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Something Works in U.S. Jails:

Misconduct and Recidivism Effects of the IGNITE Program


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The U.S. has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. Over 2 million individuals are held in correctional facilities daily.

Over 600,000 people are held in local jails; the vast majority are awaiting sentencing.

Recidivism (when a formerly incarcerated person is re-arrested) is common: one in four people recidivate from jail in the same year.

Rehabilitation programs in correctional facilities have historically not been emphasized in the U.S.

IGNITE (Inmate Growth Naturally and Intentionally Through Education):

- A jail rehabilitation program launched September 2020 in Genesee County, MI and adopted in 2021 as a national initiative by the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA).
- IGNITE consists of daily education tailored to individual inmate needs; offered to virtually all jailed individuals.
- Law-enforcement led with repurposed space; negligible budget increases.
- NSA has implemented IGNITE in other U.S. jails and continues to expand.

Study Findings:

- One month of IGNITE reduces weekly jail misconduct by 25%.
- One month of IGNITE reduces 3-month recidivism by 24% and 1-year recidivism by 15%.
- On average, IGNITE participants gained a full grade level in math and reading proficiency.
- IGNITE increased positive views of law enforcement among community members.
- IGNITE increased positive views of jail educational programming among custody staff.
- One month of IGNITE reduces the 12-month social cost of crime and incarceration by \$7,285 per person.

Research Design:

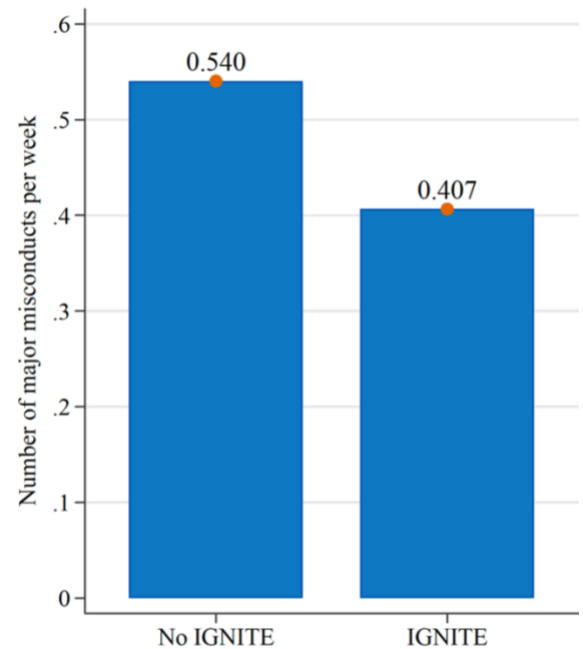
We leverage idiosyncratic court delays before and after IGNITE to estimate its causal effects.

Finding 1

One month of IGNITE reduces weekly jail misconduct incidents by 25%.

Figure 1 shows that IGNITE reduces weekly major misconduct in jail by 0.14 incidents (25%). These effects are similar across different demographic groups, prior offense status, and other possible factors that may predict rates of misconduct in jail. Major misconduct includes threatening another with bodily harm, disobeying instructions, and introducing contraband, violence, and disruption. Minor misconduct includes disorderly conduct, being in unauthorized areas, possession of unauthorized items, and lying. Medical events include suicide attempts. The analysis finds significant effects on major and minor misconduct and no effect on medical events.

Figure 1: Impact of IGNITE on major misconduct in jail



Finding 2

One month of IGNITE reduces 3-month recidivism by 24% and reduces 1-year recidivism by 15%.

On average one additional month in IGNITE reduces three-month recidivism by 9 percentage points (24%) and one-year recidivism by 14 percentage points (15%). These effects are similar across different demographic groups, prior offense status, and other possible factors that may predict the probability of recidivism. These percentage point effects increase over the time horizon of the analysis, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Impact of IGNITE on recidivism

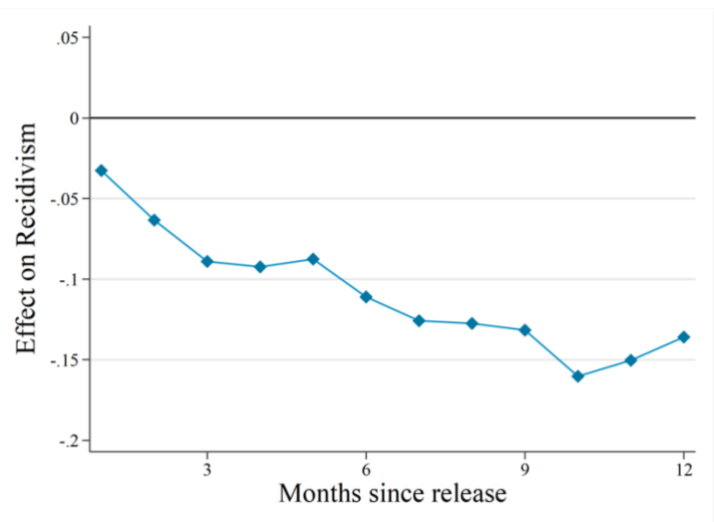


Figure 2 plots the estimated effects of one month of IGNITE exposure on the likelihood of recidivism over different horizons.

