

Incarceration to Reentry

Education & Training Pathways in Indiana

Reconnecting Justice in the States

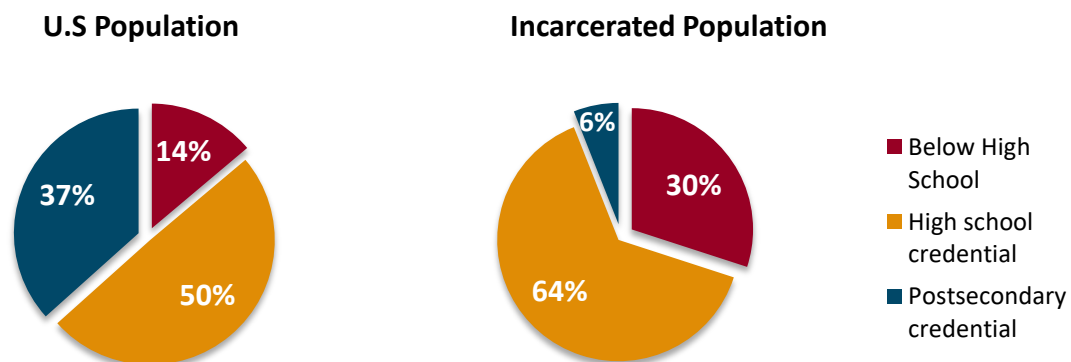


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Series background

Because the social, economic, political, historical, and racial context that shapes the criminal justice system is both complex and extensive, individuals who have been incarcerated face limited opportunities—particularly for education and training—both during and after incarceration. 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 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 are lifting this issue higher on reform agendas. Nonetheless, the education and training needs of prisoners are far more complex than what traditional postsecondary education (see figure 1) can meet, 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 Indiana.

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



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

Building reform

The need for a new approach

Like elsewhere, Indiana's attention on criminal justice reform has stemmed from an exponentially growing prison population, which caused unsustainable overcrowding and increased demand on the state budget. From 2000 to 2008, the prison population in the state grew by 41 percent—three times the rate of other states in the region—while the state increased spending on corrections by \$117 million in the same time period.³ Despite the increased spending on corrections and rehabilitation, nearly 40 percent of inmates released in 2008 were re-incarcerated within three years.⁴ Although this percentage is lower than regional and national rates, Indiana policymakers sought to further reform the cycle of incarceration and improve returning citizens' reentry outcomes. A 2010 study reported that if the state did not change existing policies, the incarcerated population would grow by an additional 21 percent between 2010 and 2017, saddling the state's budget with an additional \$1.2 billion in prison costs.⁵ In response, Indiana has made conscious efforts to reform its criminal justice system by expanding diversion practices and being more strategic about improving reentry outcomes, particularly by improving education and training opportunities.

Race and recidivism

The results of Indiana's 2014 recidivism study⁵ revealed another notable indicator: race. In particular, the intersectional impact of race, age, and gender on recidivism is part of a larger trend and narrative about racial disparities in the criminal justice system. The study found that between 2005 and 2009 those released from Indiana prisons who were most likely to recidivate were younger, male, or Black. More specifically, among nonviolent offenders, young Black men who were undereducated and unemployed were most likely to recidivate. It is no coincidence that this same demographic group experiences the highest rates of incarceration and greatest barriers to education and employment.⁶ In Indiana, Black men represent 4 percent of the population, but make up 35 percent of the prison population.⁷ The pipeline to prison for these young men is paved by systemic inequalities that must be addressed, especially at the intersection of education, employment, and criminal justice.⁸

