CASTING OUR VISION

Increasing Postsecondary Opportunities for Incarcerated Tennesseans
On any given day in Tennessee, there are nearly 60,000 people incarcerated in our state. More than 95 percent of people in our prisons will return home, yet almost 1/2 will re-enter the criminal justice system within five years. There is widespread consensus that we should re-imagine incarceration in our country and transform the way we treat people who are incarcerated in order to alter the course of their lives upon release.

For the past three years the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition has worked with our partners to elevate policies and practices that increase opportunities and improve outcomes in education in our state. Our members have taken collective action on a range of issues in order to address inequities that have real implications for students, and dramatic consequences for their ability to thrive in college, careers and life. This brief, and our accompanying advocacy agenda, is our first foray into the post-secondary arena, and aims to highlight and address the limited access to post-secondary education that exists for incarcerated Tennesseans.

Our report relies on high-quality research that crosses economic, higher education and criminal justice policy arenas. We review the history of education in prisons, highlight bright spots across the country, make the case for expanding opportunity, and offer concrete recommendations for how we may transform our delivery of post-secondary education in our prisons. Our Equity Coalition envisions a correctional system that places human dignity and potential at its core while promoting public safety, successful reentry, and economic benefits for our communities. We believe that Tennessee’s Drive to 55 must include incarcerated Tennesseans in its formula, and we must follow the example of other states that have created thoughtful systems to deliver post-secondary education in their prisons. The benefits are numerous, and the potential to transform lives and communities lies within our reach.

We encourage you to read and share this report and to lend your voice to our campaign to expand our exemplary educational innovations and goals to include incarcerated Tennesseans.
INTRODUCTION

Today, all eyes are on Tennessee. With the introduction of the nation’s first tuition-free community college program, and some of the fastest growth in K-12 student achievement, our state’s momentum has merited its model status for best practices in education.\(^\text{1}\) The common thread is clear: We believe in increasing education opportunity for all. Yet a portion of our population continues to be excluded from expanded education options – the thousands of Tennesseans who are incarcerated and who will eventually return to their communities. To advance educational equity and to build on educational rehabilitation services in our state’s corrections system, an examination and call for reform of postsecondary education for those who are incarcerated is warranted. Postsecondary credentials are consistently associated with higher earnings, social mobility and encouraging healthier lives.\(^\text{2}\) Increasing postsecondary opportunity for incarcerated Tennesseans will also benefit our state, higher education institutions, and individual communities.

Approximately 57,000 people are imprisoned in Tennessee state and federal prisons and jails.\(^\text{3}\) On average, these individuals are more likely to have limited academic proficiency and opportunity. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 29 percent of the incarcerated population functions at the lowest literacy levels, and 52 percent at the lowest numeracy levels – compared to 19 percent and 29 percent of basic U.S. households.\(^\text{4}\) Incarcerated Tennesseans represent a high-need population – and have much to gain from increased access to education opportunity.

Postsecondary education policy in correctional facilities crosses three main spheres – at the federal, state and postsecondary institution levels. This brief will provide a national and state overview of postsecondary correctional education and offer recommendations across spheres. In addition, promising practices in education for the incarcerated will be highlighted.

“For those in the free world, education is opportunity. For those in prison, education is hope.”

– Virginia Crump, Superintendent of Education, Tennessee Department of Corrections

AN EQUITY IMPERATIVE

Our report relies on high-quality research that crosses the economic, higher education and criminal justice policy arenas. Bolstering prison education helps meet the nation’s growing workforce needs. By 2020, 60 percent of U.S. jobs will require an education beyond high school, yet today fewer than half of all Americans have post-high-school credentials such as degrees or certificates.\(^\text{5}\)

Over 2 million people are now incarcerated in local jails and state and federal prisons across the country. The U.S. accounts for only 5 percent of the world’s population, but 25 percent of its incarcerated persons.\(^\text{6}\) The incarceration rate in the U.S. is five to 10 times as high as comparable democracies, such as Britain or Germany.\(^\text{7}\) The prison population growth spiked following the passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The bill, in part, lengthened time served for violent crimes and repeat offenders, and increased policing and punishment for drug-related crimes.\(^\text{8}\) These incarceration policies have led to an over-representation of people of color, Black, Latino, and Native American individuals in prisons and among

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**CHART 1**

**GENERAL POPULATION AND INCARCERATED POPULATION (2016-17)**

Source: Tennessee Department of Corrections, 2016-17; American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2012-2016

- Black individuals make up nearly 41% of incarcerated Tennesseans.

