



# ON TRACK

How well are states preparing youth in the juvenile justice system for employment?

SEPTEMBER 2019



## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no group of young people faces more daunting barriers to achieving their career goals than youth in the juvenile justice system. More than 30,000 youth are incarcerated in the United States every year,<sup>1</sup> and more than 325,000 are placed on some form of probation.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, these youth are older and seeking to enter the workforce—as of 2015, approximately 75 percent of incarcerated youth<sup>3</sup> and 50 percent of all youth adjudicated to any level of supervision<sup>4</sup> were age 16 and over. Yet, these youth are disproportionately likely, compared to their peers that are not involved in the justice system, to face an array of barriers to transitioning to a crime-free, productive adulthood.

These barriers can include lack of proficiency in math and reading skills, which often fall significantly below grade level; suspensions/expulsions from school; identified (and unmet) special education needs; and little, if any, job experience or employability skills. These young people also often struggle simultaneously with a range of individual challenges, such as mental health and substance use issues, and community-level challenges, such as access to transportation and affordable housing. This combination of challenges can significantly undermine a youth's ability to secure viable employment.<sup>5</sup> Finally, these youth must also overcome institutional barriers in the form of collateral consequences of conviction, which span from requirements to disclose their juvenile records on college and employment applications—which may adversely affect their chances—to restrictions on eligibility for public housing, financial aid, and careers in specific professions.<sup>6</sup> In large part due to these myriad challenges, federally funded employment and training programs targeted at youth in the juvenile justice system and, more generally, young people age 16–24 who are in neither school nor work (also known as “opportunity youth”) have not evidenced a strong record of success.<sup>7</sup>



### What is workforce development and career and technical education?

Offering the appropriate workforce development services can set youth in the justice system on a path to furthering their education and career goals. These services include the assessment of a youth's career interests and skills as well as the provision of career and technical education (CTE) courses, training in employability skills, real or simulated work experiences, apprenticeships, internships, and other efforts to prepare youth to obtain and sustain meaningful employment. Increasingly, jurisdictions are striving to integrate these services through a career pathways model intended to develop youth's academic, technical, and employability skills; provide them with ongoing education and training; and place them in high-demand jobs in growth industries.

However, many employers have an immediate and expanding need for skilled labor, and youth in the juvenile justice system have the potential to fill this need after they return to the community.<sup>8</sup> To tap into this mutually beneficial relationship, juvenile justice systems will need to employ a high-quality approach to workforce development services that help position youth to meet employers' expectations and achieve long-term success in the workforce.

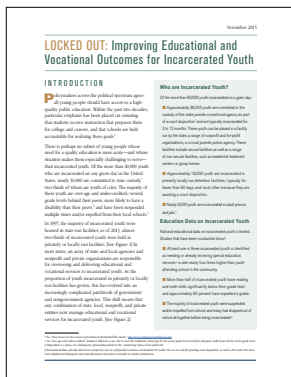
### About This Brief

In 2018, The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center partnered with the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA) to send an electronic survey to juvenile correctional agencies in all 50 states. This unique survey asked questions about the delivery of workforce development services to the approximately 32,000 incarcerated youth who are committed to state custody nationwide as part of a court disposition,<sup>9</sup> with a focus on the 23,000 youth incarcerated in secure facilities typically managed by state agencies.<sup>10</sup> All 50 states completed the survey.

The survey sought answers to the following key questions:

- ➔ What workforce development services are provided to incarcerated youth in facilities and when they return to the community, and how are these services integrated into case and reentry planning?
- ➔ Are juvenile justice agencies partnering with workforce development agencies, educational entities, and employers to promote incarcerated youth's career readiness and help youth to obtain meaningful employment in the community?
- ➔ What data are collected and reported on workforce development service provision, employment, and related youth outcomes?

