Incarceration to Reentry Education & Training Pathways in California

Reconnecting Justice in the States

CLASP

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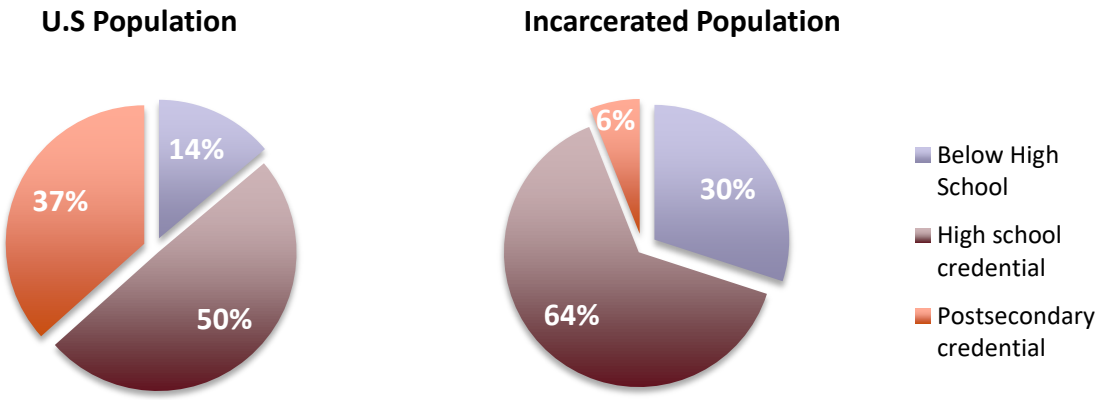
Series Background

The complexity of the social, economic, political, historical, and racial context that shapes the criminal justice system is extensive, and that context has implications for the limited opportunities available to individuals during and after incarceration, including in education and training. Historical investments in corrections and policies that prioritize punishment over prevention and rehabilitation have been unsuccessful in improving public safety and have greatly marginalized low-income communities and communities of color.[1] Research has shown, however, that access to correctional education and training can significantly improve the outcomes of those returning to society. These positive outcomes are leading to increased federal and state momentum to improve postsecondary access for prisoners and lifting this issue higher on reform agendas. Nonetheless, the education and training needs of prisoners are far more complex than what can be met by traditional postsecondary education (see figure 1), and linking those needs to training that articulates to post-release opportunities is essential for successful reentry. Building on the theme of continuity from incarceration to reentry,[2] these briefs will highlight the continuous improvement stories of states that are moving toward this type of alignment. This brief will focus on California.



Source: *Highlights from the U.S. PIAAC Survey of Incarcerated Adults, 2014*.

Figure 1. Educational attainment of incarcerated individuals compared to the overall U.S. population

Building Reform

California's experience managing both an exponentially rising prison population and a rising budget deficit mirrors the experience of the nation as a whole. From 1986 to 2006, California's prison population ballooned from approximately 60,000 to more than 173,000—over double the capacity of the state's prisons. By 2011, California faced a $26.6 billion general fund budget deficit inflated by the state's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (CDCR) budget growing from $5 billion to over $9 billion in a decade. Furthermore, beginning in fiscal year 2009-10, in-prison rehabilitative programs—including academic and vocational education, transitional services, and employment programs—faced significant cuts due to budget reductions and overcrowding. The unsustainable practices in California's prisons culminated with a 2011 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court ordering CDCR to reduce its prison population by more than 40,000 inmates over the next two years. This decision spurred the state to decrease its prison population by making major investments to reduce recidivism that would ultimately save the state millions of dollars.[3]

Following the court's orders, the state passed prison realignment legislation that cut the CDCR's budget by 18 percent and reduced the prison population by 22,000 inmates.[4] However, this legislation alone would be insufficient to fully satisfy the Supreme Court's orders, leading the state to create *The Future of California*

Corrections: A Blueprint to Save Billions of Dollars, End Federal Court Oversight, and Improve the Prison System in 2012. The blueprint aims to offer a "clear and comprehensive plan for the department to save billions of dollars by achieving its targeted budget reductions, satisfying the Supreme Court's ruling, and getting the department out from under the burden of expensive federal court oversight."[5] With an understanding of the relationship between correctional education and reduced recidivism, the plan makes an encouraging investment in correctional education and reentry programs through an objective to improve access to rehabilitation. The plan included detailed goals to:

- Place at least 70 percent of the department's target population in programs consistent with their academic and rehabilitative needs;
- Establish reentry hubs to concentrate program resources and better prepare inmates as they get closer to being released; and
- Add 159 academic teachers and 98 vocational instructors over a 2-year period.[6]

Although increased investment in correctional education and training opportunities is linked to the success of inmates following their release, ensuring that these programs align with reentry opportunities can further leverage this investment. The 2012 blueprint asked the department to establish "reentry hubs" at designated prisons that "will provide relevant services to inmates who are within four years of release." The reentry hubs provide career and technical education programs, cognitive-behavioral therapy programs, substance abuse treatment, employment training (including job readiness skills and linkages to one-stop career centers and other social service agencies in the offender's county of residence), assistance in obtaining state-issued identification cards, academic programs, and a variety of volunteer and self-help programs.[7]

Reform Progress

Changes at the State Level

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The state has faced some challenges in meeting the blueprint's mandate to reduce the overall prison population. At the same time that alternative sentencing and population management efforts have helped reduce nonviolent inmates, the population of violent offenders has increased.[8] Addressing the mandate to reduce the population while meeting the expansive needs of prisoners has made it difficult for CDCR to achieve comprehensive reforms. However, the department has succeeded in making changes in rehabilitative programming. While evidence of these changes has not been documented, traceable evidence of continuous improvement and implementation of the 2012 blueprint goals demonstrate the state's commitment to aligned, intentional, and targeted rehabilitation strategies.

ALIGNING CTE TO MEET LABOR MARKET NEEDS

California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation offers CTE training in 19 programs across six career sectors that include "the building trade and construction sector, the energy and utilities sector, the finance and business sector, the public service sector, manufacturing and product development sector, and the transportation sector." Each of the 19 programs is "aligned with a positive employment outlook within the State of California, providing industry-recognized certification" and "an employment pathway to a livable wage." The department's CTE programs "utilize a stackable curriculum allowing each inmate/student to gain employment skills and enter a career pathway for the industry." There are no eligibility requirements, and any inmate may request to participate.[1] However, the department also reports that technology-related issues were challenging the program. The program reported that it could not provide certification for 26 percent of CTE programs in November 2015 because the certification exams had to be completed online.

The 2012 blueprint urged the state to address at least one need prior to release for 70 percent of the targeted population. CDCR administrators have made progress through education and training toward this goal and others highlighted previously. By 2016, 60 percent of the targeted population was being served—despite several challenges—and the Office of Correctional Education (OCE) currently serves over 50,000 state inmates.[9] CDCR has been successful in hiring additional instructors, expanding programming, and better connecting inmates to the education and training opportunities that align and articulate to relevant post-release education and employment opportunities. Although technology barriers (i.e. restricted internet access) presented a challenge for scaling career and technical education (CTE) programming and certifications, California has invested in providing online access to the majority of prisons for online CTE testing. Current efforts are underway to provide both CTE and academic classrooms the ability to access course content through secure internet access, providing for greater efficiency and targeted instruction.[10]

To further align programming, CDCR has dedicated funding for the expansion of adult basic education and CTE. In addition, the state's Adult Education Block Grant mandates that entities receiving state or federal funds for adult education, including in correctional facilities, be part of the regional adult educational consortia, which work together to develop a regional plan for addressing adult education and transition needs. The state has spurred greater postsecondary access via funding parity for courses taught in prisons at the same level as those taught on campuses.[11] While partnerships delineate CTE instruction oversight and postsecondary instruction between CDCR and the California Community College Chancellor's Office, respectively, some articulation is occurring whereby community colleges are offering college credit for CTE courses provided under the jurisdiction of CDCR.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Building on the momentum of expanded postsecondary access spurred by Senate Bill 1391, California also became a host state to five Second Chance Pell Pilot sites, a 2016 initiative rolled out under the U.S. Department of Education's experimental authority during the Obama Administration. The 1994 ban on Pell grants for prisoners all but eliminated postsecondary access for incarcerated people. Through the pilot, 67 colleges were selected to collaborate on the project, serving over 12,000 inmates in 100 prisons across the country.[12] In addition, California passed the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act of 2016 allowing inmates to earn up to 12 weeks a year off of their sentences for completing academic and vocational programs. Between this incentive, the Second Chance Pell experimental sites, the California Community College Board of Governors' Waiver, the implementation of Senate Bill 1391, and partnership initiatives[13] across the state, California has seen a 25 percent growth in college enrollment from Fall 2016 to Spring 2017, in addition to a 57 percent increase in face-to-face instruction for new and old students.[14]

