

Partnerships for Progress in New England:

A Student-Centered Approach to Higher Education in Prison

Report of the New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison

June 2023



The Educational
Justice Institute

NEW ENGLAND BOARD
of HIGHER EDUCATION



Contents

- 1 [Letter from Commission Co-Chairs](#)
 - 2 [Executive Summary](#)
 - 4 [Why TEJI and NEBHE, Why Higher Education in Prison and Why Now?](#)
 - 4 [About The New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison](#)
 - 5 [Opportunities and Challenges in Higher Education in Prison](#)
 - 8 [Regional Background and Context: Higher Education in Prison in New England](#)
 - 10 [Commission Recommendations](#)
 - 27 [Next Steps](#)
 - 28 [References](#)
 - 30 [Appendices](#)
-

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Lastly, TEJI and NEBHE thank the members of the Commission for their time, expertise and commitment to expanding higher education opportunities for system-involved people across New England.

About TEJI

The Educational Justice Institute at MIT (TEJI) is a program within the Massachusetts Institute of Technology dedicated to providing transformative learning experiences for system-involved students and MIT students. A primary goal is to build educational pathways, while simultaneously raising the social consciousness of MIT students. Since its inception in 2018, TEJI has grown significantly and offers both humanities and computer science courses, for which transferable credits are earned through partnerships with regional academic institutions. TEJI also leads the progressive and dynamic Massachusetts Prison Education Consortium (MPEC). TEJI has championed remote synchronous classrooms and thus far has provided educational opportunities for system-involved students in the District of Columbia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

About NEBHE

Higher education is New England's most critical sustainable resource. The region's governors knew that over 65 years ago when they founded the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE). Today, NEBHE promotes greater education opportunities and services for the residents of New England and its more than 250 colleges and universities. Its mission is to advance equitable postsecondary outcomes through convening, research and programs for students, institution leaders and policymakers. NEBHE's vision is that everyone in New England will have lifelong access to affordable, high-value postsecondary education.

About Ascendium Education Group

Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. Ascendium's work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all. For more information, visit <https://www.ascendiumphilanthropy.org>.

TEJI and NEBHE thank Ascendium for its commitment to expanding educational opportunities for system-involved people. Ascendium's support made the New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison possible.

Dear Colleagues,

We are honored to share with you the final report of the New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison.

The Commission has been a unique collaboration of critical stakeholders, including corrections commissioners, prison education administrators, state legislators, people with lived experience in prison education programs, postsecondary institution leaders and faculty members, state higher education executive officers, business and workforce development leaders, subject-matter experts, scholars and policy innovators.

The Commission embraced the goal of working to ensure that every incarcerated person in New England has access to high-quality, workforce-aligned, equitable postsecondary opportunities with a wide range of educational pathways. The report and recommendations speak to how such aims can be achieved.

We sincerely thank Ascendium for its generous support of this endeavor. We also thank the members of the Commission for their valuable contributions of time and expertise. Each member has been critical to creating this report, and its recommendations represent thousands of hours of effort and members' dedication to expanding access to higher education in prison.

The work of the Commission was undertaken at a watershed moment when the future of prison education programs is being re-envisioned in light of the restoration of Pell Grants, new federal regulations, the impact of pandemic-influenced models of program delivery and renewed urgency in achieving racial and economic equity. We intend for this report to be a catalyst for further discussions, research, action planning, policy change and investment in each state in New England—and beyond.

To achieve this far-reaching impact, the Commission's report will be disseminated widely to key stakeholders, including leaders of government, business, education and community organizations.

This report also represents a commitment to building a formal, sustained partnership across the region whereby states and institutions can share information and resources, collaborate on programs and services and build awareness among key stakeholders to ensure adequate investment in prison education programs. Working together, we believe that New England has an important leadership role to play in crafting the future of higher education in prison. We invite you to join the conversation about how the six states can—in both substance and process—ensure that the Commission's stated aims are achieved.

Respectfully,



Lee Perlman
Co-Director
The Educational Justice Institute at MIT



Michael K. Thomas
President and CEO
New England Board of Higher Education

Executive Summary

The growing evidence of the myriad benefits of prison education programs helps to explain why Congress took historic, bipartisan legislative action to reverse a ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated learners. Effective July 1, 2023, eligible incarcerated people can access federal Pell Grant funding for the first time in almost 30 years.

Student participation in career and educational programming in prison has far-reaching positive implications for society, including:

- **Facility safety:** The presence of educational programs in carceral settings has a demonstrable impact on overall prison culture, reducing violent incidents and promoting positive behaviors among both participants and non-participants (Vera Institute of Justice, 2017).
- **Public safety:** The vast majority (95%) of incarcerated people will eventually return to their communities. Recipients of educational programming during incarceration are up to 43% less likely to recidivate than their peers (Davis et al., 2013).
- **Self-efficacy:** Studies have documented a profound effect on program participants' sense of purpose, dignity and self-efficacy. For example, participants in prison education programs demonstrated increased self-esteem and reduced feelings of loneliness and depression compared to similarly situated peers who did not participate (Coticchia and Putnam, 2021).
- **Intergenerational impacts:** Evidence suggests that postsecondary education participation may help to disrupt intergenerational cycles related to incarceration and educational attainment (Lim, 2020).
- **Employability:** While formerly incarcerated people continue to face stigma throughout the hiring process, early research suggests that participation in correctional education boosts students' odds of attaining employment post-release (Davis et al., 2013).

The **New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education** ("the Commission") was a regional endeavor comprised of leaders from corrections, higher education, re-entry, workforce development and government; approximately 20% of its membership were system-involved advocates and leaders. The Commission engaged in a series of discussions from October 2022 to June 2023 about expanding access to high-quality postsecondary and career pathways for the region's incarcerated learners.

Commission members crafted 15 recommendations that fall into two primary categories:

- **"Prison-based"** recommendations that are focused on improving the learner experience during incarceration, from intake through release and re-entry; and
- **"Community-based"** recommendations that necessitate sustained and regular collaboration among key stakeholders on both the statewide and regional levels.

Prison-Based Recommendations

Primary Stakeholders Involved: *Departments of Correction (DOCs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), employers, state policymakers*

- A. Prioritize postsecondary and career pathways in the intake and classification processes.
- B. Employ "Education and Career Navigators" to advise and assist students on their educational and career pathways, both during incarceration and after release.
- C. Conduct inventories of DOC facilities to promote more effective utilization of physical space, infrastructure, staff time and resources for educational programming.
- D. While remaining mindful of security concerns, expand and integrate technology usage and connectivity to foster a 21st century learner experience in DOC facilities.
- E. Review DOC procedures to ensure that postsecondary programming remains available to all learners and limit disruptions due to location, sentence or disciplinary action.
- F. Strengthen opportunities for work-based learning (e.g., internships and apprenticeships) to support skill development and employability upon release.
- G. Identify and remove barriers which impact students' academic persistence, support and campus access upon release.

Community-Based Recommendations

Primary Stakeholders Involved: DOCs, HEIs, state policymakers, state departments of education and higher education systems, researchers/research organizations, employers, state labor departments, parole/probation, re-entry specialists, interested system-involved people, community-based and nonprofit organizations

State-level:

- H. (Part 1): Develop and execute multi-year “state prison education strategic plans” addressing challenges and opportunities unique to each state’s multifaceted local landscape.
(Part 2): Undertake legislative engagement strategies to advocate for sustained state investments, in conjunction with the strategic plan (Part 1) and in support of actions outlined in the Commission’s recommendations.
- I. Establish state-specific and voluntary “credit transfer compacts” that signal HEIs’ acceptance of credits earned before and during incarceration.
- J. Enhance college readiness, access and affordability by strengthening developmental education and bridge programs as well as leveraging state and federal programs that lower educational costs for system-involved people.