Over 20,000 people are released from Indiana prisons each year, and they often face significant barriers in finding employment and/or accessing education and training opportunities that promote economic mobility.¹⁰ These barriers to employment and economic mobility have contributed to high rates of recidivism, driving the state to modernize its correctional education and training programs and intentionally connect these programs to better reentry outcomes. Among those who are incarcerated in Indiana, only 9 percent have a college degree, and just 62 percent have a high school diploma or its equivalent, while 29 percent are marginally illiterate.¹¹ Research has shown that access to correctional education and training can boost post-release employability, reduce recidivism, and, by extension, improve stability and mobility for the families and communities most affected. In Indiana, 70 percent of people coming out of prison are parents, and the collateral consequences are often intergenerational. Among children of justice-involved

individuals, economic and educational trajectories often mirror the disparities their parents face. These children are more likely to have similar or worse levels of educational attainment as their parents, be in the bottom 5 percent of income earners, and are more likely to commit crimes than children who have not had an incarcerated parent.¹²

In response to the economic and human effects of mass incarceration, Indiana began taking steps toward reform, beginning with community-based alternatives to sentencing, improved transition services, and greater transparency and interagency coordination. Indiana focused significantly on correctional education and connections to employment upon reentry, two policy approaches that previously suffered from state disinvestment despite their positive implications for reentry.

Shifting to investments in education and training

Beginning in 2008, the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) and Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD) documented employment-related information among 6,561 people who were released from prison in 2005.¹³ Using these data, several empirical studies looked at Indiana's correctional education and training offerings, as well as post-release employment and its effects on recidivism. These studies helped bolster support for reform that allowed the IDOC to structure programs to meet Indiana's specific needs. Because of the mounting evidence of the effectiveness of these programs, the state responded with greater investments, better alignment, and continuous improvement.

However, these investments came at a cost. In 2012, the state eliminated state financial aid for postsecondary education in prisons. Prior to this change, Indiana had the largest participation in postsecondary prison education in the nation, with 10 to 15 percent of the prison population accessing college programming every day. In addition, prisoners earned nearly 7,000 degrees in the eight years before funding was cut. In contrast, only 40 degrees were awarded in the three years after the state eliminated funding.¹⁴ The Indiana Department of Correction responded to cuts in state financial aid by providing more career and technical education (CTE) and certification programs to increase employability and reduce recidivism. Additionally, because of the significant reductions in recidivism associated with post-release employment—as described in the IDOC and DWD studies—the state made all educational programs focus on employment, intentionally shifting offerings to work-skills courses and certificate programs for in-demand fields.¹⁵ On January 1, 2017, the state began contracting with Oakland City University, a small private college in Indiana, to provide literacy, high school equivalency, vocational, and postsecondary CTE programs at 14 of 18 correctional facilities.¹⁶ One other site, New Castle Correctional Facility, contracts with the GEO Group, Inc. to provide similar services.

Building a culture of evidence to support investment

2012¹⁷

In 2012, the Education Division of the Indiana Department of Correction released a report evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education in state prisons. The study found that inmates who attended correctional education programs had a recidivism rate of 29.7 percent, compared to a 67.8 percent recidivism rate for those who did not. Educational attainment reduced recidivism regardless of participation in correctional education, although rates were much lower for those who participated in correctional education. For example, those who entered prison with the lowest educational attainment levels had a 32 percent recidivism rate after taking correctional education classes, compared to a recidivism rate of 82 percent for those who did not.

2014¹⁸

One study looked further at what characteristics contributed to recidivism and found demographic characteristics, education, and employment to be statistically significant factors. Education and employment were the most important factors. Over 50 percent of formerly incarcerated individuals who were unemployed returned to prison within 5 years. Those without a high-school credential had a recidivism rate of 55.9 percent, compared to 46.2 percent for those with a high school credential, and 31 percent for those with a college education.

These implications underscore the need for more education and better alignment with articulation and employability after release. The results of another 2014 study “demonstrated the need for correctional education administrators to allocate available resources to develop and implement skills-based training programs for eligible inmates” and “clearly showed that most stable and higher wage jobs obtained by ex-offenders were skills-based positions in manufacturing or construction.” It also recommended that correctional education administrators incorporate programs related to these industries so that offerings are tied to labor market needs as well as economically sustainable jobs.¹⁹