SENATE BILL 1391

In 2014, Governor Jerry Brown signed California Senate Bill 1391 into law, allowing community colleges to teach courses to inmates in person at correctional facilities. The bill permits community colleges to receive funding for students at correctional facilities at the same amounts as on-campus, full-time students. The bill also provided funding for four 18-month pilot programs. Prior to SB1391, in-person enrollment in prison-college partnerships was not supported by state funding, and consequently, options were limited to correspondence courses and privately funded partnerships. College courses were offered in distance learning programs through the voluntary education program. The updated state plan released in 2016 reflects an increased investment in community college access.

The investment into postsecondary access through the Board of Governors' Waiver and Senate Bill 1391, as well as private investment, has allowed California's colleges to provide postsecondary education to inmates despite the lack of Pell grant funds. However, the Second Chance Pell Pilot program is helping to provide additional support, and expand access at some sites. Chaffey College, for example, has been providing

postsecondary courses at the California Institution for Women (CIW) since 2005, and at the California Institution for Men (CIM) since 2015. In the first ten years of the program, 321 men and women participated with only one student returning to prison.[15] The college was selected as a Second Chance Pell experimental site, where funds will be used to support additional costs such as textbooks, which can a significant cost burden for both students and the college. Chaffey offers an Associate's Degree in General Business and Certificate in Professional Office Skills to inmates that are fully transferrable to any California Community College upon release.[16]

Because of how recently the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program launched, data collection and evaluation are still ongoing. However, in conversations with program administrators, positive lessons and stories have emerged. With a commitment from the college's President, California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) is the only institution offering a Bachelor's degree program to incarcerated individuals and was also selected as a Second Chance Pell site. Twenty-three students are currently participating in a Bachelor's program in Communication Studies, while Second Chance Pell funds will allow an additional 30 students to participate in the program beginning in 2018. Students in this cohort will be eligible if they are within five years of release and will be able to transfer to (CSULA) among their release. Although the scale of the program is relatively small, administrators have noticed men in the program act as role models to family members, other inmates, educators, corrections staff, and other students.[17]

SECOND CHANCE EXPERIMENTAL SITES

- California State University Los Angeles (Four-year)
    - 23 students being served in bachelor's degrees programs
    - Only in-person bachelor's degree program in the state for inmates
- Chaffey College (Two-Year)
    - 167 students being served in certificate and associate's degree programs
- Columbia College (Two-year)
    - 95 students being served in certificate and associate's degree programs
- Cuesta College (Two-year)
    - 265 students being served in associate's degree programs
- Southwestern Community College District (Two-year)
    - 25 students being served in certificate and associate's degree programs. With the associate's degree they receive, students can transfer into the California State University system to complete a bachelor's degree in the subject.

Note: Each of these programs existed prior to the Second Chance Pell pilot. Students in community college sites had access to the Board of Governor's fee waiver prior to having Pell access. Since these students were already being supported by state subsidies, Pell grants provided additional support for non-tuition related expenses such as textbooks and supplies. Currently, there are no student achievement related outcomes to report as cohorts have not completed a full matriculation cycle, but anecdotal program reports have been positive.

USING FEDERAL SUPPORT

In addition to shifting state investments, California has leveraged federal resources to support correctional education and reentry. Prior to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds were primarily used for the development of career and technical education programs focusing on under-employed industry sectors providing livable wages.[18] This past year CDCR has placed greater emphasis on community reentry, building partnerships with local apprenticeship programs and regional employers.[19] CDCR also leverages modest amounts of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Perkins funds to support correctional education.