Regional:

- K. Coordinate a voluntary cross-state, cross-facility collaborative to expand student choice and the range of educational offerings.
- L. Conduct a regional landscape assessment of existing course offerings in conjunction with DOCs, HEIs, employers and state labor departments to develop a plan for aligning postsecondary programming with labor market needs and in-demand skills/credentials.
- M. Launch a comprehensive, equity-focused research effort to better document the number of students participating in postsecondary education in prison, their experiences and their post-release education and employment outcomes.
- N. Form a long-term regional collaborative to support regular communication, resource- and idea-sharing among DOCs, state departments of education, HEIs and systems, employers, policymakers, researchers, system-involved experts and other stakeholders within the six New England states.

The Commission’s conclusion marks a starting point for ongoing collaboration among regional partners. Its members aim to create a future in which all incarcerated learners have equitable access to a choice-rich ecosystem of educational and career pathways.

Why TEJI and NEBHE, Why Higher Education in Prison and Why Now?

In November 2021, a shared interest in expanding educational programming in carceral settings brought together The Educational Justice Institute at MIT (TEJI) and the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) at the annual policy conference for the State Higher Education Executive Officers Organization. Having recently launched the Massachusetts Prison Education Consortium, TEJI observed the significant benefits and ongoing need for sharing learnings across often-siloed stakeholder groups in the field, including higher education institutions, departments of correction and system-involved people.¹ With the historic announcement of federal Pell Grant restoration for incarcerated learners in July 2023, alongside overwhelming evidence of the positive impacts of postsecondary education in prison, the time was right to bring together leaders from across New England to share resources and collaborate on overcoming common challenges to the expansion of high-quality education and career pathways for incarcerated learners. Given NEBHE's experience facilitating collaborative, cross-state initiatives and its foundational commitment to engaging postsecondary leadership and state governments to increase postsecondary opportunities in New England, partnering with TEJI on a regional commission to advance the field of higher education in prison was a natural choice.

About The New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison

With generous support from Ascendium, TEJI and NEBHE convened the **New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison** ("the Commission"), a regional endeavor comprised of leaders from corrections, higher education, re-entry, workforce development and government; approximately 20% of its membership were system-involved advocates and leaders. The Commission officially commenced its work in October 2022 with the first in-person meeting of its 83 members.²

The Commission was engineered to spark innovative cross-state, cross-sector collaboration. The Commission's charge was two-fold: first, to develop actionable recommendations

for increasing the availability of affordable, high-quality prison education programs in each of the six New England states. Second, to identify specific ways stakeholders could collaborate within and across states to accelerate progress, build capacity and share resources and responsibilities.

Co-chaired by NEBHE President and CEO Michael K. Thomas and TEJI Co-Director Lee Perlman, the Commission was divided into four multi-state, multi-stakeholder working groups, each with its own unique charge.³ This structure was employed to empower Commission members to identify common challenges across states within focused topical areas to create targeted, implementable recommendations. The four working groups were organized around the following topics:

- Access, Cost and Funding
- Career, Workforce and Employer Connections
- Partnerships and Policy Alignment
- Program and Delivery Models

Working group assignments were based on the individual areas of expertise as well as expressed preference of Commission members. Working groups met virtually on three occasions in addition to connecting in-person at three convenings of the full Commission. In these meetings, members were tasked with producing three to five specific and actionable recommendations under the guidance of each working group's chair and co-chair(s).

In-person convenings of the Commission were held in the Greater Boston area and featured expert presentations on topics of importance to the development of recommendations. Convening content was curated to support members' strategizing on key challenges and considerations related to expanding postsecondary prison education. Facility internet infrastructure, data collection and preparation for the historic July 2023 restoration of Pell Grants for incarcerated learners were among the topics discussed. Time for state delegation meetings and sector-specific conversations rounded out the agendas for these in-person meetings of the full Commission.⁴

This report presents the 15 recommendations of the Commission. The sections that precede the recommendations provide context and an overview of opportunities and challenges, both national and regional, relevant to efforts to expand postsecondary prison education. To aid readers who are less familiar with common higher education in prison terminology, **Appendix D** contains a glossary of key terms. It should be noted that terminology often varies across the different sectors involved in this work. In situations where naming conventions

1 Throughout this report, "system-involved" is used to describe people who are currently incarcerated as well as people who have been incarcerated and those with arrests or convictions but no incarceration. A full glossary of key terms can be found in **Appendix D** of this report.

2 For a complete list of Commission members, see **Appendix A**.

3 For summarized versions of each working group's charge, see **Appendix B**.

4 A complete timeline of Commission events appears as **Appendix C**.



“Through this network, we can ensure incarceration and education are not mutually exclusive, and that we, as a community, commit to the hard work of equipping incarcerated individuals with life-changing tools in the form of meaningful postsecondary education.”

Nicholas J. Deml, *Commissioner, Vermont Department of Corrections* with Kim Bushey, also of Vermont Department of Corrections.

diverged, this report aimed to select terms that center system-involved people’s dignity and humanity. Since expanding educational opportunities in carceral settings is a rapidly developing policy area, it is important to recognize that future readers of this report may encounter words or phrases that have been thoughtfully replaced in the time since publication.

Research and firsthand accounts have repeatedly demonstrated the devastating impacts of mass incarceration on individuals, families and communities. In recent years, organizations, advocates and leaders across sectors have sought to elevate the positive impacts of restorative and rehabilitative practices in carceral settings. Within this broader context, the Commission’s specific charge was formulated to respond to the exigencies of the policy moment—with the restoration of Pell Grant funding for incarcerated learners on the horizon. The expertise of the Commission’s members uniquely positioned this body to work toward expanding high-quality postsecondary education in prison, a proven strategy for reducing recidivism, improving community safety and positively affecting intergenerational outcomes.

Opportunities and Challenges in Higher Education in Prison

Momentum is strong for rethinking what a period of incarceration is meant to accomplish and for reimagining this time as a crucial period for re-entry-aligned growth. Since 95% of all incarcerated people will eventually return to their communities, the learning and skills amassed on the inside can become part of a high-impact toolkit for navigating both the transitional period post-release and students’ long-term re-integration into society (James, 2015, 5). The Commission presents its recommendations at a juncture when federal support for work on higher education in prison is at its strongest in many years.

Evidence of Positive Impacts

The rationale for increasing access to high-quality postsecondary education in U.S. prisons draws support from a growing body of research that bears out not just the positive practical impacts, but also the moral argument for prison education as an affirmation of human dignity and a source of self-efficacy and aspirational drive. Prison education programs have positive impacts on both facility and public safety, the former through improvements in prison culture and the latter through markedly reduced recidivism rates for program participants (Vera Institute of Justice, 2017; Davis et al., 2013). Indeed, recipients of educational programming during incarceration are up to 43% less likely to recidivate than their peers (Davis et al., 2013). Initial evidence of the positive effects of prison education also brings with it the real possibility of taxpayer savings, as incarceration is an expensive enterprise, costing the country around \$81 billion dollars annually (Kyckelhahn & Martin, 2013). Survey research has similarly bolstered the moral arguments for expanding prison education. In research published in 2021, for example, a team of scholars working in the State of Maine found that participants in prison education programs demonstrated increased self-esteem and reduced feelings of loneliness and depression compared to similarly situated peers who did not get the chance to participate in the same programs (Coticchia and Putnam). Evidence also suggests that postsecondary education participation can disrupt intergenerational cycles of incarceration (Lim, 2020).