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\(^{1}\) National Center for Education Statistics, 2016-17

\(^{2}\) U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

\(^{3}\) U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics

\(^{4}\) National Center for Education Statistics

\(^{5}\) U.S. Department of Labor, 2016 proj.

\(^{6}\) U.S. Department of Justice, 2017

\(^{7}\) Toussaint, 2007

\(^{8}\) National Research Council, 2014
people returning to their communities. Nationally, roughly one in three Black men and one in six Latino men are incarcerated. Tennessee is not an exception to these trends. Populations of color, and Black Tennesseans in particular, are overrepresented in our state’s corrections system. Comprising 17 percent of the state population, Black individuals make up nearly 41 percent of incarcerated individuals. By comparison, 78 percent of Tennesseans are White, yet 57 percent of incarcerated individuals are White. Latino populations form about 5 percent of the state’s population, and 2 percent of its incarcerated population. These percentages capture individuals who are incarcerated in state facilities (in-house), are under community supervision such as parole and are incarcerated in local jails. Improving prison education presents one clear opportunity to address the challenges in inequity along race/ethnicity.

CORRECTIONS AS REHABILITATION

For the U.S. criminal justice system, the guiding philosophy for corrections has often alternated between deterrence and rehabilitation. Deterrence philosophy views corrections as “keeping” individuals from committing further crime. Rehabilitation, on the other hand, views corrections as a series of restorative interventions tailored for individuals incarcerated based on their “needs.” These interventions may take the form of education, health services and a host of social-emotional therapeutic services. Rehabilitative practice in correctional facilities is also often associated with reduced recidivism.

In Tennessee, the Department of Corrections (TDOC) upholds a rehabilitative guiding philosophy. For TDOC, the role of rehabilitative services for the incarcerated – including education – is vital to policy reform. Believing that education “changes the landscape of justice,” rehabilitation should provide individuals in correctional facilities with education and training geared toward post-release employment. To fulfill such a philosophy, TDOC advocates for a systems approach – combining inter-agency partnership and external networks to provide post-release success for all incarcerated individuals.

OVERVIEW of Postsecondary Education for the Incarcerated

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Postsecondary correctional education emerged in the early 19th century, but did not receive significant public attention until the 1960s. During this time, the public and policymakers began to view the prison system as an opportunity for citizen rehabilitation. As such, correctional education emerged as a key factor in helping incarcerated people return to their communities. Several pieces of legislation – the Manpower Development Training Act of 1963, the Adult Education Act of 1966 and the Basic Education Opportunity Grant Program in 1972 (later known as the Pell Grant) – expanded correctional education programs across the nation.

Postsecondary education for the incarcerated took an even stronger foothold in the 1970s. With the Pell Grant emerging in 1972, eligible incarcerated persons accessed financial aid to pursue a postsecondary credential. Illinois and Texas offered some of the earliest postsecondary education in-prison opportunities, with some states demonstrating that a program could prevent incarcerated persons post-release.

Beginning in the 1980s, public support for prison education began to wane. Starting with the “nothing works” in prison rehabilitation narratives, a debate ensued in the 1990s about the merits of providing Pell Grants to fund higher education for incarcerated persons. In 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act’s passage stripped persons in prison from Pell Grant eligibility.

In 1994, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act’s passage stripped persons in prison from Pell Grant eligibility. $35 million in Pell Grant funding – less than 1 percent of the $6 billion set aside for Pell Grants during that fiscal year. After the Pell ban, the number of states offering postsecondary education for the incarcerated dropped from 36 to 21 between 1994 and 1997.