LEVERAGING FEDERAL RESOURCES

In 2016, the Office of Correctional Education in California had a $194 million state operating budget. In addition to that, the state devoted $5.1 million of awarded WIOA funds across the 35 facilities based on need. The state also allotted $496,000 in Perkins funds, and $641,000 in ESSA funds to support correctional education. The federal dollars helped strengthen efforts already underway to bolster training responsive to labor market needs, including efforts to move toward greater implementation of Integrated Education and Training.

Outcomes and Continuity

In addition to the progress in educational access, the state has achieved increased momentum to connect that progress to continued education and training opportunities and wraparound supports upon reentry. Measurable successes and ongoing improvements include:

Measurable Successes

- 34 out of 35 facilities offer college courses provided by 17 different state community colleges. Prior to Senate Bill 1391, nearly 7,000 students were enrolled in mostly distance learning college courses in 2014. Additionally, face-to-face instruction has increased to 57 percent.

- The CDCR achieved its original blueprint goal to increase instructional staff and dedicate funding to correctional education. The department added 159 academic teachers and 92 vocational instructors.

Ongoing Improvements

- In addition to working toward the goal of serving 70 percent of the targeted inmate population with rehabilitative programming, the CDCR is working with the Office of Inspector General to improve service and better account for meeting needs. Currently, a need is counted as being met if an inmate spends one day in a support program, rather than using a measure that more substantially reflects true treatment. The CDCR is also improving accountability and tracking of offender reentry outcomes with the development of a new information technology tool.

- Since completing the blueprint goals, CDCR has added 53 Community Transitions teachers who offer a 5-week class prior to release for all incarcerated individuals. In addition, CDCR added 12 CTE instructors throughout the state.[20]

- The reentry hub model is currently in practice all facilities across the state, and the pre-employment Transitions program has also been expanded to each. These reentry services model includes programming to address cognitive, socioemotional, educational, and health and wellness needs for inmates within four years of release. The pre-employment Transitions program focuses on improving job readiness and financial literacy. The CAL-ID program has been expanded to provide state identification cards to inmates being released from all prisons. The state is also on track to expand pilot reentry programs in more local communities to offer the stabilizing supports needed for successful reentry.

Future Goals

- The OCE released a 20/20 Vision Plan that aligns with and supports the overall CDCR mission and includes goals to improve the OCE's learning environment, teaching, support, and access through measurable objectives and strategies. Many of these goals support ongoing improvements, including expanding face-to-face college programming to all 35 adult institutions, increasing the number of CTE programs to reduce current waiting lists, and ensuring the budget continues to support educational priorities.[21]

- Also outlined in the OCE's vision are objectives to explore new opportunities and partnerships that can improve both correctional education delivery and reentry success. The plan notes an intention to explore contextualized learning models and to provide opportunities for continuous learning. Implementing a contextualized learning model, such as Integrated Education and Training (IET), within correctional facilities is a core component of putting students onto a career pathway that can help them secure quality jobs after they are released. The plan also seeks to design and implement a student success initiative that provides professional development opportunities for correctional educators.

- Furthermore, the state OCE plans to partner with California State Universities to expand offerings of baccalaureate degrees. Currently, California State University in Los Angeles was selected as a Second Chance Pell site. OCE will engage universities by creating a consortium of interested universities with a goal of offering classes in each of the three regions. CDCR has seen success in its partnerships with community colleges, and increasing postsecondary partnerships with four-year universities will improve college access and allow inmates to earn quality degrees that can help them secure sustaining employment upon release. The goals of OCE are ambitious; however, they signal that promising and innovative reform will continue in California – and can be a model for other states.[22]

Looking Ahead

The progress in California is indicative of a shift in both political will and resources. The support for these efforts stretches across the political aisle and throughout the branches of government. Recognizing the potential and critical role of correctional education in the push to reform, rehabilitate, and promote reentry success is a major step and a testament to the impact of aligning goals and systems to achieve outcomes. The recommendations put forth by CLASP [23] uplift this approach, and the work taking place across California offers a blueprint for implementation.