In an era when workforce development is a top priority—for higher education institutions, policymakers, employers and students alike—prison education programs have the potential to help close a troubling skilled labor gap that experts predict will only continue to grow (Bacon et al., 2020, 7). Setting aside concerns about professional licensure that will undoubtedly need to be addressed, prison education programs present a major opportunity for states to better meet employer needs by accessing the under-tapped potential of incarcerated learners (7). Seizing this opportunity, however, will require intentional program design to create workforce-aligned credential and

degree programs. Labor market data will need to inform collaboration between corrections, higher education institutions, community-based organizations and regional employers to ensure that educational programs are aligned with sectors in which thriving-wage careers predominate.

Reinstatement of Pell Grant Eligibility

The growing salience of evidence concerning the myriad benefits of prison education programs helps to explain why bipartisan legislative action was taken to reverse a ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated learners that dated back to the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. Effective July 1, 2023, eligible incarcerated people can access federal Pell Grant funding for the first time in almost 30 years.⁵ The impending reinstatement of Pell eligibility for this group of learners marks a noteworthy expansion upon the Obama Administration's Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative, which enabled incarcerated people to access federal dollars to enroll in select postsecondary programs operating at approximately 200 federal and state carceral facilities nationwide. Vera Institute of Justice, a technical assistance partner to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for Second Chance Pell, estimates that about 7,000 credentials have been awarded since the experiment began (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The July 2023 reinstatement of Pell Grant eligibility is predicted to open postsecondary opportunities to a much higher number of learners. Indeed, the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) regulatory impact analysis cites the small percentage of incarcerated people who already possess postsecondary credentials and notes that reinstatement "creates an opportunity for significant expansion of correctional education programs, including postsecondary educational programs...to address those unmet needs" (Pell Grants for prison education programs, 2022, 818). Elsewhere in the same impact analysis, OMB estimates that two percent of the nation's incarcerated population of approximately 1.6 million will be able to participate in approved prison education programs, although they explain that this figure will fluctuate with changes to the total prison population (869).⁶

Although this landmark change to eligibility for Pell Grants will surely aid the expansion of higher education in prison, most practitioners and advocates predict that Pell Grants alone will be insufficient for funding high-quality, workforce-aligned postsecondary programs in prison. In a series of research briefs published by the Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison based on rigorous mixed-methods research from multiple

"I believe regional advocacy that shines a strategic light on purposeful, targeted funding in correctional departments is necessary, [with a] specific focus on federal funding."

Helen E. Hanks, *Commissioner*, New Hampshire Department of Corrections



Second Chance Pell sites, Erin Castro and her colleagues provide compelling evidence regarding the insufficiencies of Pell funding. Castro and her team show that administering high-quality prison education programs requires higher education institutions to make financial commitments that exceed what Pell covers, especially when it comes to the institutional staffing needed to deliver meaningful educational experiences in prison (Gaskill, Castro, & Aguilar Padilla, 2022, 3). Much of the work needed to expand educational opportunities will hinge on additional, sustained investments from local, state and other federal sources.

In addition to institutional staffing challenges, the negotiated rulemaking process, undertaken to craft regulations for the July 2023 Pell reinstatement, surfaced concerns about the strain that may result from the growing responsibility the regulations impose on correctional entities, which goes well beyond the typical duties corrections leaders have to ensure the safety and security of their residents.⁷ Particularly worrisome is the fact that, despite increased material and human-capital responsibilities for departments of corrections, the regulation's preamble clarifies that the Higher Education Act does not allow USED to allocate government funds to departments of corrections, despite their role as the oversight entity for Prison Education Programs (PEPs) (Pell Grants for prison education

⁵ This significant policy change was accomplished through the FAFSA Simplification Act, a part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. This bipartisan legislative action authorized substantial changes to the federal financial aid application in addition to removing the blanket ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated students, regardless of conviction type or sentence length.

⁶ **Appendix E** summarizes efforts to estimate the number of incarcerated people who will be able to benefit from the July 2023 restoration of Pell.

⁷ To enable the July 2023 reinstatement of Pell, USED, as charged by Congress, undertook negotiated rulemaking to adjust Title IV Higher Education Act (HEA) regulations. Creating the policies and processes that the federal government adopts to regulate and protect the administration of public funds, including Pell dollars, is a process that depends upon the analysis and input from subject matter experts and the public.



programs, 2022, 869).⁸ Throughout the Commission's discussions, members echoed these concerns and emphasized that support for departments of corrections' increased oversight role must remain a focal point of funding and planning going forward.

Defining “High-Quality” Postsecondary Prison Education

Defining what constitutes “high-quality” postsecondary education in prison remains a complex endeavor because the term carries different meanings across the Commission's varied stakeholder groups. Traditional, outcomes-based metrics—academic success, rates of employment and credential attainment—remain key indicators for many. Departments of corrections often emphasize the role of institutional accreditation in verifying the legitimacy of an educational partner and, implicitly, the quality of the programming that an institution provides. Additionally, there is general agreement that quality is linked to an institution's ability to offer educational experiences inside carceral facilities that are substantially similar to program delivery on the outside. This understanding of quality is reinforced by the expectations for PEPs that are outlined in the regulatory language for federal Pell reinstatement. And yet, the work of the Commission illuminated realities that hamper efforts to create comparable educational opportunities for incarcerated people. For example, system-involved students often lack the flexibility to engage with educational tools and study spaces beyond specific, designated times.

“High-quality” is also a label frequently ascribed to prison education programs that prepare students for entry into high-demand professions post-release. This may encompass both career and technical education and liberal arts studies, which often empower learners to navigate life on the outside by equipping them with strong critical thinking and writing skills. Some with lived experience were quick to note that collegiate coursework can be valuable even beyond earning a credential because classes may catalyze an interest in higher education pursuits

“By providing access to high-quality postsecondary education to justice-involved individuals, we are not only doing what is morally right but also contributing to the betterment of society.”

Steven Johnson, Technical Support Specialist, Boston, MA

that had not seemed possible prior. Many Commission members emphasized that student choice in degree pathways is also an important marker of “high-quality,” especially because postsecondary offerings in carceral settings have historically been minimal and facility-dependent. While adopting a unified definition of “high-quality” is by no means required, thinking through these varied, sometimes competing, definitions is vital to ensuring prison education programs are fulfilling and productive for students who enroll.

Conversations about what constitutes “high-quality” in the context of postsecondary prison education are also central to addressing a misalignment of supply and demand that currently characterizes available educational opportunities in carceral facilities. Even before Congress acted to reinstate Pell eligibility for incarcerated people, many programs were reporting waitlists, an indicator that demand was exceeding supply; at the same time, other programs were expressing concerns about filling seats. Although the Commission's goal was to increase educational opportunities for incarcerated people, rapidly scaling existing Second Chance Pell programs would likely be a poor approach for several reasons. First, the needs of newly Pell-eligible students are not necessarily aligned with what Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites have been providing on an incremental, pilot basis since 2015. Moreover, while the Second Chance Pell experiment generated significant research for case making, that initiative was designed to produce general observations and identify impediments to program delivery, leaving more to study when it comes to the comparative success of different program models and modalities as well as long-term success metrics related to re-entry. Creating an eligible program from scratch requires an immense infusion of resources, including time, staffing and infrastructure. And the final federal regulations released in October 2022 specify that current Second Chance Pell programs will not be exempt from the multi-step approval process for PEPs. In this context, then, scaling must be purposeful and judicious, involving coordinated and long-term planning among all relevant partners, to ensure that current and future students have access to quality programming.