In the 21st century, a shift occurred after President George W. Bush signed the Second Chance Act in 2007. The law awarded grants to federal, state and local prisons over two years to reduce recidivism rates through rehabilitative services such as education. An evaluation of the law found that it increased public-private partnerships, created more wraparound services in preparing individuals for release, and created a cultural shift on the idea of “re-entry.” This change marked a move from a re-entry practice of rules and regulations to one of a view of correctional facilities as an opportunity to rehabilitate the incarcerated.
National Overview

Following the passage of the Second Chance Act, postsecondary education opportunity for the incarcerated has resurfaced in policy discussions nationwide. In 2015, President Barack Obama announced the Second Chance Pell pilot program—an initiative that extends Pell Grant access to incarcerated individuals across 27 states in 67 postsecondary institutions.

The U.S. prison population of 2 million has increased by an alarming 500 percent over the last four decades. On the other hand, more than 95 percent of this population is expected to return to society, with an average 700,000 leaving federal and state prisons annually.

As the prison population increases, the number of jobs requiring a postsecondary credential is also mounting. Some 65 percent of the nation’s jobs will require some postsecondary credential in 2020—yet only 12.7 percent of the total prison population have a postsecondary degree. Given the volume of people in prison and their eventual return to society, interest in postsecondary correctional education warrants renewed widespread focus.

The Cost of Incarceration

Incarceration is expensive for the taxpayer, and the costs dwarf the amount of funding allocated for K-12 and postsecondary education. Between 1989 and 2013, the combined state and local spending for prisons in the U.S. increased by 89 percent. By comparison, funding for higher education institutions has increased by only 5 percent. A combined $42.8 billion was spent across all states on corrections in 2015, totaling about $33,724 per person in spending. For K-12 education, state spending averaged about $13,119 per public school student. Higher education state average spending totaled $6,966 per student.

In addition to this cost burden, incarceration holds a social cost. Research estimates that every $1 spent on corrections yields an addition $10 in social costs. For instance, individuals in prison are often unable to contribute to the nation’s economy and gross domestic product (GDP), with an approximate $70.5 billion lost in economic productivity per year. Incarceration also impacts the child welfare system—the uptick in female incarceration between 1985 and 2000 was associated with a 30 percent increase in child welfare caseloads.

Finally, the incarcerated individual bears a cost of incarceration as well—known as collateral consequences. Collateral consequences are the unexpected burdens, in the forms of sanctions or disqualifications, that are placed on the formerly incarcerated individual upon their release.

In Tennessee, 977 LAWS impose a burden on the formerly incarcerated.

For K-12 education, the cost of incarceration as well as collateral consequences affect an individual’s post-release employment opportunities, social program participation and civic participation. In Tennessee, 977 laws impose a burden on the formerly incarcerated. Formerly incarcerated Tennesseans are ineligible to vote unless pardoned by the state executive branch, or to hold a variety of employment positions in the public sector.

The Status Quo

Coupled with the increased costs of public incarceration, recidivism rates are markedly high. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 30 states found that five out of six formerly incarcerated persons recidivated between 2005 and 2014. The highest recidivism occurred within the first year of release, when nearly 44 percent of re-arrests occurred. Such recurring instances of arrest and potential re-incarceration point to persistent incarceration costs, but also suggest an increase in crime victims. Recidivism trends also have a disproportionate impact on particular ZIP codes where many communities suffer chronically from the impacts of incarceration. When neighborhoods have a disproportionate number of persons entering and exiting the criminal justice system, social “holes” are created in neighborhoods leading to social disorganization and residential instability.

Post-release employment is an important indicator in preventing recidivism, yet formerly incarcerated persons face huge challenges in the labor market. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, 27 percent of former prisoners age 25 to 64 were unemployed. Former prisoners are actively looking for work—93.3 percent are either employed or looking for work, compared to 83.8 percent of the general population.
WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

The national trends are clear: The current prison system is a cost-burden to the taxpayer and is often ineffective for rehabilitating the formerly incarcerated. Incarcerated individuals—and the correctional facilities involved—are face distinct and shared challenges in pursuing rehabilitation. Those incarcerated may suffer from financial or academic barriers, while many facilities lack capacity in staff and space to increase education opportunities. Even if an incarcerated person receives some form of training, they still face many legal barriers to securing employment post-release.