Reform progress

Because of significant research demonstrating that individuals in Indiana and nationwide who participate in correctional education are less likely to be re-arrested and are more likely to be employed, the state allows inmates to earn time off their sentences upon completion of approved education programs. For completing a basic literacy and life skills program, GED program, or career/technical education program, inmates are awarded reductions of six months off their sentences. Completion of a high school diploma or associate degree grants up to one year off and completion of a bachelor's degree awards earns up to two years off.²⁰ In the 2008-2009 school year, those completing correctional education programs earned nearly 1.3 million days off their sentences, which saved the state an estimated \$68 million in housing costs for those inmates. That estimate does not include savings from inmates being less likely to return to prison after completing correctional education courses.²¹

With the goal of providing educational programs that lead to employment, WorkINdiana—a partnership between the IDOC and DWD—provides inmates with nationally recognized, employer-accepted credentials that are aligned to Indiana's labor market needs. All instructors are certified as occupational specialists by the Indiana Department of Education and offer courses such as auto tech, building management and trade, and business tech.²² State law requires that these three agencies work together to provide educational services, a welcome departure from the siloed approach in other states.²³ In 2012 Indiana launched the Hoosier Initiative for Re-Entry (HIRE) program, a joint initiative through the DWD and IDOC. Qualifying inmates begin the program while incarcerated and are connected upon release with Indiana employers looking to fill open positions. The program gives individuals education and training related to employer needs while incarcerated and additional training as needed following release. The program's greatest placement successes have been among those with the highest levels of education. Within the first seven months of 2017, HIRE has placed 1,104 returning citizens in jobs, largely in manufacturing, production, and food service, with an average wage of \$11.17. Close to 98 percent of returning citizens had maintained their jobs after 3 months. Notably, 78 percent of HIRE participants had been incarcerated for violent assault, theft, or drug offenses, which typically present major barriers to employment.²⁴

Using federal support

The state added capacity to its operations by leveraging federal resources. IDOC receives Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I and II dollars and distributes 100 percent of its Title I funds to juvenile programs and 100 percent of its Title II funds to adult education programs within corrections. By braiding these funds with state resources, IDOC uses about 8.5 percent of its federal Title II adult education allocation, although states are allowed to use up to 20 percent for corrections education. The state also uses federal Perkins CTE funds this way, focusing this funding stream on support for specific CTE delivery models. It is still possible that the IDOC can leverage additional federal resources as they are not making use of the maximum allowable uptake levels in these programs.²⁵

Since 2006, through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) Office of Apprenticeship, IDOC has also offered registered apprenticeship programs that meet the workforce needs of Indiana. The partnership is the largest prison apprenticeship training program

in the nation and is managed privately by PEN Industries. Inmates are selected through an application process and must have a high school diploma or equivalent among other qualifications. In order to finish the apprenticeship program, participants must have completed a minimum of 14 months on the job, logged over 2,000 hours of on-the-job training, and completed a minimum of 144 hours of curriculum requirements.²⁷ Over 2,600 inmates complete apprenticeships annually and 75 percent of those who complete a USDOL apprenticeship are employed an average of 150 days following their release.^{28,29} It is important to note that entities like PEN industries have been controversial because of their role in the prison labor industry. Inmates who work at traditional PEN Products operations are paid \$.30 to \$.55 per hour; however, this program allows some inmates to work in joint ventures with private industries that pay comparable wages to private sector workers performing the same work in the same geographic region.³⁰

Second Chance Pell and postsecondary education

Indiana is a host state to one of the Second Chance Pell (SCP) experimental sites established through a 2016 U.S. Department of Education initiative. While Pell grants were first offered to prisoners in 1972, a 1994 ban on Pell grants for prisoners all but eliminated postsecondary access for incarcerated people. Through the pilot, 67 colleges were selected to serve over 12,000 inmates and allow inmates at 100 participating prisons nationwide to be eligible for federal Pell grants.³¹ Holy Cross College (IN) offers postsecondary courses to inmates at Westville Correctional Facility and Indiana Women's Prison. Classes at Westville are taught by professors from Holy Cross College and the University of Notre Dame, with degrees awarded by Holy Cross College. Faculty members from institutions in the Indianapolis area instruct courses at the Indiana Women's Prison.³²