This brief shares key findings from the survey to help states and the juvenile justice field to establish an unprecedented baseline for how juvenile correctional agencies are striving to meet the workforce development needs of incarcerated youth. The findings also highlight key gaps related to the provision of workforce development services that should prompt state leaders to ensure that workforce development for this population is a priority and that agencies employ a purposeful, research-based approach to providing it. To support this goal, the brief provides a checklist of best practices, based on research and feedback from national experts, that juvenile justice agencies should use to assess their current workforce development activities for youth that are incarcerated, as well as those placed on community supervision, and to guide systemwide improvement efforts.



### Resource: Locked Out

In 2015, the CSG Justice Center partnered with CJCA on a similar 50-state survey to assess and report on the delivery of educational services for incarcerated youth. The resulting brief—[Locked Out: Improving Educational and Vocational Outcomes for Incarcerated Youth](#)—taken together with this one offers a unique examination of how juvenile correctional agencies are seeking to meet the educational and workforce development needs of incarcerated youth. They also provide policymakers and juvenile justice, education, and workforce development leaders with a roadmap for collaborative system improvement.



## KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

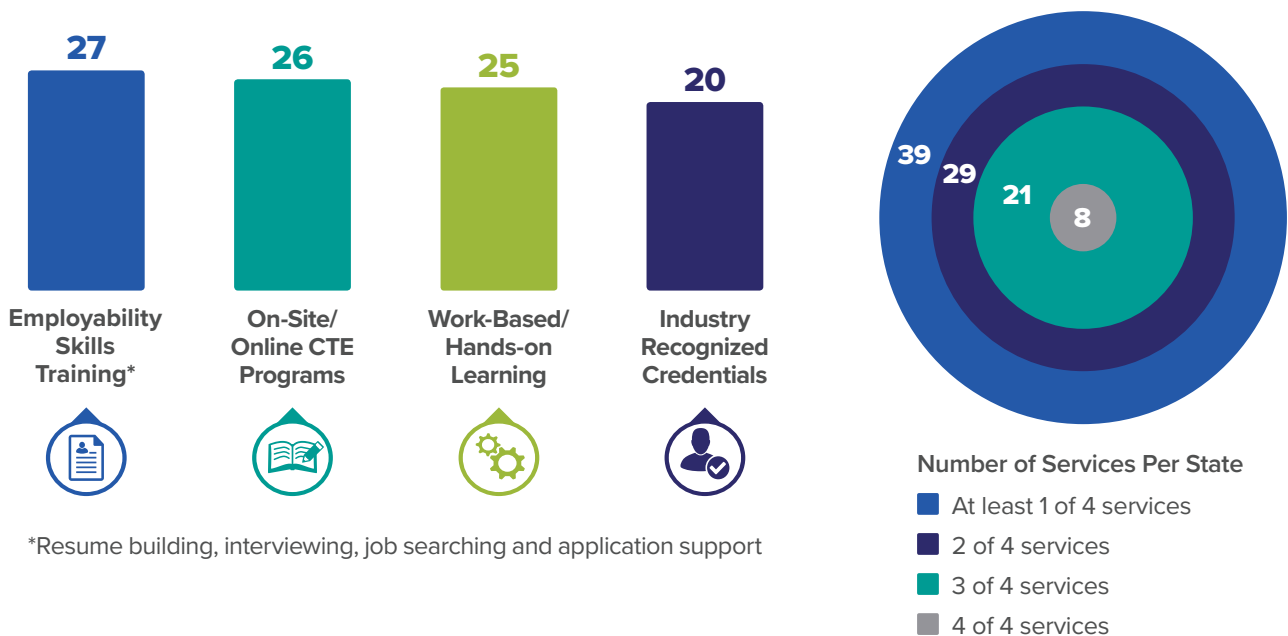


### KEY FINDING 1

Most incarcerated youth are not provided the workforce development services necessary to obtain viable employment in the community after release.