Wraparound postsecondary education opportunity is well-suited to address these challenges facing correctional facilities and formerly incarcerated individuals post-release. On average, a college graduate is about half as likely to be unemployed than a high school graduate. Postsecondary institutions—the key provider of the college credential—are well-positioned to partner with facilities, easing some of the logistic and resource burdens facing many correctional facilities.

Postsecondary education for the incarcerated is also a cost-effective policy option. In 2018, the RAND Corporation found that individuals participating in correctional education were 28 percent less likely to recidivate than non-participants. It is important to note that this is not a new finding. Recidivism rates dropped substantially in Texas in the 1970s when in-state prisoners had access to the Pell Grant.

Along with its effectiveness as a policy solution, postsecondary correctional education is a cost-savings strategy for states. For every $1 spent on correctional education, an estimated $4 to $5 is saved on re-imprisonment costs related to recidivism. In addition to these cost-savings, it is associated with positive post-release outcomes for the formerly incarcerated. Many studies show that individuals are more likely to be employed post-release than those with lower levels of education, or no education credential at all. With cost-effective benefits clear, policy actors at the national, state and local levels should continue to advocate for high-quality postsecondary options for prisoners, and reinstated access to the Pell Grant.

TENNESSEE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY COALITION

Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites

The U.S. Department of Education’s Second Chance Pell Grant Pilot program is a key policy to expand postsecondary correctional education at the national level. Starting in 2015, the pilot program partners with institutions in 27 states to provide need-based Pell Grants to persons in state and federal prisons. The program, which began in 2016, boasts preliminary positive results: Partnerships saw a 231 percent increase in enrollment from fall-to-fall semesters between 2016 and 2017. Since its launch, 954 credentials have been awarded to participants. Tennessee did not participate in Second Chance Pell, providing advocates with an important opportunity to advocate for the reinstatement of Pell Grant eligibility to incarcerated individuals in federal and state correctional facilities.

Tennessee’s Attainment Goals and Room for Correctional Education

Tennessee is a leading innovator in postsecondary education policy. In 2013, the state set its ambitious Drive to 55 goal with hopes that 55 percent of its population will obtain a postsecondary credential by 2025. The state goal is aligned with workforce demand—55 percent of jobs will require a postsecondary credential in the next decade.

To meet this demand, our state has spearheaded several innovative higher-education policy initiatives. The nation’s first tuition-free community college program, Tennessee Promise, saw its first entering cohort in 2015. Tennessee Reconnect, a last-dollar tuition waiver for adult learners, received thousands of adult learner applications in the fall 2018. Other programs such as SAILS (Seamless Alignment in Learning Support), as well as Tennessee Pathways, were put in place across K-12 and postsecondary education to improve college- and career-ready transitions.

These recent innovations and expansion in postsecondary education opportunities have not yet reached the state’s nearly 30,000 individuals incarcerated in state facilities and jails, or under community supervision. For the 2016-17 fiscal year, the Tennessee Department of Corrections reported 22,104 individuals were incarcerated in state facilities, and 2,865 imprisoned in local jails, with a total of 24,969.

Today, these individuals face many financial and logistic barriers to a postsecondary education. Not only does this population stand to gain from obtaining a credential, but it presents a pool of individuals that must be part of any calculation toward our shared Drive to 55 goals.
BENEFITS of State Policy in Postsecondary Correctional Education

**BENEFIT NO. 1**

*It expands education opportunity to a key population in the Drive to 55.*

According to Tennessee’s Drive to 55 goal, the state will need to award an approximate 871,309 degrees between 2015 and 2025. For communities of color, the state hopes to gain 22,217 Black degree-holders in that timeframe, as well as 13,144 Latino degree-holders. As the state moves to achieve these goals, it is imperative that state policy incorporates the incarcerated Tennessean into the “55.”

