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## EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

**Teach inmates functional, educational, and vocational competencies based on employment market demand and public safety requirements.**

This policy statement addresses the educational and vocational aspects of the overall programming plan that was discussed in Policy Statement 9, Development of Programming Plan, and expands on ways to effectively use the educational and vocational assessment information described in Policy Statement 8, Development of Intake Procedure. When a person is incarcerated, a tremendous opportunity exists to provide him or her with basic reading, writing, and math skills; a trade that is useful in the marketplace; and, sometimes, an advanced degree. Too often, this opportunity is lost because the class slots available are limited, not varied, or poorly timed; because programming does not correspond to the person's skill levels; or because the individual is not sufficiently interested in participating in the programs. When vocational education is offered, the training often does not correspond to high-demand jobs or to those employment sectors that are forecasted to provide new job opportunities in the community to which the prisoner will return. The research and recommendations that follow outline ways to improve the quantity and quality of vocational and educational programs available to people during their incarceration, so that they are best prepared to return to the community.

## research highlights

Most people in prison or jail have low levels of educational achievement, have limited job skills, and report low earnings prior to their incarceration.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that only 46 percent of incarcerated individuals have a high school diploma or its equivalent, as compared to 82 percent of men aged 18 to 34.<sup>131,132</sup> Significantly, one in six jail inmates reports that he or she dropped out of school because he or she was convicted of a crime, was sent to a correctional facility, or was involved in illegal activities.<sup>133</sup> Nearly 60 percent of black men who are high school dropouts have done time in prison by their mid-30's.<sup>134</sup> About two-thirds of people in prison and jail were employed—either full- or part-time—during the month before they were arrested for their current offense.<sup>135</sup> Despite this relatively high employment rate, research indicates that individual earnings prior to incarceration are low. For example, of those in jail who were employed before their most recent arrest, the median income was less than \$1,000 per month.<sup>136</sup>

Involvement in educational and vocational programming is low, given that the majority of those in prison and jail would benefit from additional education and training.

Just over half of all state prisoners participate in educational programs at some point during their incarceration, a proportion that has been decreasing over time.<sup>137</sup> About one-third of prisoners participate in vocational programs at some point during their incarceration. At any given time, however, the percentage of prisoners engaged in educational and vocational programs is far lower than these figures suggest. While all federal prisons, 91 percent of state prisons, 88 percent of private prisons, and 60 percent of jails offer some type of educational program, the relatively low number of available program slots often limits rates of program participation. Demand for programming often exceeds supply, resulting in waiting lists for many programs.<sup>138</sup> In Maryland, 1,500 state inmates were on waiting lists to participate in educational or vocational programming in 2001.<sup>139</sup>

While comparable participation rates are not available for jail inmates, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that secondary education classes are most commonly available, offered in 46 percent of jail jurisdictions.<sup>140</sup> Vocational program availability is very limited for jail inmates, with only five percent of jail jurisdictions offering vocational training. Many jail jurisdictions (33 percent) offer no educational or vocational training at all.<sup>141</sup>

**131** C. W. Harlow, *Education and Correctional Population*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2003), NCJ 195670.

**132** US Census Bureau, "Educational Attainment in the United States: March 2002, Detailed Tables (PPL-169)," Table 1a. Available online at [www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/ppl-169/tab01a.pdf](http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/ppl-169/tab01a.pdf).

**133** C. W. Harlow, *Education and Correctional Population*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2003), NCJ 195670.

**134** Marc Mauer, unpublished letter to the editor, July 19, 2004.

**135** US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics and Federal Bureau of Prisons, *Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities* (Washington, DC: 1997).

**136** C. W. Harlow, *Profile of Jail Inmates 1996*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 1998), NCJ 164620.

**137** C. W. Harlow, *Education and Correctional Population*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington, DC: 2003), NCJ 195670.

**138** Nancy G. La Vigne et al., *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Maryland* (Washington DC: The Urban Institute, 2003); Jeremy Travis, Sinead Keegan, and Eric Cadora, *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in New Jersey* (Washington DC: The Urban Institute, 2003).

**139** Nancy G. La Vigne et al., *A Portrait of Prisoner Reentry in Maryland* (Washington DC: The Urban Institute, 2003).

**140** James J. Stephan, *Census of Jails*, US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Washington DC: 2001), NCJ 186633.

**141** Ibid.

Research indicates that prison educational and vocational programs can improve behavior, reduce recidivism, and increase employment prospects upon release.