Creating high-quality educational opportunities in prison also necessitates navigating the current realities of sentencing, in which the average length of sentence, nationally, stands at about 2.6 years and is trending downward, due primarily to

⁸ This report uses the acronym “PEP” to denote approved educational programming created in accordance with official USED processes for Pell-eligible prison education programs. When neither the acronym nor the capitalization is present, this report is referring to postsecondary programming in prison more broadly.

reductions in mandatory minimums (Subramanian & Delaney, 2014). Depending on enrollment intensity and when in their incarceration a learner can begin postsecondary coursework, less-than-three-year average sentences mean that higher education institutions interested in offering programs in prison need to think critically about how coursework completed on the inside can be viable post-release. This likely means offering short-term and stackable credentials as well as ensuring credits earned transfer seamlessly to degree or credential programs at accessible postsecondary institutions. Even before release, consideration must be given to academic disruptions caused by facility transfer—about which little publicly available data exists.⁹ Because average sentence length is incompatible with the typical duration of traditional postsecondary attainment, higher education institutions and departments of corrections likely need to consider the viability of offering short-term credentials that can be completed within a more limited window of time. Funding short-term credential programs can be challenging, however, since the stackable courses that comprise these credentials typically fall below the 15-week requirement for using Pell. Higher education policy experts have acknowledged that Pell Grant funding needs



“I think this is an important issue and should certainly be addressed in a sustained way, and I’ve been glad to both bring my own experience to bear and to learn from others.”

Meghan Kallman, Senator, Rhode Island Senate

to evolve with innovations to the structure of collegiate coursework. Although a bipartisan consensus does not yet exist, three proposals for short-term Pell were introduced in Congress this session, which signals increased openness to adapting federal funding to support the functional, stackable coursework that is increasingly common in higher education today (Burke, 2023). Whether or not institutions serving incarcerated learners embrace short-term credentials, adapting to the realities of short sentence lengths is crucial to maximize the positive impacts of prison education programs.

Regional Background and Context: Higher Education in Prison in New England

With its high concentration of renowned colleges and universities, New England has long been considered a leader in higher education, although recent research has rightfully highlighted longstanding and pronounced equity gaps in rates of college access and degree completion, especially along lines of race and gender (Papay et al., 2020). Where prison education programs in New England are concerned, there has been early evidence of the positive effects of programs currently in operation. These outcomes can be quantified through commonly invoked metrics related to facility safety and recidivism but also grasped through the inspiring narratives of individuals who have engaged with prison education programs in the six New England states and shared about the personal growth they experienced as a result. Indeed, many formerly incarcerated Commission members connect their experience with prison education to the pursuit of fulfilling careers and enrollment in postsecondary education upon release.

There are approximately 43 prison education programs in operation in New England as of Fall 2022, with 16 of those classified as Second Chance Pell sites. It is difficult to reliably determine the number of students who have been served by these programs, since no unified data and reporting exists regionally—or even statewide. Anecdotal evidence from Commission members who administer prison education programs indicated that supply and demand are not currently well aligned across the region’s prison education offerings, nor is there necessarily robust alignment between educational opportunities and workforce needs. With over 40% of the incarcerated population in New England predicted to be eligible for Pell Grants for postsecondary learning starting July 1, 2023, there is substantial work to be done to determine not just how to expand educational opportunities in the region’s carceral

⁹ The Education Justice Tracker is attempting to fill this data gap. Pioneered by Cornell University’s Rob Scott, the project combines publicly available corrections data with student enrollment data to track incarcerated learners, with the goal of improving student support during academic disruptions, such as facility transfer, and upon release (Hopkins, 2021).



“Working with the New England Commission on the Future of Higher Education in Prison has been instrumental in developing strategies and formulating best practices for improving postsecondary prison programs, which serve to reduce recidivism and improve career readiness for those [who are] formerly incarcerated.”

“Providing structured access to postsecondary education, STEM and Career/Technical Education (CTE) training helps create successful pathways for those in our care to prepare for life after incarceration.”

**Carol Mici, Commissioner,
Massachusetts Department of Correction**

facilities but also how to better tailor those opportunities to the needs of students and employers (Oakford et al., 2019, 39).¹⁰

As part of the Commission’s work, each New England State Department of Corrections shared about their respective structures and capacity to offer educational programming through a survey facilitated by NEBHE. The six New England departments reported that staff play a vital and time-intensive role in helping institutions adapt educational operations to unique, security-first and compliance-focused learning environments, which departments are also responsible for regulating. In their survey responses, corrections leaders described how Pell reinstatement has pushed them to consider how they will stretch existing physical space, staffing and financial resources to increase postsecondary access and meet demand. Further, respondents noted that ensuring complementary and practical (i.e., stackable, transferrable and employment-aligned) “systems of opportunities” remains the broader goal for Department of Corrections leaders’ educational programming.

Where postsecondary education was a shared priority and focal point of the Commission, student “readiness,” in both the academic and emotional senses, remains a core aspect of the approach corrections leaders take to education. To ensure students are successful in their future postsecondary pursuits, New England Departments of Corrections prioritize participation in high school completion and equivalency pathways as well as programs that address language barriers or provide adult basic education. In addition, survey respondents explained that prospective students may benefit from other enrichment programming before beginning academic pursuits. Moreover, educational programming must be prioritized within a specific facility’s classification, availability and constraints. All six New England Departments of Corrections reported that infrastructure constraints currently prohibit programmatic development for career and technical education, for which space for hard-skill training is essential.

Universally, digital learning modalities, including online and remote synchronous instruction, were identified as promising solutions to address limited space and expand program options. However, corrections leaders recognized that the feasibility of this type of learning is impeded by a lack of broadband access as well as a lack of instructional technology, including—but not limited to—computer access. Addressing these barriers to digital learning would necessitate costly updates for aging facilities. Additionally, based on shared observations among corrections leaders and experienced carceral system educators, the increasing digitalization of education must be balanced with in-person engagement between students and institutions, which all parties agreed remains critical for supporting student success.

¹⁰ The number of incarcerated people in New England who would be eligible for Pell Grant funding was estimated to be around 12,400 when this figure was last calculated by NEBHE using Vera Institute of Justice data from 2019 (Oakford et al.).

Commission Recommendations

The following 15 recommendations are the product of months of robust conversations among Commission members. They have been crafted to empower a diverse array of stakeholders across the region to address the challenges of expanding high-quality higher education in carceral settings. Recommendations A through G are organized to correspond with the stages of the Intake to Re-Entry Continuum (see diagram). These “prison-based” recommendations focus on improving the learner experience during incarceration. Recommendations H through N, or “community-based” recommendations, necessitate sustained and regular collaboration among key stakeholders on both the statewide and regional levels.