![Chart 3](chart3.png)

**CURRENT:** POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT IN TENNESSEE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Source: Tennessee Department of Corrections, 2016; TDOC Annual Statistical Reports, 2017

![Chart 4](chart4.png)

**WHAT COULD BE:** A TARGET PERCENTAGE FOR POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT IN TENNESSEE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Source: TDOC Annual Statistical Reports, 2017-18

The Tennessee Department of Corrections, in partnership with the Tennessee Higher Education Initiative (THEI), offers an in-facility postsecondary program at two locations. THEI served 137 individuals at correctional facilities through Nashville State Community College and Dyersburg State Community College in the spring 2018. Lipscomb University, a private institution in Nashville, provided postsecondary offerings to 50 women at the Tennessee Prison for Women. The Department of Corrections also provided six postsecondary certifications to 400 individuals in trades such as computer design/drafting and electrical core. This enrollment accounts for 2.3 percent of the total state and jail populations in Tennessee.

Of the individuals incarcerated across state facilities and jails, the Tennessee Department of Corrections has a target percentage goal for postsecondary education: 10 percent of the population. Chart 4 demonstrates this target percentage as a proportion of the total population incarcerated in state facilities.

Currently, incarcerated individuals in Tennessee are not yet represented in the state’s Drive to 55 goals and policy initiatives. Our state’s Drive to 55 narrative has changed the K-12 and postsecondary landscape – more individuals from all backgrounds are considering a postsecondary certificate than before. By aligning with the Department of Correction’s target percentage for postsecondary education, Tennessee has the opportunity to expand the Drive to 55’s college-going momentum – from high school diplomas to postsecondary degrees – into our state’s correctional facilities.

![Spotlight](spotlight.png)

**Postsecondary Workforce Education Bill**

In 2016, Florida set its goal for increased postsecondary attainment: Like Tennessee, the state’s Rise to 55 goal is for 55 percent of its populace to be workforce-ready by 2025. Prior to 2018, all incarcerated individuals in Florida were barred from accessing state funds for education. The Florida legislature acted to allow all citizens to take part in the state’s attainment goals. The Postsecondary Workforce Education bill, signed into law in the spring of 2018, allows incarcerated Floridians the opportunity to access scholarships and financial aid for workforce certificate while incarcerated. The Florida Department of Corrections also, as a result of the bill, coordinates with local high school boards and the Florida College System to provide high-quality options for those incarcerated.
It supports high-quality, postsecondary prison education that is less costly than the status quo.

Incarceration is costly to the Tennessean taxpayer. Between 2014 and 2017, the state corrections system budgeted an average $945.5 million on corrections.58

An examination of state spending per person reveals the scope of Tennessee’s funding streams related to education and corrections. In 2017, the state spent an average of $32,736 for every person incarcerated in state facilities and jails.59 The state’s expenditure of over $5 billion equates to only an average $4,765 per K-12 student. For higher-education spending, the state spent about $7,733 per student.60 On average, the state spends twice as much per individual to incarcerate Tennesseans as they do to educate general K-12 or higher-education students.

Chart 6 displays a year-to-year cost comparison between the incarceration of individuals and the average cost of two-year and four-year postsecondary institution tuition.61

Chart 7 compares the average cost per individual incarcerated over three years with the estimated cost of postsecondary education in prison over three years. An incarcerated Tennessean’s average prison sentence is 12.85 years, with a total price tag $420,657 in taxpayer dollars.62 Estimated time-to-degree – based on existing postsecondary education programs in facilities – is 3.5 years for an associate degree and 6.5 years for a bachelor’s. Applying conservative estimated direct costs for two-year and four-year degrees, this cost is about $17,500 for an A.A. degree graduate and $58,500 for a B.A. graduate. For a hypothetical student to complete a B.A. in transfer after completing an A.A., estimated total cost is $42,250 – almost 10 times less than the total of an incarcerated Tennessean’s average sentence.63 These estimates do not incorporate the indirect costs of programming staff, but provide a snapshot of the cost to graduating incarcerated individuals.
The research and evidence are clear. For every $1 our state spends on education, $4 to $5 would be saved for the general public. The price to educate an incarcerated individual is much less than the cost to incarcerate—and reduces potential costs of reincarceration in the future. State leaders and advocates have the opportunity to increase investment in postsecondary options in the present to decrease taxpayer burden moving forward.