Despite the many barriers to obtaining employment that incarcerated youth face when returning to the community, few juvenile correctional agencies offer the comprehensive array of services necessary to prepare these young people to find meaningful employment. Only eight states report offering all youth in secure facilities the opportunity to develop soft employment skills (e.g., interviewing, resume building, etc.); take onsite or online CTE courses; engage in work-based learning; and earn industry-based credentials. Further, 27 states offer any one of these workforce development services to all incarcerated youth—in particular, females have less access to services than their male peers, which is likely due to typically being incarcerated in smaller facilities.

**FIGURE 1** | Number of States Offering Core Workforce Development Services to All Incarcerated Youth




When workforce development services are provided to incarcerated youth, they are not often developed as part of intentional, comprehensive programs aligned with local labor market needs. As a result, juvenile correctional agencies are not positioning this population—which is likely to struggle to find a job under the best of circumstances—to have the greatest possible chance of finding gainful employment when they return to the community. Instead of a more strategic approach, the types of services available to youth are most often determined by agency staff’s personal availability, skills, and relationships in the local community (see Figure 2).


**FIGURE 2** | Factors Influencing What Workforce Development Services Are Offered in Facilities (by Number of States)



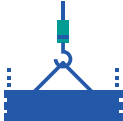
Given the lack of an intentional approach, it’s unsurprising that few states offer CTE courses to all youth in key areas of national labor market growth.<sup>11</sup> The survey found that only:



**Fifteen states** offer CTE courses to all incarcerated youth in information technology and computer programming. *Of the 35 states that do not offer these courses, nine states do not even provide youth in secure facilities with access to the internet.*



**Nine states** offer CTE courses to all youth in culinary arts.



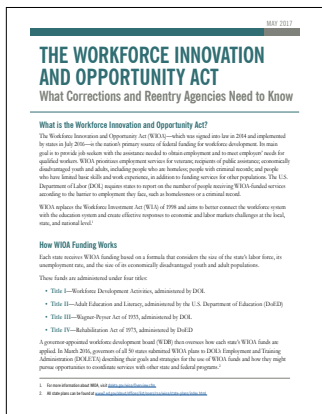
**Six states** offer CTE courses to all youth in building trades.

Finally, 35 states assess all incarcerated youth’s career interests and skills at intake, 34 states incorporate workforce development goals and services into youth’s case plans, and 30 states require that employment goals and services are a part of youth’s reentry plans. However, less than half of states do all three, meaning that juvenile correctional agencies are not sufficiently prioritizing the provision of workforce development services and integrating such efforts into their standard assessment, case planning, and service delivery activities.

**0-π KEY FINDING 2**

**Most state juvenile correctional agencies lack the partnerships needed to help incarcerated youth overcome barriers to obtaining viable employment in the community.**

The survey findings show that most states don’t have staff dedicated to overseeing the development and provision of workforce development services for incarcerated youth, particularly after these youth return to the community. In some states, it’s the responsibility of transition liaisons to provide such services after release; in other states, it’s facility education staff or parole officers. Given this limited staff capacity and often unclear responsibility delegation, it falls upon juvenile justice agencies to partner with workforce development agencies, educational entities, employers, and community-based providers to make sure incarcerated youth’s workforce development needs are effectively met. However, substantial gaps exist in the partnerships that agencies have formed, particularly with the workforce development community (see Figure 3).

