THE FEDERAL INTERAGENCY REENTRY COUNCIL
A Record of Progress and a Roadmap for the Future

Education

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Improving access to meaningful educational opportunities

The Challenge. In a federal study of people released from state prisons, 94 percent of incarcerated adults identified education as a key reentry need. Roughly 37 percent of people in state prisons do not have a high school diploma or GED, and 86 percent lack postsecondary education. Education is a core resource for release preparation, and is an evidence-based tool for reducing recidivism among adults and juveniles. The RAND Corporation’s meta-analysis of research on correctional education found that, on average, incarcerated people who participated in correctional education programs were 43 percent less likely to recidivate than their counterparts who did not. This major study, funded by BJA, also found that a one dollar investment in prison education translates into four to five dollars of savings in corrections costs during the first three years after release.

Education is also a critical issue for youth in custody, including youth with disabilities. Of those who were tested, nearly one-third of the individuals in juvenile-justice facilities were diagnosed with learning disabilities, though fewer than 25 percent received special education services and supports to address their needs. And drawing upon the most recently available data from the nation’s largest database on teaching and learning in juvenile justice systems, the quality of the learning programs for incarcerated youth have had “little positive, enduring impact on the educational achievement of most children and youth in state custody.”

The Path Forward. Reentry Council agencies will continue to implement and build upon efforts to improve educational opportunities for justice-involved populations, both pre- and post-release. Using new tools and guidance materials, agencies will promote best practices and provide technical assistance in support of reentry education and transitional services. In addition to building on recent efforts to expand access to higher education,

“And for those already in the system, we can’t just walk away from them – we also have to invest in education, career training, treatment, and support programs that help young people who are already involved in the criminal justice system become contributing members of our society. That’s why we are starting the Second Chance Pell program, to give those who are incarcerated a better chance at going to college… We cannot stand by while another generation of young people – from Chicago to Denver, and from Baltimore to Ferguson – faces the same choices. That’s why we’re in the fight we’re in, to make opportunity real for those who were born without advantages, and who have lived and grown with struggle and fear: That’s why I so strongly believe, as the President does, that we must be a nation of second chances. It’s why we have to try new ideas. It’s why we have to do everything we can.”

Education Secretary
John B. King, Jr., Speech, September 20, 2015
the Reentry Council will continue to build a community of practice that supports an array of educational opportunities, including career and technical training opportunities and high-quality education for youth and justice-involved persons with disabilities. These steps will include efforts not only to improve access, but also to expand available programming and improve assessment and review systems.

Reentry Council Accomplishments:

» **Expanded access to higher education.** ED’s Second Chance Pell pilot program will allow nearly 12,000 eligible Americans incarcerated in state and federal correctional facilities access to roughly $30 million in Pell Grants, enabling them to pay for postsecondary education and training that can help them to successfully reintegrate, obtain jobs, and support their families. Over 200 postsecondary institutions applied and 69 institutions – in partnership with more than 100 correctional facilities – were selected in June 2016. Teams representing each pilot site came to Washington, D.C. for a convening hosted by ED, DOJ and the Vera Institute of Justice, and sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the California Wellness Foundation, in late July to identify and share best practices for designing effective postsecondary correctional education programs. Additionally, ED issued a Beyond the Box guide highlighting the impact of criminal justice inquiries on college admissions to support colleges and universities in their efforts to expand college opportunity for justice-involved individuals. And the White House and ED launched a Fair Chance Education Pledge June 2016 for colleges and universities to demonstrate their commitment to providing second chances. As of July 2016, more than two dozen postsecondary institutions have committed to removing barriers to higher education access.
Issued joint guidance to improve education delivered to juveniles in correctional settings. ED and DOJ released a correctional education guidance package in December 2014 to inform the efforts of states, school districts, and juvenile justice facilities that serve court-involved youth. This guidance package included:

- A set of Guiding Principles for Providing High-Quality Education in Juvenile Justice Secure Care Settings from ED and DOJ identifies promising practices for improving education programs in juvenile justice facilities, as well as areas in which federal legal obligations apply.

- A Dear Colleague Letter on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for Students with Disabilities in Correctional Facilities from ED’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, clarifying state and public agency obligations under IDEA to ensure the provision of a free and appropriate public education to eligible students with disabilities in correctional facilities.