Texas Taxpayer Savings

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), in partnership with the state’s community colleges, has a robust postsecondary correctional education program. Offering a wide array of programs from a vocational certificate to a graduate degree, TDCJ and postsecondary institutions require that each incarcerated individual meet criteria for admission. The program has been cost-effective for over a decade. In 2004, the education program cost for corrections and community colleges was only $3,082 per incarcerated person, compared with $14,300 per individual for general incarceration costs. The TDCJ collected data from associate degree-earners that re-entered society, and found that formerly incarcerated Texans re-offended at a rate of 27 percent—compared to a 43 percent average for the system. In taxpayer dollars, this translated to about $944,000 in state savings. Such a huge sum does not include the increased savings for taxpayers for each subsequent year that the individual was not incarcerated.

Benefit No. 3
It benefits postsecondary institutions

Postsecondary education for the incarcerated also benefits postsecondary institutions. As the key providers of this service, institutions play a vital role in any policy reform to expand postsecondary options to correctional facilities. With over 20,000 individuals in state facilities, Tennessee’s public and private institutions have the opportunity to fulfill their institutional missions by offering courses to those who are incarcerated. In addition, public institutions of higher education stand to benefit from the state’s outcomes-based funding formula.

For public higher-education institutions, a key component of each institution’s mission is its commitment to the “public good.” Higher-education scholars point to the postsecondary sector’s purpose in promoting increased civic participation and a vibrant, healthy economy. Other research has highlighted the importance such a “good” provides through access to education, which is considered a basic right in our country. In addition to this role, American community and technical colleges meet localized, workforce demand. Such institutions, serving predominantly local citizens, are often associated with a sense of community pride nationwide. These institutional missions are not isolated to public colleges and universities. Faith-based institutional missions are linked with service and community engagement as well. Table 1 highlights postsecondary-facility partnerships and the number of individuals enrolled for the year.

For the 2016-2017 fiscal year, 276 individuals participated in college coursework across facilities. About one-third of these participants received their postsecondary instruction from out-of-state institutions—public, private and for-profit. Table 1 highlights postsecondary-facility partnerships and the number of individuals enrolled for the year.
Under the Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA) of 2010, Tennessee established the nation’s first outcomes-based funding formula (OBF). As a result, all public colleges and universities are funded on institutional outcomes instead of institutional enrollment. For example, an institution receives additional state funding for graduating low-income students, not for enrolling a student. This formula incentivizes higher-education institutions to deliver on the outcomes established – and holds the potential for increased institutional resources by expanding postsecondary offerings across state facilities.

Tennessee’s outcomes-based funding formula has three focus populations: low-income students, adult learner students and academically underprepared students. Institutions have the opportunity to receive additional funding for awarding degrees to these populations. Currently, 88.7 percent of incarcerated Tennesseans are between the ages of 25 and 64 – providing a potential adult learner population. By incentivizing completion through metrics that prioritize focus populations and credentials/degrees awarded, the funding formula provides postsecondary institutions the opportunity to receive premium funding and invest further resources by enrolling more students in prison.

Public colleges and universities also stand to gain from added student degree and certificate completions by enrolling our state’s prison population. The formula rewards institutions for “degrees awarded” with more funding when they increase degree completions year-to-year. A premium is also provided for awarding postsecondary certificates at Tennessee’s community colleges. Presently, average completion rates for our state’s community college system is 27.7 percent, and 59.9 percent for all public four-year institutions. In 2016-17, 38.4 percent of incarcerated Tennesseans completed their postsecondary certificate program and graduated – exceeding the community college average by 11 percentage points. The Tennessee Higher Education Initiative conferred 22 associate degrees to incarcerated individuals in 2018 – a 64 percent three-year completion rate.

Lipscomb University’s program for those incarcerated in the Tennessee Prison for Women exemplifies the fulfillment of institutional mission. Lipscomb University, a private university in Nashville, Tenn., has supported incarcerated women since 2007. The program offers courses each semester in which students from the university attend a course at the facility. Since its inception, over 100 students have enrolled. Program participants began receiving their diplomas at the inaugural graduation ceremony in 2013. The LIFE program’s structure allows for mutual growth and community building between university and correctional facility participants.