Despite the longevity of prison educational and vocational programs within the corrections system, rigorous evaluative research on the effectiveness of these programs is limited. However, a number of recent studies have found that participation in prison education, job training, and placement programs is associated with improved outcomes, including reduced recidivism.<sup>142</sup> The most effective programs are those aimed at released prisoners in the mid-twenties or older; these individuals may be more motivated to change their lifestyles than their younger counterparts. Results from the largest and most comprehensive correctional education and recidivism study to date show lower rates of recidivism among inmates who participated in these programs.<sup>143</sup> In this study of over 3,000 prisoners, reincarceration was 29 percent lower among education program participants than among nonparticipants. In addition, the study found that individuals who participated in prison education programs earned higher wages upon release than nonparticipants. There is also evidence that involvement in job training and placement programs can lead to employment and lower recidivism.<sup>144</sup> Recidivism rates of participants in prison education, vocation, and work programs have been found to be 20 to 60 percent lower than those of nonparticipants.<sup>145</sup> Participants in work programs are more likely to be employed following release and have higher earnings than nonparticipants.<sup>146</sup>

## recommendations

### A | Develop programs that will enable inmates to be functionally literate and capable of receiving high school or postsecondary credentials.

Correctional facilities should make available programs to teach basic skills and literacy to those individuals who do not have, but are cognitively capable of, developing these skills. Many people in prison or jail have only a limited education. Moreover, for many, English is not their first language.

<sup>142</sup> Gerald G. Gaes et al., "Adult Correctional Treatment," in Michael Tonry and Joan Petersilia (eds.), *Prisons* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Kim A. Hull et al., "Analysis of Recidivism Rates for Participants of the Academic/Vocational/Transition Education Programs Offered by the Virginia Department of Correctional Education," *Journal of Correctional Education* 51, no. 2 (2000): 256–61; Kenneth Adams et al., "A Large-Scale Multidimensional Test of the Effect of Prison Education on Prisoners' Behavior," *The Prison Journal* 74, no. 4 (2001): 433–449.

<sup>143</sup> Steven Steurer, Linda Smith, and Alice Tracy, *Three-State Recidivism Study* (Lanham, MD: Correctional Educational Association, 2001).

<sup>144</sup> David Wilson, Catherine Gallagher, and Doris Mackenzie, "A Meta-Analysis of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, and Work Programs for Adult Offenders," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 37 (2001): 347–68.

<sup>145</sup> Shawn Bushway, "Reentry and Prison Work Programs" (paper presented at the Urban Institute's Reentry Roundtable, May 2003); Kim A. Hull et al., "Analysis of Recidivism Rates for Participants of the Academic/Vocational/Transition Education Programs Offered by the Virginia Department of Correctional Education," *Journal of Correctional Education* 51, no. 2 (2000): 256–61; Steven Steurer, Linda Smith, and Alice Tracy, *Three-State Recidivism Study* (Lanham, MD: Correctional Educational Association, 2001).

<sup>146</sup> Kenneth Adams et al., "A Large-Scale Multidimensional Test of the Effect of Prison Education on Prisoners' Behavior," *The Prison Journal* 74, no. 4 (2001): 433–449. Steven Steurer, Linda Smith, and Alice Tracy, *Three-State Recidivism Study* (Lanham, MD: Correctional Educational Association, 2001).

Accordingly, it is no surprise that many people enter correctional institutions lacking the skills needed for today's workplace. At a minimum, program staff should ensure that inmates have, or are working to improve, basic skills in the areas of learning, language, math, and computers. Notably, however, such educational programming should take into account the cognitive abilities of the prisoners involved in the program. Some inmates with mental retardation, for instance, might not be able to participate in such programming.

Many of the skilled jobs being created in today's marketplace require some postsecondary education. While it would be preferable to provide every inmate with the opportunity to achieve that level of education, this goal is probably not realistic. Providing educational opportunities that will enable most people to read at the eighth grade level—the level at which a person can be considered functionally literate—should be a universal goal within corrections. Providing the opportunity for interested and able individuals to obtain a high school equivalency or comparable degree should also be a target for most jurisdictions. Correctional institutions should maximize the value of any degree—and minimize the stigma of where it was earned—by ensuring that certificates awarded do not feature the name of the institution.

#### EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION IN THE CORRECTIONAL SETTING

Correctional institutions should be required to operate within standards and to be credentialed by appropriate entities. In 1998, the Correctional Education Association (CEA) adopted 74 Standards for Adult and Juvenile Correctional Education Programs, to establish minimum criteria for education programs in any correctional setting. CEA conducts audits for agencies using the standards and provides consultation to those choosing to perform their own internal reviews. Whether adopted from the CEA or created on an institutional or statewide basis, the use of documented standards provides quality control for the programming. CEA's standards include, for example, requirements that all policies, procedures, goals, and organizational structure be documented in manuals, and that teachers' salaries be comparable to the salaries of teachers in the local public schools.