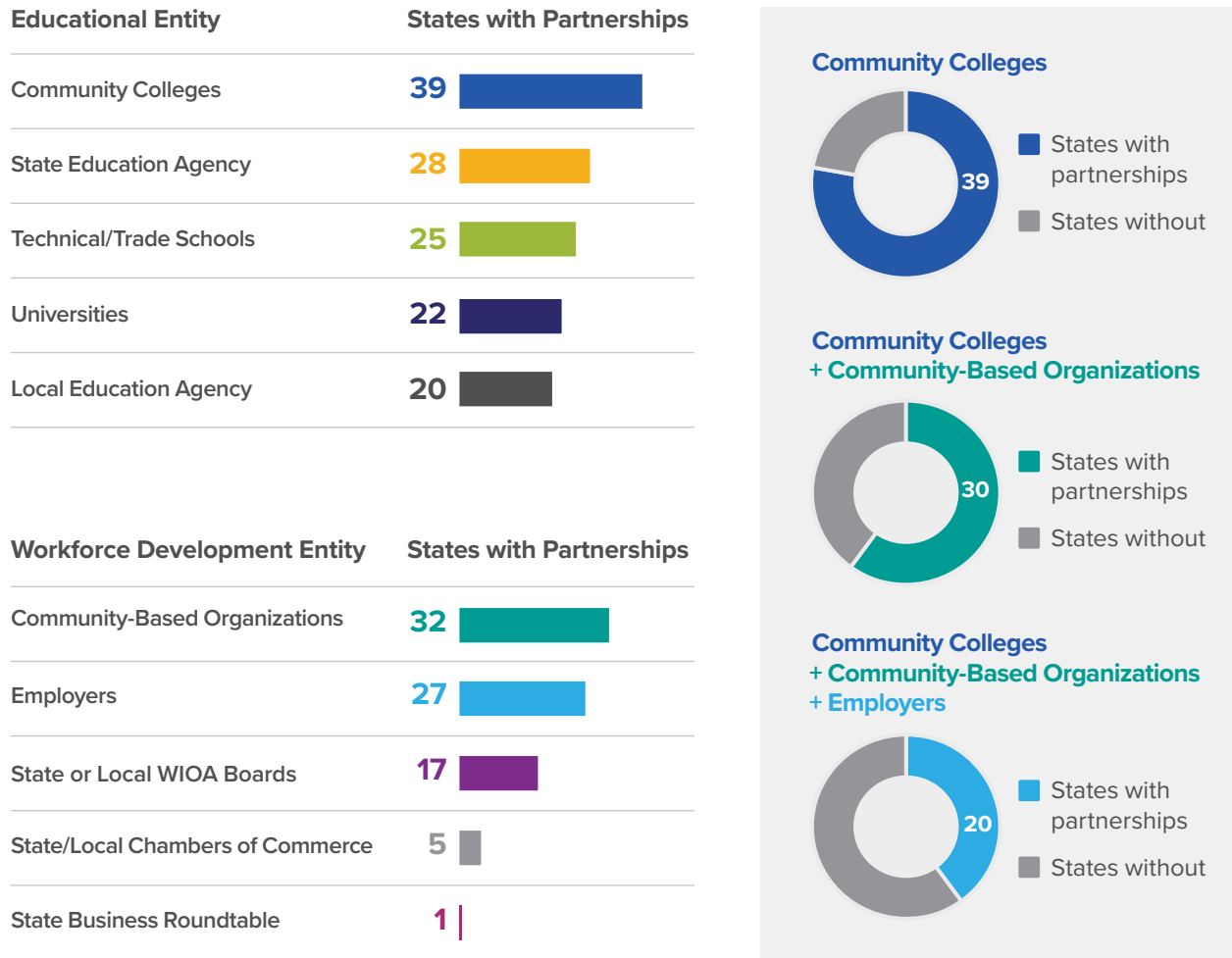


**Resource: *The Workforce and Innovation and Opportunity Act and Youth Involved in the Justice System***

**The Workforce and Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)**, passed in 2014, is the primary federal funding source for improving state workforce development services. A workforce development board (WDB) appointed by the governor oversees how each state’s WIOA funds are used. As part of Title I of WIOA, states receive dedicated funding to **deliver a comprehensive array of services** targeting youth with one or more barriers to employment, including youth in the juvenile justice system.

Juvenile justice agencies have an important opportunity to partner with their local WDBs to explore how WIOA funding can be used to prepare youth in their system for employment. Yet, only 18 states report that a juvenile justice agency representative attends meetings of the local and/or state WDBs; 38 states report either that youth involved in the juvenile justice system are not a priority for their WDBs or that the agency is not familiar enough with their WDBs to even know their priorities.