The Commission’s Overarching Commitment to Equity

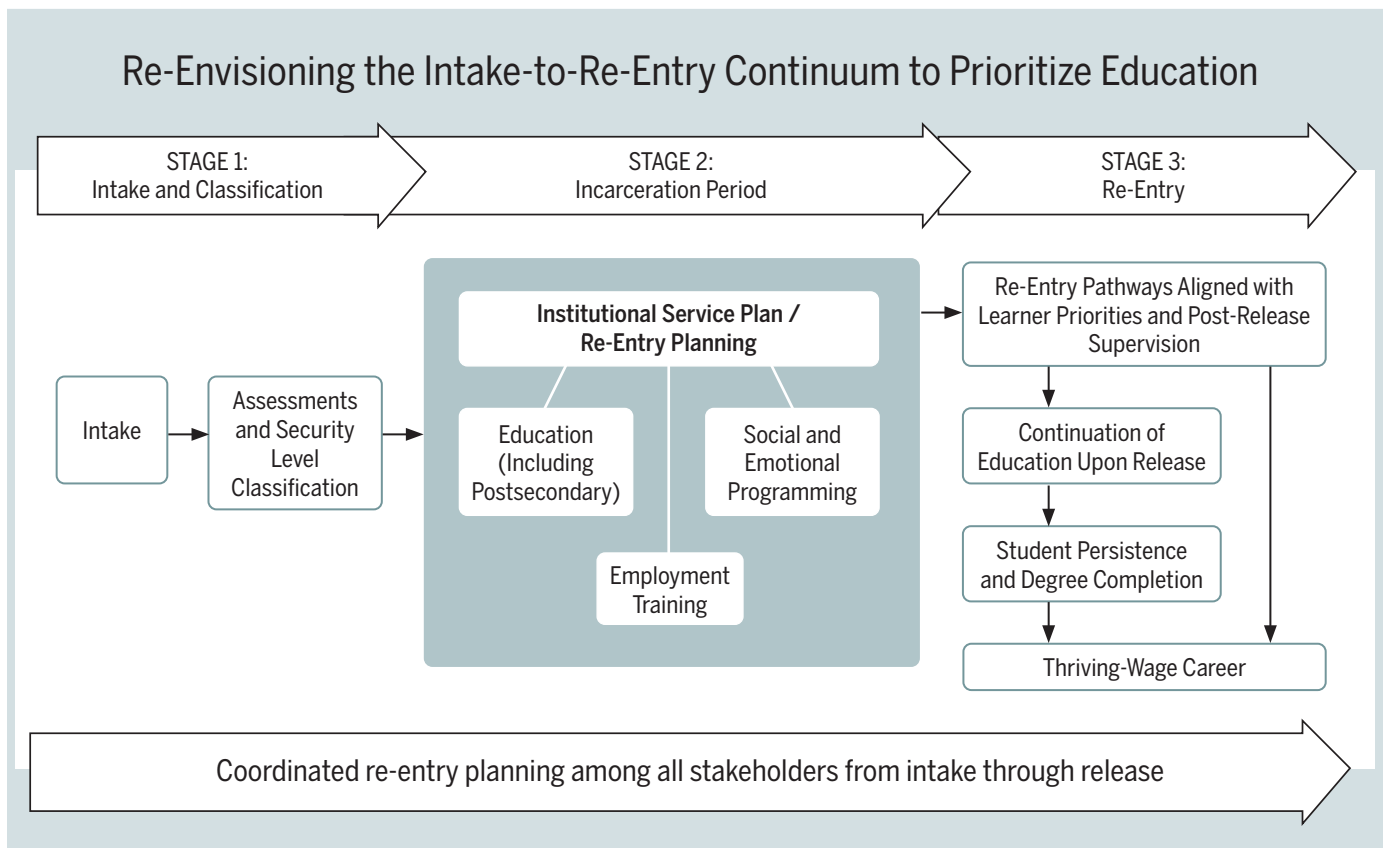
Informing all of these recommendations is an overarching commitment to equity as it pertains to both educational access and student outcomes. This report takes its definition of equity from the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison’s 2019 report, *Equity and Excellence in Practice: A Guide for Higher Education In Prison*, where equity is defined as “maintaining sustained

Key to Acronyms:

HEI = Higher Education Institution

DOC = Department of Correction(s)

attention to how race, gender, ability, economic status and other dimensions of identity, status, and experience impact every dimension of the field [of higher education in prison]” (Erzen, Gould, & Lewen, 3).¹¹ The Commission echoed the work of researchers and practitioners who suggest that the inequities that shape access and success in higher education on the outside must necessarily “contextualize conversations regarding higher education in prison” (Castro & Gould, 2019, 7). Only by surfacing these inequities can the region build programs capable of transcending the patterns that continue to result in inequitable rates of student enrollment and credential attainment. Research repeatedly demonstrates that nearly everyone benefits when greater numbers of incarcerated people receive education, including learners, families, communities, facilities, and local and regional economies. This is why an equity imperative threads through the Commission’s recommendations.



¹¹ The Commission underscores the importance of equitable access for English Language Learners in higher education in prison. Emerging research suggests that these learners are less likely to participate in educational programming than their peers for whom English is a first language (Castro & Gould, 2019).

Interventions Along The Intake To Re-Entry Continuum

The Intake to Re-Entry Continuum depicted in the Re-Envisioning graphic does not represent the current reality of incarcerated learners but rather re-imagines this process to prioritize education.¹² Crucial to this re-envisioned continuum is coordinated re-entry planning that begins at intake by identifying the ideal program provisions for a learner's long-term success (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016, 3). The new model also emphasizes aligning discharge plans with conditions of parole or post-release supervision whenever possible to better navigate situations where different partners' expectations (e.g., facility staff, parole officers and faculty) may conflict with the continuation of post-secondary education. For instance, a student might enroll on-site in an evening course that concludes after their parole curfew.

Commission members were collectively motivated to build a choice-rich ecosystem of career and educational opportunities, providing potential learners with an array of pathways: language and developmental education, personal enrichment programming, career and technical education, short-term credentials, associate degree programs, bachelor's and other degree pathways. The intended scope of the recommendations is also meant to encompass learners housed within a range of carceral facilities, including both juvenile and adult settings.

The Importance of Strong Partnerships and Clear Agreements

Re-envisioning this continuum to increase access and success for higher education in prison hinges on the formation of strong partnerships and the creation of well-developed agreements to formalize commitments, especially between education providers, corrections leadership and other relevant stakeholders. Cross-sector partnerships anchor many of the recommendations below. To maximize their impact, the recommendations presented should be codified, whenever possible, in clear, comprehensive agreements. Far from static documents, the Commission sees these agreements as providing the structure for long-term collaborative exchanges among involved parties and starting places for a commitment to building pathways and continuous improvement. For considerations regarding the form these agreements might take, DOCs and HEIs can review the regional Memorandum of Understanding template developed by Commission members and featured on the NEBHE-housed [Commission website](#).



“Educational pathways need to start on the first day of incarceration.”

*Lynne Sullivan, Regional Manager,
Massachusetts/Rhode Island,
The Petey Greene Program*

“The multiplier effect of education is real. When residents commit to education, suddenly the world is a brighter place.”

*Randall A. Liberty, Commissioner,
Maine Department of Corrections*

¹² Key terms related to the intake to re-entry process are defined in the glossary in **Appendix E**.

Intake and Classification (Stage 1)

Recommendation A

Need:

In many instances, postsecondary and career planning are secondary factors in the classification/adjustment processes upon entry into carceral facilities. Additionally, people's educational levels, needs and goals are inconsistently prioritized in determining facility assignment and designing institutional service plans. Regular collaboration between DOC educational divisions and HEI program providers will improve alignment starting from the beginning of students' educational trajectories.

Proposed Solution:

The classification process should prioritize educational goals and career aspirations. Assessments, administered during classification, should cater to a range of academic experiences, inform facility placement and serve as the foundation for comprehensive institutional service plans and participation in educational programming during incarceration and upon release. Plans and assessments should explore a range of student interests and goals, including social-emotional learning, English language development, high school completion, adult basic education, employment pathways and postsecondary coursework.

Suggested Action Steps:


1. HEI and DOC partners collaborate to align educational assessment tools, classification terminology and pre-intake educational records wherever possible to avoid the need for students to be reassessed upon release and transfer to HEIs. For instance, DOC educational assessments (such as WorkKeys) may allow a student to waive postsecondary assessments (such as Accuplacer) post-release.
2. HEI and DOC partners collaborate to train classification staff on how to interpret assessments and identify educational needs (e.g., English language development, Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations, etc.). Accurate interpretation and coordination ensures student success in future educational and career pathways.
3. In addition to educational assessments, DOCs and HEIs prioritize strategies to enroll students in transferable credit-bearing courses whenever possible—for instance, by employing co-requisite models in lieu of developmental coursework for college readiness (Daugherty, 2018).