Functional literacy and a high school equivalency degree should be sufficient to obtain employment in many entry-level jobs in the rapidly growing service sector of the economy. While these jobs have limited pay, benefits, and advancement opportunities, they serve as an important first rung of the ladder for a long-term connection to work and a career.

#### EXAMPLE: Enhanced Job Skills Program, Lafayette Parish Correctional Center (LA)

The Enhanced Job Skills Program provides inmates with basic educational skills development as a precursor to job training. Inmates are not allowed into the program unless they have or are working towards their General Equivalency Degree (GED). Once in the program, inmates use a computer-based program called "Destinations" to build basic academic skills in more than 200 job categories. The Destinations program instruction begins at the individual's current education level and seeks to move him or her toward the twelfth grade level. After the person works on this educational phase for approximately two months, he or she can begin the next phase of the program: the development of job-seeking skills and postrelease job placement.

#### **B** | Analyze the job market in the area to which people in prison or jail will be returning.

To ensure that the education and training provided to people in prison and jail corresponds with the pre-

vailing job market, it is critical that corrections officials work closely with community-based workforce and employment services providers. Partnerships between corrections agencies and these organizations will ensure that program participants are receiving skills and training geared toward available jobs within the community to which they will return upon release. (See Policy Statement 5, Promoting Systems Integration and Coordination, for more on collaboration between systems.)

Each state’s Department of Labor or other state government agency typically gathers labor market information (LMI) for its respective jurisdiction, including detailed information on cities and counties. Workforce Investment Boards, One-Stop career centers, community colleges, universities, employment development offices, and similar resources can also be excellent sources of current labor market information. Many of these organizations supplement the LMI data provided by the state with their own information. Representatives of the criminal justice system should establish partnerships with local workforce and employment services providers to utilize such resources.

**EXAMPLE: Project RIO, Texas Workforce Commission and Texas Department of Criminal Justice**

The close collaboration of two state agencies—the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice—allows institutional programming to be tailored to the needs of both prisoners and the market. Program employment specialists have immediate access on their office computers to the Texas Workforce Commission’s entire database of labor market analyses and may arrange for specific employers to visit potential employees in prison. In addition, RIO staff work within the Windham School District, which operates in the state’s prisons and is funded by the Texas Education Agency, collaborating on curriculum development and delivery.

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**c | Ensure that vocational and education classes target the needs of the job market.**

To ensure that programming corresponds as specifically as possible to the needs of both the community labor market and people in prison or jail, corrections program managers should design and develop job skills programs that are consistent with current analyses of the labor needs of the communities to which those people will be returning. To that end, corrections administrators should partner with community employers, One-Stops, or other community-based employment service providers to audit current programming and ensure that market-responsive programs replace those that provide no benefit based on job market research.

**EXAMPLE: Release Preparation, Federal Bureau of Prisons**

The Federal Bureau of Prisons provides a wide range of occupational training programs that gives prisoners the opportunity to obtain marketable skills. Course offerings are based on general labor market conditions, institution labor force needs, and vocational training needs of inmates. In addition, many institutions have established apprenticeship programs in areas of particular skill development.

Policymakers and corrections administrators should also consider assembling an advisory group representing local employers, economic development agencies, Workforce Investment Boards, One-Stops, educational institutions, and targeted community-based organizations. Such an advisory group could use its familiarity with the local job market to provide helpful input on correctional programs to ensure that participants obtain the skills that they would need to learn so that they can find employment in that particular market when they re-enter. For example, local employers and employment agencies could inform the corrections administrators of the credentials required to obtain employment in a particular field, and then help to create institutional training programs that award the appropriate certification to program participants.

Corrections program planners and workforce partners should review existing vocational and related course offerings every 12 to 18 months to ensure that they are not only relevant in the current job market, but also up-to-date with advances in technology and methodology. In addition to keeping the programs current, this review can also serve to renew the partnership between corrections administrators and staff and community-based workforce developers and employers. Corrections officials should then assign researchers to evaluate the efficacy of any new training programs by tracking the number of people who enter jobs after release, the types of jobs they enter, and other performance benchmarks. (See Policy Statement 6, Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Impact of a Re-Entry Initiative.) Corrections officials can therefore ensure that coursework and vocational offerings are consistent with both the job market and the skills of individuals released from their institutions.