**FIGURE 3 | Juvenile Correctional Agency Partnerships with State and Local Education and Workforce Development Entities**



To the extent that juvenile justice agencies have partnerships with education and workforce development entities, the primary focus of these partnerships is on delivering services to incarcerated youth in facilities, not after release. Only 30 states have partnerships to provide workforce development services to youth after they return to the community from incarceration, and only 11 states have agreements with employers to actually provide youth with jobs. Many employers are reluctant to hire youth who were involved in the justice system; compounded with the challenges created by the collateral consequences youth face upon reentry, the lack of these partnerships makes a successful transition back to the community even more difficult.



### Resource: Juvenile Records and Barriers to Employment

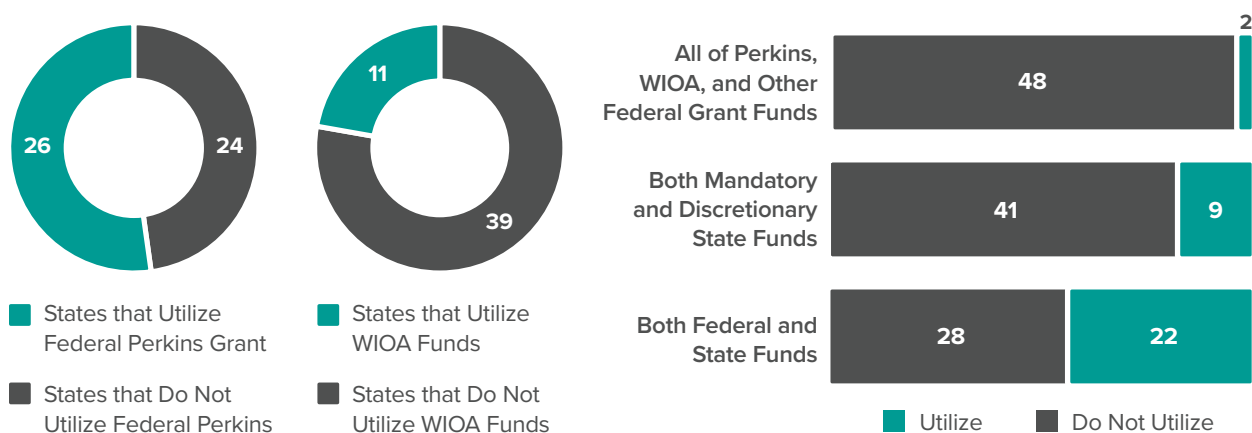
When a young person becomes involved with the juvenile justice system, it has the potential to go on their record. Depending on the state, this may follow them for the rest of their life, which can impact their pursuit of education, employment, housing, and more. While methods of record clearance are available, they may not be widely known, and the process is often confusing and time consuming.

The [National Juvenile Defender Center](#) has developed a host of resources for identifying the legal restrictions and barriers that youth with juvenile convictions may face. These resources can be used to identify which occupational programs to offer and which employers to partner with in developing them. In addition, juvenile justice agencies can draw upon the [Clean State Clearinghouse](#) to learn more about record clearance laws in their states and identify local legal services that can help youth clear their record and avoid these consequences altogether.

Even for those states that do have partnerships with employers and other education and workforce development entities, these partnerships are generally based on informal relationships rather than on formal agency agreements and, as a result, are often temporary due to frequent staff turnover (see Fig. 2). Unsurprisingly, 36 states rated their partnerships as average, below-average, or poor quality.

Finally, a key consequence of the lack of formal, ongoing collaboration between juvenile justice and education/workforce development entities is that states are failing to maximize available funding to meet the workforce development needs of youth in the juvenile justice system. Indeed, no more than half of all juvenile correctional agencies currently leverage any one of the major federal and state funding streams available to help improve employment outcomes for this population (see Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4 | Funding Sources Used by Juvenile Correctional Agencies for Workforce Development Services (by Number of States)**





**Resource: The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act**

[The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act](#), reauthorized in 2018, provides funding to increase access to high-quality CTE programs. As part of the reauthorization, states must submit four-year plans covering all the act’s requirements by spring 2020, providing them with an opportunity to consider how this funding could be used to improve CTE programs for youth in their juvenile justice systems.