“The recommendations that come from this Commission will help individuals involved with corrections gain the skills, confidence, and hope for the future that will help them lead fulfilling lives in the free world.”

“Whether students take one course or complete a degree, providing an opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills is a wise investment in individuals, communities [and] states, as well as the region.”

Joyce Judy, *President,*
Community College of Vermont



Intake and Classification (Stage 1)

Recommendation B

Need:

Prospective, current and formerly incarcerated students often experience a lack of awareness about educational options and the steps involved in transitioning from enrollment to graduation to embarking upon a thriving-wage career upon release. Additionally, mentorship and support are often best received from credible messengers—students' system-involved peers (Martinez et al., 2022). Commission members with lived experience also reported limited knowledge and communication about available programming. Access to education specialists throughout their educational journeys could increase transparency for more informed decision-making and support students as they move through the carceral system and re-enter their respective communities.

Proposed Solution:

For individualized support throughout a student's educational journey, HEIs and carceral systems should employ teams of "Education and Career Navigators" who serve as a central resource to explain postsecondary options, financial aid access, and provide integrated support from enrollment through release, re-entry, credential attainment and employment.

Featured Practice

The Washington State Department of Corrections provides a comprehensive system of support for incarcerated people, which includes education and employment services facilitated by a team of "Education Navigators" (Al-Zubaidy, n.d.). These Navigators, both internal (prison-based) and external (community-based), are funded and trained by the DOC and work in close collaboration with case managers, community corrections officers, employers and college staff, among others, to create a one-stop resource for students. Navigators provide enrollment support, financial aid assistance, career development guidance and access to guided credential pathways and employment connections. As students near their release date, prison-based and community-based Navigators provide students with a "warm hand-off" to ensure continuity of support during the re-entry process.

"We know education reduces recidivism; however, returning citizens must meet their basic needs before degree completion."

Linda Dolloff, Advocacy Coordinator, Maine Prison Advocacy Coalition

Suggested Action Steps:

1. HEIs and DOCs jointly explore the most feasible models for instituting "Education and Career Navigators" who serve students throughout their educational journey during incarceration and post-release.
 - a. Partners explore the viability of a single navigator who supports students before and after release or an inside-outside team that collaborates to support students.
 - b. Partners consider how they might leverage system-involved peers as credible messengers, including as education-specific mentors and/or teaching assistants within facilities.
2. State legislatures designate funding for "Education and Career Navigator" positions to support learners at every state facility and fund a community-based program to coordinate the navigators.
3. Beyond their student-facing work, "Education and Career Navigators" also spearhead efforts to raise awareness about higher education opportunities available to DOC staff and contribute to staff-facing outreach campaigns around postsecondary and career pathways for adult learners.
4. HEIs and DOCs consider the advantages of state and regional coordination of "Education and Career Navigators" to maximize knowledge of effective practices and build toward consistent support across facilities, states and the region.

Incarceration Period (Stage 2)

Recommendation C

Need:

The physical infrastructure of a facility is a primary determining factor in educational programming, access and academic success. To anticipate and prepare for growth in demand as a result of Pell restoration, adequate space and infrastructure for all eligible students who want to pursue postsecondary education will be necessary. At present, students report that they lack distraction-free spaces for completing coursework. Further, available and unused spaces differ by facilities. Comprehensive, education-focused inventories of potential learning areas would allow DOCs to assess and possibly repurpose underutilized multi-purpose spaces with the goal of maximizing learning areas. DOCs may also consider how supplemental education technologies such as tablets and laptops will support students' academic access and success.

Proposed Solution:

States should provide resources for all DOCs to conduct regular standardized inventories of the physical space, staffing analysis, facilities and assets (including education technology) associated with all aspects of student learning—including coursework, tutoring and independent learning—to maximize resources and support planned expansion, resulting in the effective delivery of postsecondary programs.

Suggested Action Steps:

Based on inventory results:

1. In collaboration with their HEI partners, DOCs work to understand current needs related to both classroom and multi-purpose program spaces on a facility-by-facility basis.
2. DOCs allocate spaces, beyond classrooms and computer labs (where in existence), for students to study and consider the possibility of acquiring temporary structures, such as relocatable or modular classrooms.
3. DOCs consider their policies around device access in living spaces and/or create living-learning communities to foster peer support and provide a distraction-free learning environment for students.

Relevant Research

The nonprofit research organization Ithaka S+R and Ennead Lab, a strategic design firm, are collaborating on a project to better grasp educational space needs in carceral settings. Similarly intended to align with the presumed expansion of prison education programs in the wake of Pell reinstatement, this work, funded by Ascendium, synthesizes research, generates new data and culminates in the development of both “policy recommendations and design solutions to address the issues of spatial constraints on education programming in prisons” (Tanaka & Mielke, 2022).



“Infrastructure is critical in our aged correctional facilities, as well as access to safe correctional hardware for students to use during incarceration.”

Helen E. Hanks, *Commissioner*, New Hampshire Department of Corrections

Incarceration Period (Stage 2)

Recommendation D

Need:

In 2023, there is no question that all students must have access to technology and gain digital literacy skills to ensure a successful re-entry. Writing emails, applying for jobs and participating in Zoom calls are skills that can be developed during incarceration to support students' successful transition back to campus, the workplace and their communities. Plus, instructors stand to benefit from access to high-impact educational technology. DOCs necessarily operate in a security-first environment. Therefore, students benefit when HEIs and DOCs intentionally communicate and train on how technological tools that are typically utilized outside carceral settings (e.g., institutional email, Learning Management Systems) are monitored, integrated and accessed by faculty and students inside prisons. Additionally, while it is important for DOC education staff to embrace technology expansion and updates, the support of DOC leadership and staff at all levels of the agency is critical to ensuring a smooth and sustainable integration of technology inside facilities while addressing security concerns.

Proposed Solution:

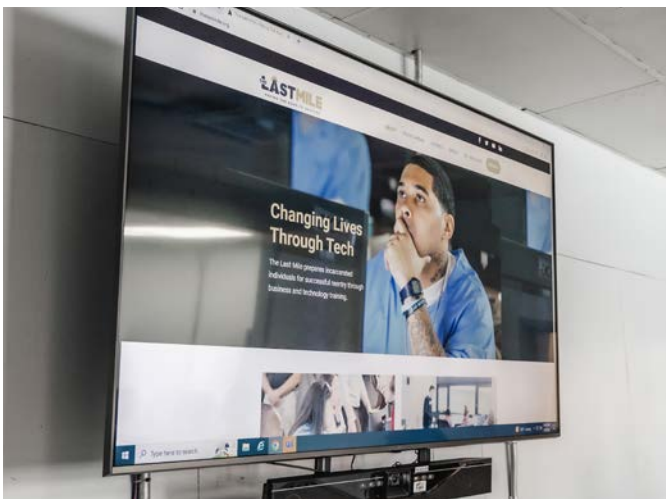
While remaining mindful of security needs, DOCs should embrace a systems-wide approach to integrating technology into the learner and instructor experiences. By aspiring to emulate consumer-grade technology and connectivity, as experienced by those outside carceral settings, students gain 21st century skill development. DOCs, in concert with their HEI partners, should consider how to maximize their shared educational resources and embed technology into facility operations through long-term, sustainable investments of staff time and resources.