**EXAMPLE: Welding Program,**  
Louisiana Department of Corrections and Avondale Shipyards

The welding curriculum at Hunt Correctional Facility is closely based on the technical training curriculum at the area's largest employer, Avondale Shipyards, with the result that people who are successful in the program become strong candidates for job openings at the shipyards upon release. Northrop Grummond, which operates the shipyards, actively recruits job candidates from Hunt, visiting the facility to conduct skills assessments prior to their release.

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**▫ Encourage inmates to participate in educational and job training programs.**

Participation in some type of education and training during incarceration is a critical step for people preparing for release and reintegration into the community. Yet, people who are incarcerated do not always choose to participate in education and vocational programs. A broader array of programs could lead to greater participation. Establishing basic and cognitive skills programs that prepare people in correctional facilities for more advanced educational and vocational programming can help to engage those individuals who would otherwise be excluded. (See Policy Statement 14, Behaviors and Attitudes, for more on cognitive, faith-based, and peer-oriented

programs that may serve as a stepping stone to other treatment programs.) People who are incarcerated may also be more likely to participate when they can be matched to programs that are consistent with their individual strengths and goals.

Some prisoners will not initially perceive the value of educational or vocational programming, and others may not be adequately motivated by that perception. Although training programs may have benefits even if enrollment is mandated, not all institutions require participation in vocational and educational programs. Corrections administrators should recognize the value of encouraging participation among even reluctant prisoners, and may wish to implement incentive systems to ensure as high a level of participation as possible. Incentives could include good conduct time, preferred living quarters, cash or commissary stipends, increased visits, certificates, or access to other services.

**EXAMPLE: Transitions Project, Oregon Department of Corrections**

The Department of Corrections rewards individuals for positive performance toward the fulfillment of transition plan goals through the Performance Recognition and Award System (PRAS). Under PRAS, Oregon provides prisoners with monetary awards and other incentives to encourage them to improve their participation in educational classes, training programs, work assignments, behavioral programs, and substance abuse treatment.

**EXAMPLE: Correction Enterprises, North Carolina Department of Corrections and Department of Labor**

The Correction Enterprises work program provides incentives for people in prison to participate in prison workforce training programs. Through a partnership with the Department of Labor, those who complete a classroom instruction component and then a period of work within a specific Correction Enterprises industry can develop advanced job skills and receive DOL certification as journeymen-laborers. In addition, participants may earn an incentive wage and quality and production bonuses of up to three dollars per day for their Correction Enterprises work.

Family members and other representatives of the community can be valuable resources for corrections administrators seeking to encourage prisoners to participate in work and educational programming. Some people who are incarcerated will resist programming that they feel is being forced upon them by corrections staff. Involving family and community members during the incarceration period can help prisoners to focus on the future and to recognize the value of these programs in preparing them for life after their release from the correctional facility.

For instance, during visiting hours, corrections officials might provide family members with printed materials about educational and vocational programs available to prisoners, as well as facts concerning the relationship between education, skills, job prospects, and successful, long-term re-entry. In such documents, or in meetings with transition planners, family members may be encouraged to then speak to their relative in prison or jail about the value of participation in such programming.

**INCENTIVES AND THE PAROLE SYSTEM**

Parole time-off or “good time” credits have been (and in some jurisdictions still are) related to participation in educational/vocational programming. In some jurisdictions, however, good time is no longer awarded. Experts fear that such changes in the parole system have reduced the incentives for inmates to participate in education and vocational programs. Reducing or eliminating time off for good behavior may have the effect of encouraging prisoners to simply wait out their sentences.

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**E | Engage community-based agencies, such as volunteer and faith-based organizations, to provide institutional job-skills programs.**

Community-based organizations should be involved in delivering job-skills programming to the greatest extent possible. Volunteer and faith-based organizations, as well as other nonprofit service providers, can provide some of the most critical support systems available to individuals upon release. Early contact between these organizations and inmates provides a firm foundation for such relationships, which can encourage participation in programming and ensure that that engagement continues postrelease. Furthermore, incorporating staff from community-based organizations can shift the burden of service delivery away from corrections staff.

**EXAMPLE: Fresh Start, Osborne Association (NY)**

Fresh Start is a life- and job-skills program, run by the community-based Osborne Association, for male prisoners at Rikers Island, the New York City jail. Fresh Start offers a combination of job training (in culinary arts or journalism and computer skills) and counseling that begins during incarceration and continues after release.

**EXAMPLE: INTUIT, Virginia Department of Corrections and Virginia Commonwealth University**

INTUIT is a 13-week program that encourages participants to focus on the skills behind career planning and development, rather than just finding a job. Virginia Commonwealth University graduate and undergraduate students and community volunteers teach participants to conduct assessments of themselves, their life situations, and their environment; to obtain accurate and current career information; to communicate interests, skills, experiences, and values to employers; and to interact with successful role models, potential employers and community service providers.