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORRECTIONAL FACILITY</th>
<th>INSTITUTION</th>
<th>STUDENTS ENROLLED</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morgan County Correctional Complex</td>
<td>Adams State University Ohio University Mountaineer Baptist College Covington Presbyterian College Stratford University</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Lubell Transition Center</td>
<td>Ashworth College</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast Correctional Complex</td>
<td>Ohio State University Ashworth College Blackstone Career Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast Correctional Complex</td>
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<td>South Central Correctional Facility</td>
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<td>Tennessee Prison for Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turrey Center Industrial Complex</td>
<td>Nashville State Community College</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Tennessee State Penitentiary</td>
<td>Ashworth College Louisiana State University Ohio State University</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Tennessee Higher Education Initiative conferred 22 associate degrees to incarcerated individuals in 2018 – a 64 percent three-year completion rate.

The Wisconsin Technical College System

The Wisconsin Technical College System boasts an outcomes-based funding formula with 10 criteria for the state’s technical colleges. One metric rewards each technical school for enrolling “special populations,” a definition that includes incarcerated individuals. After its first year of implementation in 2014, the state’s formula incentivized Wisconsin technical colleges to enroll 17,563 incarcerated individuals over the course of three years.

The Tennessee Higher Education Initiative conferred 22 associate degrees to incarcerated individuals in 2018 – a 64 percent three-year completion rate.
**Benefit No. 4**

*It improves local communities.*

Postsecondary education for the incarcerated is an effective policy solution for reducing recidivism and improving the quality of life in our local communities. If formerly incarcerated persons return to prison at high rates, their communities continue to suffer from high crime rates. In addition, a person’s return to prison often perpetuates community and family instabilities.

In Tennessee, 47.2 percent of incarcerated individuals recidivated in 2017 – roughly 12,086 persons were re-arrested and potentially re-incarcerated within three years of release.\(^{74}\)

Multiple providers of postsecondary education in prisons boast impressive reductions in recidivism rates. For example, the Tennessee Higher Education Initiative reported a recidivism rate of 4 percent in 2017 for those who received postsecondary credentials.\(^{75}\)

In New York, the Bard Prison Initiative – a consortium of correctional facilities and a private liberal arts college – reports a recidivism rate of 2.5 percent for its graduates. By comparison, the New York Department of Corrections reported a 43 percent recidivism rate in 2015.\(^{76}\)

Individuals convicted of felonies and misdemeanors face particular difficulties in post-release employment. Providing applicable credentials to incarcerated individuals paves the way for more stable income, and has a ripple effect of social stability that impacts local communities as well. Formerly incarcerated Tennesseans face difficulties in finding employment compared to the general population – 14.3 percent were reportedly unemployed in August 2018, compared to 3.5 percent of the general population.\(^{77}\)

To further demonstrate the positive impact education programs have on incarcerated individuals, increased data-sharing agreements are required. In Indiana, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Labor share data to provide high-quality evaluations of their corrections programming. A central finding of this body of research: (1) education and (2) employment are the two greatest predictors for reducing recidivism – and in turn, improving local communities. Individuals with a college degree and post-release employment recidivated at a rate of 17.3 percent, compared to 44.7 percent of those with no high school diploma and no post-release employment.\(^{78}\)

The New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons Consortium (NJ-STEP) is a model for high-quality, postsecondary correctional education policy. NJ-STEP is a consortium of multiple higher-education institutions, including community colleges and four-year universities that are served by a coordinating body housed at Rutgers University – Newark. The consortium provides degree-bearing programs to qualified incarcerated persons, and assists in the post-release transition to continue college in their communities. These programs are established with seamless transferability of coursework between schools, but one community college and one four-year institution house the associate (Raritan Valley Community College) and bachelor’s degree (Rutgers University’s School of Criminal Justice) options. The wraparound nature of this program provides strategies that can inform other postsecondary education programs. In concert with other rehabilitative and re-entry service providers in New Jersey, NJ-STEP has seen New Jersey’s prison population drop 31 percentage points between 1999 and 2014.\(^{80}\)
TENNESSEE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY COALITION

MOVING TENNESSEE FORWARD

Tennessee is heralded for leading the way in education policy innovation, but our state must fulfill its dedication to all Tennesseans – including those who have been incarcerated. The researched benefits of postsecondary correctional education are clear; but much work remains for lawmakers, higher-education institutions and correctional facilities to determine the best path forward.