Suggested Action Steps:

1. DOCs dedicate staff time to developing an IT/technology infrastructure plan focused on supporting educational programs and achieving strategic goals.
2. HEIs and DOC education staff increase collaboration to assess, plan and execute technological support for students and instructors, ensuring that learners have access to devices and resources necessary for course engagement, research capabilities and skill development comparable to their non-incarcerated peers. Through this collaboration, partners explore funding alternatives to limit technology costs to students.
3. DOCs involve staff at all levels, across divisions, to prepare and support carceral facilities through the technology adoption process. They should develop purposeful, centralized action plans for implementation, such as processes for involvement of various divisions and vetting protocols for whitelisting websites.
4. DOCs engage incarcerated students in the process of developing ground rules and expectations for technology use. DOCs include students in the adoption process through collaboration specific to usage, developing clear user agreements and initiating open dialogue to discuss technology successes, challenges and relevant software updates.

Relevant Research

The U.S. Department of Education's (USED) 2022 publication, "Building the Technology Ecosystem for Correctional Education," recognized the innovative efforts of Colorado, Louisiana, Maine and Wisconsin in developing and implementing technology ecosystems which meet the unique needs of their facilities. The brief provides discussion points addressing infrastructure issues to include in a DOC technology assessment/inventory. Exemplars have successfully leveraged various funding sources, including federal, state and private funds, to support their efforts.



Incarceration Period (Stage 2)

Recommendation E

Need:

DOC policies may impede, or in some cases prohibit, student participation in postsecondary programming. For example, participation in coursework can be restricted in light of security concerns, behavioral infractions, designated housing or length of stay (Bacon et al., 2020).

Proposed Solution:

To ensure equitable access and continuity of learning, DOCs should consider periodic reviews of practices and protocols that determine access to education with the intent of increasing the inclusion of special housing unit (SHU) residents. These reviews may lead to decisions to permit students with minor infractions to continue their studies whenever possible and finding other creative solutions to reduce the disruption of education for residents facing disciplinary time.

Suggested Action Steps:

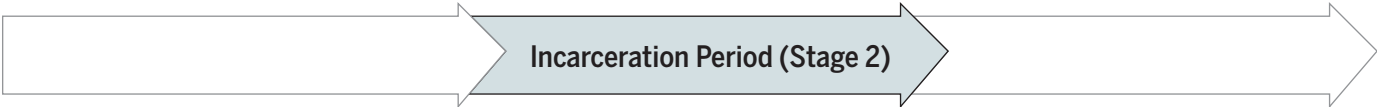
1. DOCs collaborate with HEIs to find alternative methods of education for Special Housing Unit (SHU) populations. This includes exploring the use of tablets and remote synchronous learning to ensure continuity of education and course participation.
2. DOCs develop a strong learner participation agreement that establishes clear expectations for students and addresses how disciplinary sanctions impact education and technology privileges.
3. DOCs continue to develop strong incentives for post-secondary education participation, including earned good time accrual policies specific to education, and communicate about incentives to prospective students.¹³

Featured Practice

At Pelican Bay State Prison in California, the SHU was transformed into an expanded space for educational and rehabilitative programming. Rooms are equipped with connectivity/Wi-Fi. Students use tablets and laptops to complete educational coursework ranging from General Education Diploma (GED) credentials to bachelor's degrees. In addition to college coursework, the facility expanded access to vocational programming and has observed positive impacts on facility culture and student outcomes (Orlando, 2022).



¹³ “Earned time laws” are state-specific policies that allow incarcerated people to earn a reduction in the length of their sentence for participation in or completion of “productive activities,” including educational programming (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021).



Incarceration Period (Stage 2)

Recommendation F

Need:

It can be difficult for incarcerated learners to imagine what is possible without adequate visibility of diverse education and career pathways. It is imperative that partners collaborate to maximize career exploration and skill-building connected to educational and career pathways during a person's incarceration. Ideally, all students could pursue employment in a thriving-wage career immediately upon release or continue their education to that ultimate end. For learners with longer sentences, the focus can be on designing creative pathways to apply education to meaningful and sustaining-wage employment.

Proposed Solution:

HEIs, DOCs and other relevant partners should collaborate to develop and strengthen opportunities for learners to build social capital and skills through career exploration, internships, apprenticeships, work-based learning and mentorship pre-release, leveraging credible messengers (formerly incarcerated graduates) and Education and Career Navigators whenever possible.

Featured Practice

The Oregon DOC offers job certifications via virtual reality (VR) through a grant from the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance Second Chance Act. Their program simulates the operation of heavy machinery via a VR headset and controls. According to the Oregon Employment Department, many occupations that require heavy equipment operation are in high demand for the state, including jobs like light truck drivers, production workers, operating engineers and other operators of construction equipment (Powell, 2022).

Suggested Action Steps:

1. HEIs and DOCs collaborate to provide career assessments, career exploration activities and career advising across facilities.
2. Alumni networks, colleges and universities, and professional organizations proactively include currently and formerly incarcerated learners to provide essential connections and help build networks.
3. HEIs and DOCs partner with community-based organizations to connect mentors from a wide variety of professional backgrounds.
4. HEIs, employers and DOCs collaborate with community supervision, parole and probation to improve alignment and work toward an integrated career pathways approach.
5. DOCs, in collaboration with HEI partners, work to ensure that students leave prison with materials in hand to support continuing education and employment, including a transcript of credits earned, a record of their remaining Pell Grant access and a résumé or CV.
6. To ensure that work-based learning opportunities during incarceration result in improved financial and career outcomes, relevant partners should engage in outreach and education campaigns to employers more broadly to encourage hiring of formerly incarcerated people. For instance, HEIs, fair chance employers and community-based organizations can reduce reluctance to hiring system-involved people through a concerted group effort, such as a public relations campaign to reshape the narrative and allay concerns for potential employers.

“Access to high-quality postsecondary education in prison is just one piece of a complex puzzle. To realize the promise of these experiences, we must make sure learners have access to apply their education and training through internships, fellowships and quality jobs. We must stay attentive to developing equitable career pathways and building social capital.”

*Rebecca Villarreal, Senior Director,
Center for Justice & Economic
Advancement, Jobs for the Future*

Recommendation G

Need:

Re-entry support is crucial for successful reintegration into society. Formerly incarcerated Commission members have identified several barriers that significantly disrupt students' academic success upon re-entry into the community. These include their inability to communicate with trusted and dedicated education providers post-release, which can be affected by DOC policies specific to post-release communication, as well as a lack of support related to basic needs, financial aid and other holistic and targeted wrap-around services upon re-enrollment at HEIs.

Proposed Solution:

To ensure students persist academically after release, HEIs and DOCs should intentionally identify and remove existing barriers which limit students' access to mentorship and other academic and wrap-around support upon release.

Suggested Action Steps:

1. DOCs regularly review policy and procedure specific to restricting contact between students and faculty post-release. Creative solutions to address this may include faculty requesting a waiver to policy adherence or creating a dual staffing category for faculty, such as categorizing them as faculty/aftercare advocates.
2. DOCs take a 360-degree view of HEI partners to consider how they demonstrate a comprehensive and hands-on approach to supporting the unique educational needs of system-involved students during and after incarceration.
3. HEIs appoint support staff who are knowledgeable about the unique needs of system-involved students, including financial aid, academic advising, wrap-around services, trauma-informed learning and mental health/addiction support.
4. HEIs move beyond "banning the box" (i.e., eliminating the requirement to disclose incarceration history) and take meaningful action to build robust partnerships with community-based organizations to address basic needs and provide support to formerly incarcerated students.
5. HEIs conduct a comprehensive assessment of their transcript and registration hold policies to understand how they impact low-income students, particularly those who are system-involved.