When seeking to involve community-based organizations in institutional programming, jurisdictions should use a structured process for review and selection. Both corrections and community-based organizations need enough time to perform the necessary due diligence (tours, meetings, interviews, observation, document review, etc.), and build a foundation for long-term relationships that give confidence and stability to all parties. Formal contracts, agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, or similar legal instruments are valuable tools that can be used to establish partnership and delineate clear expectations and responsibilities. (See Policy Statement 1, Encouraging Collaboration Among Key Stakeholders, and Policy Statement 3, Incorporating Re-Entry into Organizations' Missions and Work Plans, for more on collaborative work between organizations working in the field of re-entry.)

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**F | When appropriate, provide prisoners with opportunities to gain occupational competence through postsecondary education.**

Individuals who are able to meet the requirement for postsecondary education that prevails in today’s labor market are more likely to obtain and maintain employment, which has been shown to reduce recidivism. Policymakers should seek to educate the public on this effect to counter potential negative reactions against public funding of postsecondary education for prisoners. (See Policy Statement 7, Educating the Public About the Re-Entry Population, for a discussion of marshalling public support for re-entry reform.) With the support of policymakers and the public, corrections administrators are more likely to be successful in encouraging educational institutions to make classes available to people in prison or jail and to award degrees recognized in the community.

Given the increasing number of jobs that require postsecondary education, correctional institutions, educational institutions, and state governments should study the feasibility of establishing agreements with in-state colleges, universities, and community colleges that would allow for the continuation upon release of the education started while incarcerated. Such agreements should also be pursued with private, for-profit universities that may better allow inmates to pursue degrees and education upon release. Programming staff seeking to facilitate the enrollment of incarcerated men and women in college or other higher education programs should be aware of restrictions on financial assistance for people with criminal records, including the Higher Education Act Drug Provision, the federal law that denies college financial aid to persons with drug convictions. (See PS 24, Identification and Benefits, and the Epilogue to Part II, for more information on these barriers.)

The possibility to attain advanced degrees, even through distance learning, will not succeed without the cooperation of outside institutions. The local community college system can be a vital partner. If state money is funding the college, the legislature can require that classes and services be provided to inmates as well as to the community at large. The corrections agency can assume the equipment costs for those inside the facility and can coordinate around the college’s schedule.

Distance learning provides a new opportunity for people in prison or jail to earn advanced degrees. Distance learning is a viable option because inmates are “pooled” electronically with other students. When distance learning classes exist, the cost of adding students is minimal. Some correctional facilities are in the pilot phase of using digital technology in this manner.

**EXAMPLE: Distance Learning, Iowa Department of Corrections**

Since the mid 1990s, the Iowa Department of Corrections, through the Iowa Communication Network (ICN), has provided individuals who are incarcerated the opportunity to

take courses online at their personal expense. Some 15 to 20 students per semester take 10 to 15 courses at community and private colleges and universities over the ICN, earning college degrees and certificates.

**EXAMPLE: Educational videoconferencing,  
Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction**

Using videoconferencing technology, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) has implemented an education network that allows prisoners to participate in distance education programs, leveraging the effectiveness of teachers. In addition, some staff education/training programs are now provided via the video network, allowing instructors to deliver quality information without traveling to multiple locations or requiring staff to drive to a central location.

Security concerns with the availability of email and Internet access may provide obstacles to the implementation of distance learning. New surveillance technology, however, helps to diminish security issues. Also, creative and effective facility management can create a “good behavior” system in which people in prison or jail can earn their computer privileges.

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**c | Prioritize the allocation of education and training resources when resources are limited.**

Education and training programs should be available to every person who would benefit from such programs during his or her incarceration. As a practical matter, however, corrections resources are often so limited that appropriate work and education programming is not available for all. Given this reality, corrections officials will need to prioritize their service delivery.

One way to prioritize is according to imminence of release dates: those who are closest to re-entering the community might receive the bulk of any available services, particularly the more targeted, expensive, occupational preparation programs. Alternatively, corrections staff might prioritize training for individuals who entered the facility with the least skills generally. In a similar vein, corrections staff could again examine the skills needed for available jobs in the local community and prioritize the prisoners who are most lacking in those marketable skills.

It is hoped that educational and vocational services will be available for and tailored to each individual. Insofar as there are resource constraints, however, corrections administrators must have a thoughtful way to prioritize their services. The lack of resources should also compel corrections staff to creatively draw on resources from community volunteers or peer tutors, particularly for basic skills training, such as literacy tutoring.