Let’s consider state-grown programs such as the Tennessee Higher Education Initiative (THEI) and Lipscomb’s LIFE program. In 2018, THEI’s 64 percent graduation rate exceeded the state’s two-year and four-year institutions’ graduation rates. Of the 22 individuals who graduated, seven achieved a 4.0 GPA. Lipscomb’s LIFE program has awarded 21 diplomas since its inception in 2007, and served 100 students at the Tennessee Prison for Women. The momentum in these programs is immensely commendable – but multi-sector partnership and investment are needed to continue Tennessee on this forward path.  

A 2018 poll found that prison rehabilitation reform was largely non-partisan. Over 75 percent of both Republicans and Democrats agree that our justice system should focus on rehabilitating the incarcerated. Improving outcomes for these Tennesseans is a non-partisan issue, and its benefits extend to all of our individual and unique communities.

With half of incarcerated Tennesseans recidivating, state lawmakers must consider alternative practices to rehabilitating and re-entering these individuals into our communities. The state’s promise of education opportunity and workforce readiness must be applied and upheld for all Tennesseans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Support federal and state financial aid for the state’s incarcerated populations.

Tennessee state policymakers, the Tennessee Department of Corrections, higher education institutions and advocacy organizations could draft a petition to reinstate the federal Pell Grant for incarcerated populations, and submit to the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in the U.S. Senate.

Tennessee leaders could also explore the expansion of Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect to grant eligibility to individuals incarcerated in our state facilities.

Include incarcerated Tennesseans in the state’s Drive to 55 goal.

State policymakers, leaders, researchers and advocacy organizations have the opportunity to support the Department of Correction’s “10 percent enrollment” goal for incarcerated individuals as part of the Drive to 55.

Tennessee leaders could incentivize a consortium of community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and nonprofit organizations to expand postsecondary education for people in prison.

Tennessee could create a consortium of current direct-service nonprofits and higher-education institutions to expand two degree-bearing programs – one associate degree option and one bachelor’s degree – to each of the state’s correctional facilities. Such a partnership could be established with memoranda of understanding, and ensure program offerings are high-quality and aligned with workforce demand. With adequate funding, the consortium could be monitored and evaluated to study the impact of expanded programming on taxpayer cost-savings and individual recidivism.

The Tennessee Department of Corrections and the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development could develop a comprehensive data-sharing agreement.

The Departments of Corrections and Labor and Workforce Development should develop a shared data system to track individuals from release to employment. Such a system would be useful in monitoring the impact of postsecondary correctional education programs as well.

Consider additions and revisions to the state’s outcomes-based funding formula.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Tennessee lawmakers, and institutional administrators could consider revisions in the formula’s Focus Populations and Outcomes. With 43 percent of incarcerated individuals identifying as persons of color, a populations of color focus population might be explored. In addition, other formula revisions that would provide financial benefit to the state’s postsecondary-corrective partnerships could be considered.
Casting Our Vision: Increasing Postsecondary Opportunities for Incarcerated Tennesseans

SPECIAL THANKS TO:
- Tennessee Department of Corrections
- Tennessee Higher Education Initiative
- Lipscomb University’s LIFE Program
- Complete Tennessee

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ENDNOTES

45. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
Visit our website to learn more about becoming a member of the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition or to sign up for an upcoming event.

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About the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition

The Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition is a group of diverse civil rights and education advocacy organizations that have built a shared policy agenda to address chronic disparities in achievement and opportunities for students of color in the state of Tennessee.

The Coalition was formed in the spring of 2016 and is convened by Conexión Américas, a long-standing Nashville-based nonprofit serving the Latino community.