**KEY FINDING 3**

Most states do not track key employment outcomes for incarcerated youth while they are in facilities and after their release.

Given the poor track record of many federally funded workforce development programs for opportunity youth and the barriers that this population faces, it’s critical that juvenile correctional agencies evaluate their investments in these services. Yet, most states are not collecting data on key workforce development outcomes while youth are incarcerated:



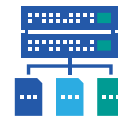
**Thirty-seven states** collect data on industry-recognized credentials or certificates earned.



**Seventeen states** collect data on postsecondary degrees or diplomas earned.



**Fourteen states** collect data on job training diplomas earned.



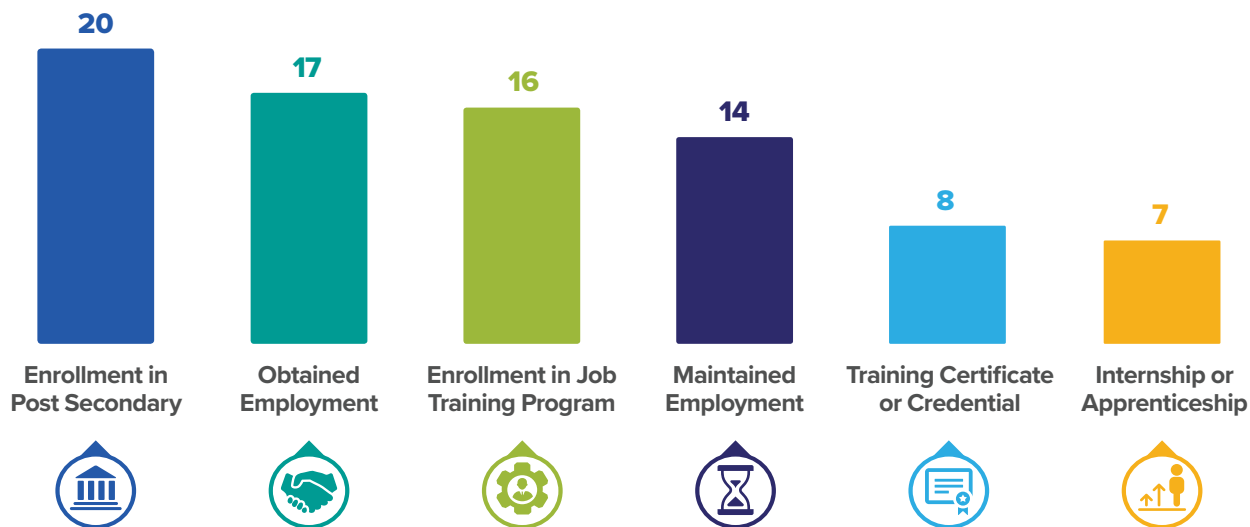
**Only eight states** collect data on all three of these outcomes.

States face an even greater struggle to collect this data when incarcerated youth return to the community. In some states, the state juvenile correctional agency oversees community supervision for incarcerated youth after release; in other states, local probation departments serve this function. Only 21 states have designated a single agency for collecting workforce development data for youth in the community. Further, juvenile justice agencies rarely have a cohesive data system for capturing the provision of workforce development services and employment outcomes for youth in the community, and, as noted earlier, typically lack formal partnerships with the education and



workforce development entities that are better positioned to collect this data. Thus, most states are not tracking even basic workforce development outcomes for incarcerated youth when they return to the community, and only five states collect data on these outcomes after youth are no longer under system supervision (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5** | Number of States Collecting Workforce Development Outcomes for Incarcerated Youth After Release



Given these challenges, almost two-thirds of states cite improving the tracking of workforce development outcomes as a key priority for system improvement.