- A Dear Colleague Letter on the Civil Rights of Students in Juvenile Justice Residential Facilities from ED’s Office for Civil Rights and DOJ’s Civil Rights Division, clarifying that those juvenile justice residential facilities that receive federal funding, like all other public schools, must comply with federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, and disability.

- A Dear Colleague Letter on Access to Pell Grants for Students in Juvenile Justice Facilities for campus financial aid professionals, and a question and answer factsheet for students (also in Spanish) from ED’s Office of Postsecondary Education, clarifying that otherwise eligible youth who are confined in juvenile justice facilities are eligible to receive Pell Grants, subject to the modified cost of attendance statutory provisions that apply to incarcerated students.

Ensuring effective implementation of the guidance through IDEA Self-Assessment Monitoring Tool. To assist states and districts in effectively implementing recommendations and requirements included in the 2014 Guidance, ED has created the State Correctional Education Self-assessment (SCES), a voluntary tool for states to evaluate how well their correctional education programs are delivering special education and related services and complying with IDEA requirements for these youth. ED will continue to provide TA and training on the use of this tool.

Implemented important WIOA changes. ED is implementing WIOA, which includes a range of education and job training opportunities for incarcerated individuals to promote successful reentry and reduce recidivism. WIOA also raised the cap on the amount of funding states can use for correctional education from 10 to 20 percent. Regulations were finalized in June 2016.
» **Developed an evidence-based reentry education model and tested it in various jurisdictions.** ED developed a reentry education model in 2012 and, in concert with DOJ, awarded three grants to adult education providers for innovative correctional education programs aimed at helping America’s incarcerated population make a smooth reentry to society through education and workforce training. Building on the successes and lessons learned from this investment, ED developed an online reentry education toolkit in winter 2016. ED also awarded nine new reentry education grants in the fall of 2015. This grant program seeks to build evidence on effective reentry education programs and to demonstrate that high-quality, appropriately designed, integrated, and well-implemented educational and related services in institutional and community settings are critical in supporting educational attainment and reentry success for individuals who have been incarcerated.

» **Adapted reentry model for application in juvenile settings.** The Juvenile Justice Reentry Education Grant Program: Opening Doors to College and Careers through Career and Technical Education (JJ-REP) is a joint investment between ED’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education and DOJ’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). This grant program is intended to improve outcomes for justice-involved youth by providing career and technical education (CTE) programs in juvenile justice facilities as well as intensive wrap around reentry supports and services, post-release CTE, and employment and training opportunities. Each of the JJ-REP projects represents a unique approach to working with a population that typically has a history of poor school attendance and academic disengagement.

» **Developed research on ways to securely provide access to information technology in correctional education.** ED’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education issued Educational Technology in Corrections, 2015, as a response to the challenges and opportunities that technology presents for correctional education. This policy brief looks broadly at the challenges to and opportunities for expanding and improving educational services for incarcerated individuals through the use of educational technology and empowering teachers and learners in correctional settings. The Reentry Council has also released Myth Busters on Technology Information Access and Education Technology in Juvenile Facilities.
Upcoming Actions:

» **Implementing the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program.** Starting in the summer of 2016, ED and DOJ will work to create and foster a community of practice for postsecondary correctional education to disseminate information, share resources, and keep pilots and the field up to date about new developments and best practices, while also developing a robust evaluation component in partnership with researchers and philanthropic foundations. ED will also gather information and share resources with concurrent postsecondary correctional education programs not participating in the Second Chance Pell pilot program, in order to enhance ED’s knowledge base and build on the community of practice.

» **Encouraging colleges and universities to sign the Pledge and adopt the Beyond the Box Guidance.** The Fair Chance Higher Education Pledge provides our nation’s colleges and universities with an opportunity to voice their support for the reforms needed to remove unnecessary barriers to higher education. ED will continue to encourage colleges and universities (and a broad array of coalitions) to sign the Pledge and demonstrate an ongoing commitment to adopting fair chance admissions practices and going “Beyond the Box” by determining whether criminal justice-related questions are necessary to make informed admission decisions.