Second Chance Pell in Indiana ²⁶

Through a partnership between Holy Cross College and the University of Notre Dame, the Westville Correctional Facility and Indiana Women's Prison have been offering postsecondary education courses as part of the national Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) Consortium since 2013. This established program became a part of the federal Second Chance Pell (SCP) initiative in 2016, with faculty and graduate students from both campuses partnering to provide teaching, tutoring, and resource support for students. Participation in SCP helped Notre Dame and Holy Cross College add capacity to support and expand programs including a writing center. Following the BPI model, the program offerings focus on a liberal arts education; and like all Holy Cross College graduates on the main campus, students complete a career internship during their senior year.

Second Chance Pell has ultimately doubled college enrollment at Westville, currently serving 53 students. In December, Westville will confer its 39th associate's degree, the first class since SCP started. Six students are expected to earn B.A. degrees in May 2018. Upon release, students can continue their studies at Holy Cross College, although no other colleges in the state have established formal articulation agreements. To date, six students have applied to continue their studies on campus. The opportunity for post-release continuity of studies depends largely on where students live after release, which reinforces the need for stronger state articulation agreements.

Despite some successes, there have also been challenges. After a year in operation, the women's facility discontinued the SCP program due to funding limitations.

Unfortunately, state and federal financial aid is not available to Indiana inmates (with the exception of SCP grants). Incarcerated adults may self-pay and enroll in associate or bachelor's degree program through correspondence courses offered by Oakland City University.³³ IvyTech Community College was awarded a Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education grant to enroll women at the Madison Correctional Facility in the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council's Certified Production Technician program, which offers college credit. This program is directly tied to the workforce needs of Indiana, as nearly 20 percent of workers in the state are employed in manufacturing, and these jobs have median wages of more than double the minimum wage.³⁴

Outcomes and continuity

This progress in educational access has helped Indiana increase its momentum in connecting returning citizens to opportunities for education and training, as well as wraparound supports upon reentry. The state's measurable successes and ongoing improvements include:

Measurable successes

- During the 2014-2015 school year, 25,726 adults were housed at a facility with educational programs. There were 5,336 individuals enrolled in academic programs and 2,499 enrolled in CTE programs. Also, 1,850 inmates completed a literacy program, 1,141 completed a high school equivalency program, and 1,969 completed a CTE program.³⁵
- Overall recidivism rates have declined, with three-year rates dropping to 36.9 percent in 2016 after two years of increases. However, rates have remained consistently below 40 percent over the past five years, reflecting incremental improvements under the last decade of reforms. Nonetheless, because of disparities across populations—and most drastically among young adults—the state should strive to reverse these trends with a more targeted focus on policy. Two of the most significant drivers across all indicators of decreasing recidivism are education and employment.^{36,37}

Ongoing improvements

- The HIRE program uses a continuous improvement model, gearing pre-release training and employability skills to Indiana's labor market sectors with the best prospects for employing returning citizens. As a result, the timing of pre-release training has become more targeted, with the goal of enrolling and accelerating inmates through high school equivalency courses to transition them more quickly into CTE and postsecondary training. This fast tracking of course sequences enables inmates to earn credentials closer to the time of their release, expediting the employer placement process.
- The state's adult education grant has supported the roll out of an IDOC initiative called Master Student to Master Employee and a complementary initiative by DWD called Workplace Essentials. These programs provide training in skills targeted to specific employment outcomes, using career readiness certificates in specific industry sectors. Through data-based evaluations of the effectiveness of these programs, Indiana plans to increase program quality and capacity throughout the system.

