



Resource Bulletin

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Phase 2 Survey Will Look Into Other Professions in Corrections

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In 2003, the American Correctional Association launched the first comprehensive survey of the correctional work force in more than 34 years. That survey focused primarily on correctional officer positions and the difficulties juvenile and adult correctional agencies were having in recruiting and retaining a qualified correctional work force. The report also described a profile of the correctional officers currently employed across the country and explored other trends impacting corrections. The report, *A 21st Century Workforce for America's Correctional Profession*, can be found on the ACA Web site at www.aca.org/research — click on “research.”

In Phase 2 of the Workforce Project, ACA will conduct another national work force survey. The focus of this survey will be on three very important areas in correctional practice: health care professionals, mental health treatment professionals and education professionals. To field test the survey, the authors called the director of corrections, the director of juvenile justice, or the CEO in eight correctional agencies. The following is a very brief description of the findings of the preliminary survey.

1. *If your agency has difficulty recruiting and retaining medical and mental health treatment professionals, to what do you attribute the difficulty?*

Finding: State salary scales that cannot compete with the private health care organizations, locations of facilities, and a stigma that can be attached to working in a correctional facility.

2. *Within the areas of medical and mental health treatment, are there specific positions that are more difficult to recruit?*

Finding: Nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers are the most difficult positions to fill. In some cases, medical doctors and dentists were also listed, but that was not the case for all respondents. As in all areas of health care, at this time, recruiting nurses is the greatest challenge for correctional health care administrators.

3. *If your agency has difficulty recruiting and retaining education professionals, to what do you attribute the difficulty?*

Finding: Work schedules, training requirements, correctional policies, procedures and practices (i.e., conducting counts, tool and key control, etc.), teacher certification, and certification in special education were among the reasons given for difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified educational employees. Half of the agencies reported that they were not finding it difficult to recruit qualified teachers.

4. *Within the area of education, are there specific positions that are more difficult to recruit?*

Finding: The most difficult educational positions to fill are special education teachers, vocational education instructors, and some instructor positions for college-level classes especially when the correctional facilities are located in rural areas away from population centers.

In addition to answering these specific questions, the respondents also recommended that ACA include in the national survey questions that ask why people leave their positions in these specific areas, what employee-friendly programs are in place in correctional facilities, what incentives are used to recruit and retain employees, what is being done to foster collaboration between corrections and correctional education, what training programs exist for employees in these specific positions, and what are the salary and benefit ranges for employees in these three areas.

For the national survey, ACA will be contacting all adult and juvenile correctional agencies and a sample of adult local detention centers (jails) and juvenile detention centers as the next step in its work force project. The survey will be sent in early 2008 via e-mail using the Web-base survey program “Survey Monkey.” A report will then be written and made available to the field through ACA’s Center for the Correctional Work Force of the Future. Given the very favorable response to the first survey, it is anticipated a similar, or even better, response level can be achieved.

Check out the Center for the Correctional Work Force of the Future Web site at www.aca.org/Workforce/home.asp.