

Auburn Citizen - Our view: Prison education without tax dollars worth a try

By: Editorial Board

1/13/2016

When Gov. Andrew Cuomo proposed in 2014 to offer college courses to inmates at 10 state prisons, we argued against doing it with taxpayer money. This week, the governor brought the subject up again, but this time with a plan for having it paid for by a combination of private funding and bank settlement money being held by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

If he can make that happen, we say "Go for it."

The biggest argument to be made for education in prisons is that by giving inmates the tools they need to get a job when they get out, that they are less likely to return. This new program would be offered to inmates who already have high school diplomas, and those serving life sentences would not be eligible to participate.

With the recidivism rate at about 40 percent in New York, the opportunity to learn a marketable skill, get a high-school equivalency or earn a college degree have value for not just the inmates but society at large. Cutting into the recidivism rate could save money in the long run by cutting the amount of state money being used to keep people incarcerated. And giving prisoners something positive to work on has the potential to make prisons safer for the people who work there.

There is always a risk in starting a new program without a long-term plan for funding, but if this program can be paid for without dipping into the general fund, it might be a worthwhile effort. Cuomo envisions educating about 1,000 inmates over the course of five years. Will those inmates then make the best of the opportunity given them and manage to stay out of trouble? This could be a good test to find out if it works.