Finally, to the extent that juvenile correctional agencies are tracking workforce development outcomes, they are not regularly sharing this data with key stakeholders to encourage and guide multisystem improvement efforts and the efficient allocation of resources:



**Twenty-seven states** share this data with their state education agency.



**Twenty-four states** share workforce development outcomes with their state legislature, and 18 share it with the governor.



**Five states** share workforce development outcomes with state workforce development agencies, and only four states share data with state and/or local WDBs.



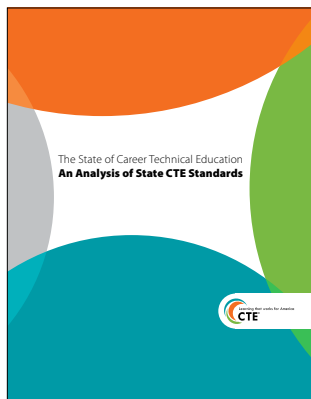
## BEST PRACTICE CHECKLIST

While there are many barriers to creating successful workforce development programs for youth in the juvenile justice system, there are ways to overcome these challenges. Policymakers and juvenile justice agency leaders, in collaboration with education and workforce development entities, should use the key questions and associated best practice checklists<sup>12</sup> detailed below to assess existing workforce development services for youth in the juvenile justice system and develop action plans for improvement.



### 1. What workforce development activities are provided to youth in facilities and in the community, and how are these services integrated into case and reentry planning?

- Specific staff are designated to oversee the development and implementation of workforce development services for youth in facilities and in the community, including the formation of partnerships.
- All youth (regardless of age or educational level) receive a career interest survey as well as an employment skills assessment at intake.
- Soft skills trainings are available, such as interviewing skills, resume building, job searching, standards of professionalism, conflict resolution, and teamwork, as well as guidance for completing financial aid and college applications.
- Access is provided to onsite and/or online CTE coursework that can lead to industry- or employer-recognized credentials and certifications.
- Hands-on learning is promoted, ideally through on- or off-site real work experiences.
- Workforce development goals and services are incorporated into youth's case and reentry plans, and review meetings include discussions on how best to support youth's long-term career readiness and success in the community.
- Paid training, apprenticeships, internships, and/or actual jobs in the community are offered, which include incentives for achieving key milestones or certifications.
- Ongoing training and support helps youth find and maintain employment, meet employer expectations, and overcome barriers to transitioning to independence (e.g., access to housing, transportation, etc.).



### Resource: Best-Practice CTE Standards

In partnership with representatives from 42 states and Washington, DC, business and industry experts, teachers, and administrators, Advance CTE conducted a review of [current state-level CTE standards](#) and developed the [Common Career Technical Core \(CCTC\) standards](#). The CCTC standards include guidance for different career pathways as well as an overarching set of [Career Ready Practices](#). State agencies can use these standards and practices to ensure that their CTE offerings have the appropriate level of rigor and alignment with employer needs.



## 2. Are juvenile justice agencies partnering with workforce development agencies, educational entities, and employers to promote youth's career readiness and help youth to obtain meaningful employment in the community?

- CTE course offerings and other workforce development services are focused on areas of local job growth and are informed by feedback from employers, chambers of commerce, and state/local workforce development agencies.
- CTE courses and training lead to industry-recognized certifications or credentials.
- Regular forums exist for agencies to solicit feedback from employers, and efforts are made to establish agreements with employers to provide paid training, apprenticeships, and employment specifically for youth after they leave incarceration.
- A juvenile justice agency representative participates in state and local WIOA meetings and other workforce development collaboratives.
- A resource map, registry, or guide exists that details available workforce development services and programs—including eligibility criteria, funding source, and key points of contact—that target opportunity youth and young adults, including those that are involved in the justice system.
- A funding guide exists that identifies all federal, state, and local funding streams that can be used to provide workforce development services for youth and young adults; eligibility criteria; and which agency, including specific points of contact, has oversight responsibility. Additionally, all state youth-service agencies partner to identify priority populations and programs for this funding and to ensure the resources are fully utilized.
- The collateral consequences that impact youth's ability to obtain viable employment, continue their education, and transition to independence are clearly identified and taken into account when developing programming. Efforts are made to partner with other agencies to eliminate or mitigate such barriers (e.g., eliminating required questions related to criminal history on employment, college, financial aid, and housing applications).
- Youth receive legal assistance with record clearance.