- On July 1, 2017, Governor Eric Holcomb signed an executive order removing questions about criminal history from initial employment applications for state government jobs, unless the conviction would conflict with the ability of somebody to perform that job. Previously, state job applications asked about criminal convictions that have not been expunged or sealed by court. The goal of the order was to remove the initial stigma of a criminal record before having the chance to make an unbiased impression during the selection process. Although applicants can be still be subject to criminal background checks in later phases of the application process, they will be given the chance to explain the context of their record after having the chance to demonstrate their fit for the position. While this “ban-the-box” order does not entirely eliminate the employment barrier, it does represent progress toward fairer hiring practices.³⁸

Future goals

- Beyond this collaborative approach to build up employment opportunities, the state has more work to build up that same capacity to support the comprehensive needs of returning citizens and offer them continued guidance as they reintegrate. Likewise, change vehicles to promote these efforts should be fixed in both practice *and* policy. In addition, targeted rehabilitation and reentry strategies must consider the disparate impacts of incarceration by race, particularly due to systemic bias and weaker opportunities for young men of color, a demographic with some of greatest barriers to employment and highest rates of recidivism in the state.
- Because 34 percent of the IDOC’s adult population was functionally illiterate in 2015³⁹, the state needs to make increased investment in basic literacy and math skills, along with promote the articulation of those skills into pathways with more advanced skills and employment. The department’s continued efforts to align correctional education to post-release employment and continuity must include efforts to integrate basic education *and* training, and there are many models for Indiana to emulate, both within and outside of correctional settings. WIOA funds can also support these efforts. Nonetheless, because these trends are a microcosm of larger systemic disparities, so successful reform will happen through conversations beyond the correctional system.
- Indiana has strengthened its correctional education offerings to align with labor market needs, and has leveraged interagency collaboration and employer partnerships consistently improve outcomes. However, pathways to successful reentry should not be limited to narrow employment options. Prior to the 2012 state financial aid ban, postsecondary education was accessible to incarcerated people, which provided another pathway option. Research has proven that postsecondary prison programs have positive individual and community benefits during and after incarceration. Likewise, as degree attainment levels increase, recidivism shrinks to almost non-existent levels.⁴⁰ To help realize the full potential of returning citizens, access to postsecondary education and statewide articulation agreements should be a part of the state’s re-entry model.

Looking ahead

The investment and alignment across education, workforce, and justice systems in Indiana is indicative of strong and coordinated efforts to support reentry outcomes. Although broader criminal justice reform remains an ongoing challenge, the coordinated support among agencies and state leaders to strengthen correctional education and reentry employment is a signal of progress in one important field. 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 importance of aligning goals and systems to achieve outcomes. The recommendations put forth by CLASP⁴¹ uplift this approach and the work taking place across Indiana offers a blueprint for implementation and a model for other states.

CLASP recommendations

Actions at the federal level

- Congress should fully reinstate Pell grant eligibility for incarcerated people. The 1994 ban on Pell Grants, which amounted to less than 1 percent of the Pell budget at the time, essentially removed access to postsecondary education for those in prison.⁴² Rigorous research has proven the effectiveness of postsecondary access for prisoners, which offers 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 Career and Technical Education Act. Given the high number of prisoners with insufficient reading, math, and problem-solving skills, more investments in these educational supports are urgently needed. Although states are allowed to dedicate set-asides for correctional education under both of these federal programs, many states are underutilizing even these modest existing resources. States should be fully informed about these funds and encouraged to use them.
- Formula grants to states under Title I of WIOA should be fully funded at the levels that Congress authorized in its nearly-unanimous bipartisan vote to pass the law in 2014, 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 U.S. 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 this work in communities across the country.
- The federal government should promote reentry education and training opportunities by building up evidence and providing guidance to reduce ambiguity around federal policies and resources. The collaborative effort of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council was 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 is at the state level, state policymakers 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 seek to braid funding efficiently, while investing in and scaling best practices.
- 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 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.
- State-funded financial aid for postsecondary education should be equitable and accessible, and free from punitive policies. Postsecondary institutions can and should play a key role in educating incarcerated and returning citizens, and individuals with prior criminal offenses should not receive additional, trajectory-defining punishments as a result of restricted access to state financial aid.
- 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.⁴³ For example, state occupational licensing rules can completely undermine the success of correctional education, thus dashing hopes and wasting time and money by training people for jobs from which former felons are legally barred. 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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