» **Assisting states in implementing the juvenile correctional education guidance.** ED’s Title I, Part D program continues implementation of the guidance package recommendations through joint TA to state and local agency contacts (five joint webinars and presentations with OSEP since 2015), developing new self-assessment instruments and monitoring plans that incorporate key points of the guidance (from FY 2017-18), and analyzing annual performance data on connection to services and educational outcomes while juveniles are in confinement and up to 90 days after they leave.

» **Presenting on WIOA changes.** ED will present on WIOA and corrections at the annual state workforce board directors’ meeting in August 2016, highlighting the expanded opportunities under the law for correctional education funding. Additional training opportunities will be identified.

» **Clarifying student loan rehabilitation and repayment for incarcerated individuals.** ED will be releasing a “Reentry MythBuster” through the Reentry Council designed to clarify ED policies around student loan repayment and student loan rehabilitation for individuals who are currently incarcerated.
» **Disseminating lessons from the reentry education toolkit and grants.** The reentry toolkit will be presented at an international gathering of correctional educators in August 2016. The JJ-REP grantees will also have a technical assistance provider who will develop tools and resources based on lessons learned from the grantees.

» **Developing resources to promote successful youth reentry.** ED is developing resources to support the smooth reentry of incarcerated juveniles into schools and the community. The Neglected or Delinquent Technical Assistance Center (NDTAC) for the Title I, Part D program will update its Transition Toolkit for the first time since September 2008. The Toolkit will help practitioners equip youth with the skills necessary to successfully navigate child-serving systems. Additionally, ED is developing resources for states, juvenile justice facilities, and families to provide high-quality education for justice-involved youth with disabilities. In partnership with DOJ, ED is also creating user-friendly resources to help students and families address a wide range of reintegration needs, including re-enrollment, expungement and records transfer, among others.

» **Developing a juvenile reentry toolkit for youth and families of youth in out-of-home placement.** The toolkit will highlight common barriers to reentry and provide information on national and local resources, including educational resources, to meet the needs of youth transitioning back to their communities.

» **Disseminating findings from the cognitive skills study.** The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) study provides direct measures of incarcerated working-age adults’ cognitive skills based on their performance on literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving tasks set in real-life contexts. This is a follow up to the 2003 national assessment of adult literacy prison survey. ED is expecting that a report will be released in October 2016. ED will work to develop a Dear Colleague Letter to address the Administration’s response to the information contained in the study and work with their reentry grantees and the technical assistance provider to incorporate lessons learned from the study into TA products.

» **Sharing information on practices that promote successful reentry of youth with disabilities.** ED currently has three Model Demonstration Projects underway relating to reentry of students with disabilities from juvenile justice facilities to education, employment, and community programs. These projects are collecting data on common student and systems change outcomes and will continue to do so throughout the 2016-2017 school year. The analysis and reporting will be completed late in 2017.

» **Support education-focused alternatives to incarceration.** ED and DOJ will make a joint investment in diversion programs intended to improve academic, employment and behavioral outcomes for certain justice-involved youth. This effort will support communities in diverting young people out of the criminal and juvenile justice systems, instead reconnecting them to the educational system, as well as social and emotional supports. This initiative will provide critical resources to build the capacity of local communities to help connect justice-involved youth with pathways to college, careers, and economic stability.
Julius Walker, Nyack College 2015

“In my 34th year of incarceration I discovered college; not only did it transform my life but it also changed my trajectory. In 2015, I proudly graduated with my bachelor’s degree in organizational management and today, I’m a Program Coordinator at a non-profit that focuses on strengthening relationships and building communities, a position that allows me to help young people learn how to peacefully resolve conflict and help families forge healthy relationships.”

Steve Rodriguez, Nyack College 2015

“Education has given me a chance to earn the love and respect of my children. Education has helped me to become a better person and more importantly, a better father and grandfather.”

Darryl Butler, Nyack College 2001

“Education helped me to realize that no matter how bad things get, there are positive ways to manage problems. Education helped me develop the skills and insights that I need to own my future. The old me was someone you’d never want as a neighbor; the new me is someone you’d value as a friend.”

Sean Pica, Nyack College 2001

“Education saved my life. Education started me on my path to success. I earned my bachelor’s and master’s degrees while incarcerated. Today, I’m the executive director of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, which provides college in five NY State correctional facilities. Today, I’m able to pay-it-forward and positively affect thousands of men and women inside and outside the prison walls.”