### 3. What data are collected and reported on workforce development service provision, employment, and related youth outcomes?

- A minimum set of key workforce development performance measures are tracked within state juvenile justice and/or education case management systems, including: attendance/participation in workforce development programs; CTE credits and industry credentials/certifications earned; and whether employment was obtained and maintained. To assist with tracking these outcomes in the community, memorandum of understanding (MOUs) with education and workforce development entities include data sharing/collection agreements and protocols.
- Workforce development data is disaggregated and analyzed by youth demographics, facility, and program/provider to identify trends and disparities. This data is shared internally and with partners to evaluate system performance and identify improvement opportunities.
- Workforce development service participation and youth outcome data is included in annual reports that state agencies provide to the legislature and other key stakeholders.
- Youth outcome data is routinely shared at WDB meetings and other multisystem forums and is used by all parties to direct resources to only those programs/providers that have demonstrated effectiveness and to address gaps in service access and outcomes.



#### Resource: Federally Funded Workforce Development Programs

The Department of Labor funds two national workforce development programs—[YouthBuild](#) and [Job Corps](#)—that specifically target opportunity youth and have shown some evidence of success at improving outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. Juvenile justice agencies should identify local affiliates and partner with them to develop specific referral pipelines and programming for youth under system supervision. In addition, justice agencies can partner with local community-based organizations to apply for funding through DOL's [Reentry Employment Opportunities](#) program, which is explicitly focused on improving employment outcomes for youth involved in the justice system and young adults who were formerly incarcerated.



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> “Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement,” Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, accessed July 2019, <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>.
- <sup>2</sup> Sarah Hockenberry and Charles Puzzanchera, *Juvenile Court Statistics 2015* (Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2018), <http://www.ncjj.org/pdf/jcsreports/jcs2015report.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> “Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement,” Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- <sup>4</sup> Sarah Hockenberry and Charles Puzzanchera, *Juvenile Court Statistics 2015*.
- <sup>5</sup> The Council of State Governments Justice Center, *Locked Out: Improving Educational and Vocational Outcomes for Incarcerated Youth* (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015).
- <sup>6</sup> The Council of State Governments Justice Center, *Reducing Recidivism and Improving Other Outcomes for Young Adults in the Juvenile and Adult Criminal Justice Systems* (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015), <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Transitional-Age-Brief.pdf>.
- <sup>7</sup> Farhana Hossain and Dan Bloom, *Toward a Better Future: Evidence on Improving Employment Outcomes for Disadvantaged Youth in the United States* (Washington, DC: MDRC, 2015).
- <sup>8</sup> Rachael Stephens, *Mind the Gap: The State of Skills in the U.S.* (Washington, DC: Third Way, 2017), <https://www.thirdway.org/report/mind-the-gap-the-state-of-skills-in-the-u-s>.
- <sup>9</sup> The survey did not ask about the workforce development services provided to the 15,000 youth who are placed in detention facilities, typically prior to disposition. These facilities are often managed at the local level.
- <sup>10</sup> “Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement,” Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- <sup>11</sup> “Occupational Outlook Handbook: Most New Jobs,” Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, accessed May 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/most-new-jobs.htm>.
- <sup>12</sup> Farhana Hossain and Dan Bloom, *Toward a Better Future: Evidence on Improving Employment Outcomes for Disadvantaged Youth in the United States*; Heather Koball et al., *Opportunities Youth Demonstration and Evaluation* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2016). Ranita Jain et al., *Connecting Young Adults to Employment* (Washington, DC: Workforce Strategies Initiative at the Aspen Institute, 2015).

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