Finding 3

IGNITE participants gained, on average, a full grade level in math & reading.

One possible reason IGNITE led to large reductions in misconduct and recidivism is that it increased literacy and numeracy among participants. Figure 3 and Figure 4 show that those who enrolled in IGNITE gained the equivalent of around one grade level in both math and reading. This suggests significant improvements in educational achievement. However, there is more to IGNITE than education...

Beyond the classroom:

jail culture changes with **IGNITE**

"[IGNITE] really humanizes people ... [both] the inmate population, and ... the deputy population" – Deputy Conner Bigelow
[Source: Route Fifty](#)

"County jails across America are filled with people where 90% of them are going back to the community... so our question is, as a Sheriff, how do you want us to prepare [them] to come back to your neighborhoods?" – Sheriff Chris Swanson
[Source: WNEM](#)

Figure 3: Impact of IGNITE on math scores

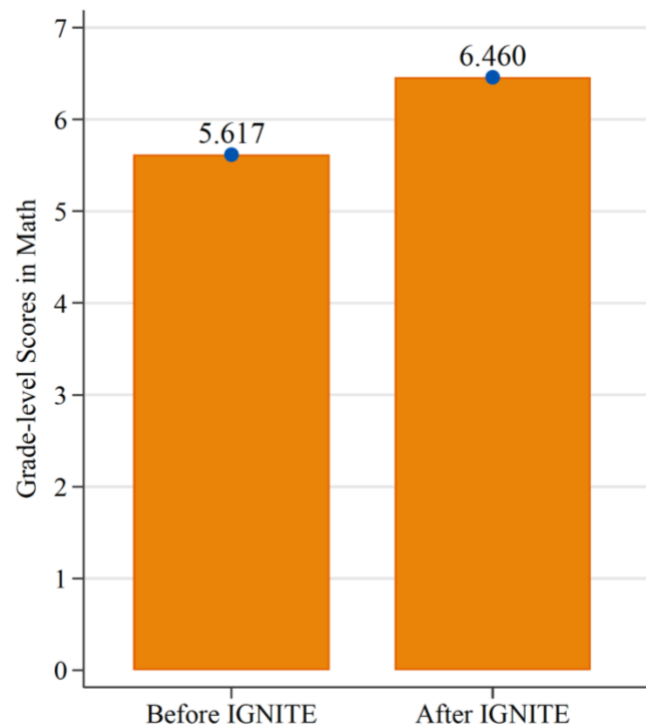
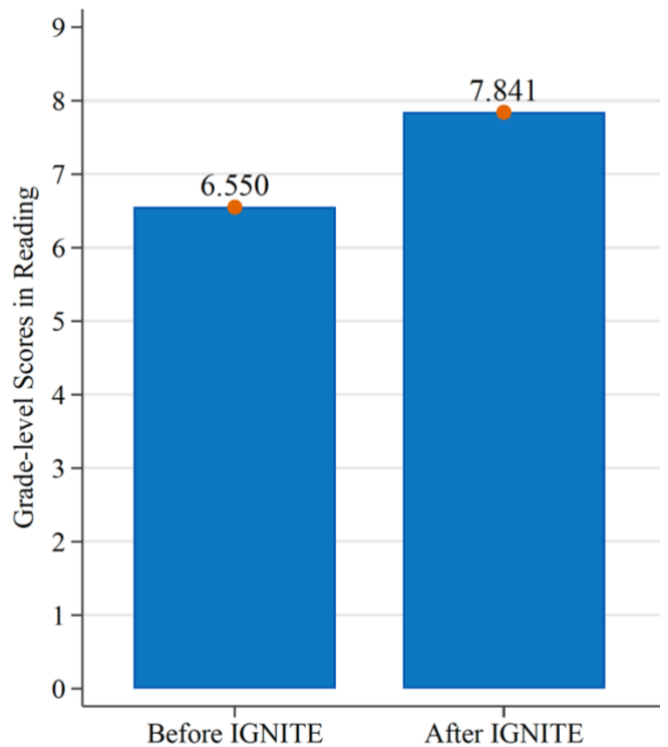