CLASP Recommendations

Actions at the Federal Level

- Congress should fully reinstate Pell grant eligibility for incarcerated people. The 1994 ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals, which amounted to less than 1 percent of the Pell budget at the time, essentially removed access to postsecondary education for those in prison. [24] Postsecondary access for prisoners has been proven effective by rigorous research, offering a return on investment for both inmates and society as a whole.

- Federal policymakers should increase overall funding—and current funding ceilings—for adult education and career and technical education through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AELFA—funded under title II of the WIOA) and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act. Given the high number of prisoners with insufficient reading, math, and problem-solving skills, these resources are urgently critical. Although states can use dedicated funding streams for correctional education within both of these federal programs, even these modest existing resources remain underused. States should be fully informed about these funds and encouraged to use them.

- Title I of WIOA should be fully funded at authorized levels, and states and local areas should be encouraged to target these funds to individuals facing significant barriers to employment, including justice-involved youth and adults.

- Federal discretionary grants administered through the Departments of Education, Labor, and Justice should continue to be funded to support best practices, spur innovation, and scale effective models in states and localities. These grants include:

  - Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) grants to support testing and implementation of successful reentry training models.

  - Training to Work grants to target career pathway development and employment support for returning citizens in high-crime, high-poverty areas.

  - Linking to Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP) grants to better connect services offered inside correctional facilities to local workforce development systems.

  - Second Chance Act (SCA) grants to help returning citizens safely and successfully reintegrate into the community.

  - Improved Reentry Grants (IRE) to support the continuum of education and training opportunities between prison and community-based education.

- Congress should reauthorize the bipartisan Second Chance Act to continue supporting the work already started.

- Support reentry education and training opportunities by building up evidence and providing guidance to reduce ambiguity around federal policies and resources. The collaborative efforts of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council are a model for this type of comprehensive administrative effort.

- Federal policymakers should recognize the complexity of criminal justice issues, as well as the human and economic toll on states, cities, communities, families, and individuals. By considering the collateral consequences of incarceration and reentry, federal policy can be carefully crafted to reduce unintended consequences of other policies that may impair education and training opportunities and overall economic mobility of people involved with the criminal justice system. Legislation on issues as varied as health care, infrastructure, employment, sentencing reform, housing, public benefits, and child support enforcement, among others, should be considered through this lens.

Actions at the State Level

- Because the overwhelming majority of corrections spending comes from their budgets, states have a tremendous opportunity to implement helpful reforms. States should improve correctional education to support the continued training and labor market success of inmates, the vast majority of whom will eventually return to society and need the tools to succeed in the labor market. Even amid tightening state budgets and other uncertainties, states should maintain support for correctional education and challenge themselves to be efficient with resources, while investing in and scaling best practices. One good example: when state financial aid was cut for inmates in Indiana correctional facilities, the state shifted its focus from traditional postsecondary education and toward more vocational and certification programs through a partnership with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development.[25]

- Too often, state data on correctional education funding are not transparent, making it difficult to track and evaluate funding streams and programs. States should publish clear and specific correctional education budgets—including information on how much funding is dedicated to correctional education and which types of programs are offered—to help policymakers, other decision makers, and advocates monitor and measure their approaches. By tracking the accessibility of their programs and the outcomes of participating inmates, states can inform the success of correctional education programs and provide insight to other states.

- States should collaborate across education, workforce, and criminal justice silos to ensure the effective access, delivery, and continuity of education and training during and after incarceration. Recognizing each as parts of a whole that must work together through partnerships and policy coordination helps to limit systemic barriers to education and training.

- States should make sure their financial aid is equitable and accessible, and not operating under punitive policy structures. Postsecondary institutions can and should play a key role in educating incarcerated and returning citizens, and prior offenses should not serve as additional, trajectory-defining punishments that restrict state financial resources.

- Experts have identified more than 40,000 collateral consequences at the state and federal level that a criminal conviction can have on employment and other opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals.[26] For example, state bans on occupational licenses can completely undermine the success of correctional education, thus dashing hopes and wasting time and money by training people for jobs that bar former felons. Where and how people can legally and safely contribute to the economy and their own wellbeing should not be limited by debts already paid to society.

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