Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman received certificates for completing their first three hours of college credit through the prison's new alliance with Mississippi Delta Community College.

MDOC Commissioner Burl Cain, who is pushing reentry programs to prepare inmates for life on the outside, says that the classes are designed for those completing sentences and those who hope to someday be paroled.

He says ramping up education in the prisons gives them an education foundation they'll need to enter the workforce.

During a morning ceremony at CMCF's gymnasium, male and female inmates entered to "Pomp and Circumstance" in celebrating their achievements. Carla Causey, assistant director of adult education and program quality for the Mississippi Community College Board, addressed the inmates noting that she started as a correctional officer at CMCF in 2006, then became an alcohol and drug counselor, and later transformed her career into service through education.

"No one can take away from you what you know. In your mind, you can make a choice to do something different," Causey said. "I'm proud of you for making a choice in the midst of turmoil to make yourself better." During her remarks, Causey encouraged the inmate students to be transparent, be passionate, have a purpose, and make good choices.

For inmate Steven Miller, receiving his GED after recently turning 50 years old is a life milestone of pride. "This is my first education accomplishment and I feel really good and proud of myself. It seems like every time I tried to lift myself up before, I made mistakes so I really appreciate this opportunity to get it right," Miller said.

Sitting across the gym, inmate Darlene Twiggs said she feels pride in accomplishing a personal achievement. "This feels amazing. Every inmate needs to take advantage of these programs. This was a personal goal for me to finish. It gives me a sense of self-worth," Twiggs said.

Just 24 hours earlier, the group of men at the Parchman prison were celebrating a new step completed in their quest for a college education. Certificates were given for Beginning English, English Composition, and Intermediate English. Plans are underway for the inmates to move forward, beginning the next cycle of the same subjects.

In this new college program, funding was made available when the Mississippi Humanities Council wrote an application near the end of December 2020 and won a grant provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The grant covered compensation for instructors and supplies which were provided by Mississippi Delta Community College.

The grant also covered hiring a training coordinator who facilitated the program's operations among the participating partners which also includes Hinds Community College, Northeast Mississippi Community College, and Jones College in South Mississippi that recently joined the program.

All legislators who represent the Parchman area attended the ceremony. Delta Representative Tracey Rosebud said, "It shows these gentlemen that they can achieve things regardless of the situations they've faced in the past. And it gives them hope for the future."

Inmate student Jacob Walker was one of the students who participated in the Beginning English class and spoke during the ceremony about what the achievement means to him. "Anything you want to do in this life is going to start with the mind itself. For you to have a positive life, you need to educate yourself," Walker said.

Walker, who is a U.S. Army veteran, is expecting to be released in 10 months and plans to further his education at a junior college in business management and start his own business, possibly in agriculture. "(This course) was a great opportunity for me and it helped me to elevate and further my education and made me a better person," Walker said. "It is very impactful for the prisoners to be part this program. I hope more programs like this are provided because it will really help the inmates."

Inmate student DeCarlos Jenkins said living a positive life can serve as a role model to others. "You can always do things for the positive. You can always do things for the community to send a message to the younger guys out there who might be on the wrong road that there's a chance. It's always a chance for you," Jenkins said.

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