Figure 4: Impact of IGNITE on reading scores



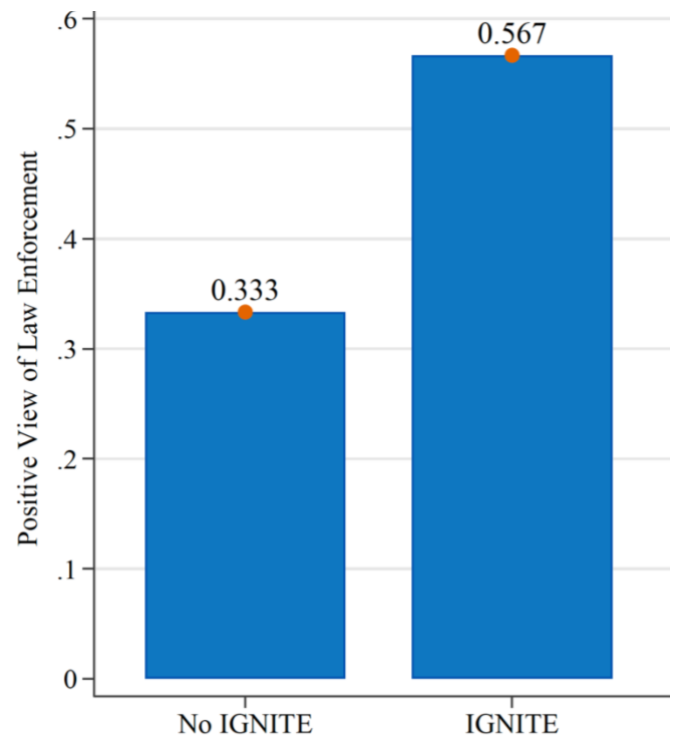
Finding 4

IGNITE increased positive views of law enforcement among community members.

We conducted a survey of Genesee County community members. The survey was anonymous and asked the respondents about their own experiences with incarceration and the experiences of close friends and family members.

Figure 5 shows that survey respondents who were exposed to IGNITE (either themselves or a close friend/family member incarcerated in Genesee County Jail after September 2020) were 23 percentage points (approximately 70%) more likely to have a positive view of law enforcement than those who were not exposed.

Figure 5: IGNITE improves views of law enforcement among community members



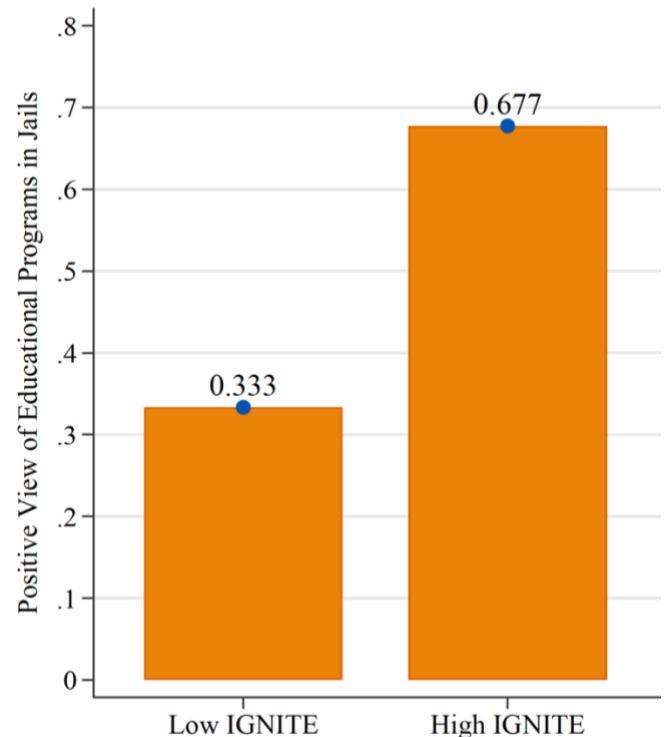
Finding 5

IGNITE increased positive views of jail educational programming among custody staff.

We also conducted a study of custody staff working in the Genesee County Jail. The survey was anonymous.

Figure 6 shows that custody staff who regularly interact with IGNITE participants are 34 percentage points (approximately 100%) more likely to view educational programs in jail as worthwhile.

Figure 6: IGNITE improves views of jail education among custody staff



Research Team

The most recent version of our research paper can be found [here](#).



The most recent version of our online appendix to the paper can be found [here](#).



The most recent version of our presentation slides can be found [here](#).



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