Featured Practice

In Vermont, the DOC may classify faculty and staff from HEIs as "mentors" or "coaches." These classifications require more vetting up front than a typical "volunteer" designation but remove some of the post-release communication barriers experienced in other states between academic personnel and the students they mentor.



"Incarcerated people benefit from having someone who cares, encourages and connects with them during the journey through education."

*Lynne Sullivan, Regional Manager,
Massachusetts/Rhode Island,
The Petey Greene Program*

Avenues for Continued Partnership and Advocacy: Opportunities for State-Level Collaborative Action

Recommendation H (Part 1)

Need:

Given the imperative to expand access to prison education programs across the region, it is vital that states proactively articulate a vision and plan for both increasing the capacity of available programs as well as supporting the creation of new, additional options. Such plans become a template for sustained state investment and for strategically engaging HEIs and other key partners to ensure pathways include integrated, stackable, workforce-relevant credentials, as well as two- and four-year degree options. Additionally, each New England state must address issues central to its unique, multifaceted local landscape. State-specific partnerships dedicated to this cause, with the crucial inclusion of currently and formerly incarcerated students, are critical to enact targeted, effective advocacy campaigns and inform legislative considerations in each state (outlined in Recommendation H Part 2).

Proposed Solution:

Each New England state should create a formal multi-stakeholder group to develop a detailed, multi-year “state prison education strategic plan.” Such plans should consider existing programs, staff, resources and infrastructure, and chart a path to expanding student-centered postsecondary and career pathways. The plans should lay a foundation for sustained state investment and include an annual progress report.

Suggested Action Steps:

1. Each state determines which stakeholders from the DOC, HEIs, departments of education, state policymakers, current/former students and employers should serve in a formal capacity. Over time, and following the strategic planning cycle, stakeholder representation may be altered to incorporate other stakeholder representatives, including those mentioned in federal Pell regulations.¹⁴
2. Members inventory existing programs, staff, resources, infrastructure and policies which inhibit student success within the state.
3. Members identify a shared mission, vision and set of goals for the long and short term.
4. Members develop strategies and metrics for achieving determined goals, including a plan for legislative advocacy to increase investments in educational programming and related carceral system infrastructure.



“As someone who was previously incarcerated and benefited from participating [in higher education] in prison, I can attest to the life-changing impact of higher education programs. Not only did they equip me with valuable knowledge and skills, but they also helped me to see myself in a new light and motivated me to turn my life around.”

Abraham Santiago, *Student Advocate*,
Second Chance Educational Alliance

¹⁴ 34 CFR 668.235 provides definitions detailing how correctional bodies may gather nonbinding feedback relative to the implementation and success of a PEP. The feedback process, formulated by the resources and interests of the correctional body, must include “Relevant Stakeholders” including representatives of confined or incarcerated individuals, organizations representing confined or incarcerated individuals, state higher education executive officers, accrediting agencies and others as determined by the correctional body.

Avenues for Continued Partnership and Advocacy: Opportunities for State-Level Collaborative Action

Recommendation H (Part 2)

Need:

To effectively provide learners with a diverse range of educational opportunities and ensure positive outcomes, it is essential for states to thoroughly evaluate their legislative strategy regarding financial support for higher education in prison. For example, while Pell Grants provide crucial financial assistance, grants often do not cover the costs of participation in, or administration of, postsecondary programs (Gaskill, Castro, & Aguilar Padilla, 2022). Previous recommendations and reflections from Commission members have confirmed the limitations of Pell funding for many practical, short-term programs and high-lighted concerns regarding the capacity of education providers, including funding, staffing and outdated infrastructure in an increasingly digital world. Additionally, while private philanthropy has an important role to play in providing seed funding to explore innovative ideas, including through pilot programs, this type of support should be leveraged to build evidence for sustained, long-term investments by each state.

Proposed Solution:

Informed by the state's prison education strategic plan (see Recommendation H Part 1), states should implement a sustained advocacy and legislative engagement strategy dedicated to increasing state investment in higher education in prison, including representation from the DOC, HEIs providing college in prison programs, currently and formerly incarcerated students and state policymakers. State strategic plans should evaluate needs, interests and opportunities, and target funding to support the implementation of the Commission's recommendations where appropriate.

“With Pell Grants becoming available for incarcerated individuals beginning in July 2023, it is incumbent upon all of our New England states to be prepared to support incarcerated students to succeed in higher education by sharing best practices, highlighting essential partnerships and eliminating policy barriers.”

Brenda Dann-Messier, *Senior Advisor*,
Education Strategy Group

Suggested Action Steps:

1. Advocate for funding for related staffing needs, including the establishment of at least one senior, state-level professional role in each New England state to oversee prison education statewide. This person could direct program development, coordinate delivery across multiple facilities, engage and coordinate program providers, support the development and execution of strategic plans and evaluate performance data and outcomes.
2. To enable state-wide success, analysis and advocacy may focus within three areas of change:
 - a. Firstly, for DOCs, funding can modernize connectivity, infrastructure and staffing, implementing actions outlined in Recommendations B, C and D.
 - b. Secondly, for HEIs, the focus is on programmatic development and addressing student success needs connected, but not limited, to Recommendations A, D, G and F.
 - c. Finally, state investments should support broad strategies which enable student and re-entry success, such as funding community-based organizations and partnerships, expanding broadband access generally and other key initiatives.
3. Explore and develop state-based incentives and education campaigns for employers, such as tax credit programs or funded education-to-career pathways, to encourage hiring of formerly incarcerated people. State strategies may explore maximizing benefits or models of other state-administered federal programs, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.¹⁵

Featured Practice

Through its administration of Perkins, the State of Maryland developed the “Joint Skills Training Partnership” (JSTP) in its Hagerstown correctional facilities to document specific competencies that incarcerated people master in different jobs provided in these facilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). JSTP works with facility staff to specify what skills students learn on the job, which are noted on their resumes and discussed with possible employers upon their release. As a result of this training, 298 people met the standards established by their supervisors and received certificates after completing their training.

¹⁵ The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act are two primary federal laws that respectively develop, support and increase coordination among career and technical education, workforce development and related programs.

Avenues for Continued Partnership and Advocacy: Opportunities for State-Level Collaborative Action

Recommendation I

Need:

While some New England HEIs will provide prison education programs, all institutions can play a role in supporting the success of incarcerated students by implementing transfer receptive policies. Federal Pell reinstatement regulations require that credits earned in an approved PEP must transfer to at least one HEI in the state.

However, upon re-entry, students will benefit from having postsecondary options representing a range of costs, program choices and locations as they seek to navigate reacclimatization and secure housing, transportation and employment. Many incarcerated students are working towards longer-term credentials that they will continue post-release. Because of the 12-semester lifetime limit on students' ability to draw on Pell Grant dollars to fund their higher education pursuits, it is crucial that credits accrued in prison education programs seamlessly transfer to credential and degree programs on the outside.

Proposed Solution:

HEI leaders in the New England states should establish state-specific, voluntary "credit transfer compacts" to signal their institutions' commitment to guaranteeing the acceptance of previously earned credits (accrued both pre- and during incarceration) and expanding the range of available credit transfer options. Similarly, HEI providers should ensure that all programs are designed to maximize credit acquisition and transfer.

Suggested Action Steps:

1. HEIs, DOCs and researchers align data systems to identify high-volume intra- and inter-state transfer pathways used by currently and formerly incarcerated students.
2. HEIs and DOCs work to identify and promote existing lateral and vertical transfer infrastructure, including public-to-public transfer pathways (e.g., [Mass Transfer A2B](#)), public-to-independent transfer pathways (e.g., the [New England Transfer Guarantee](#)) as well as individual, one-to-one articulation agreements.
3. HEIs work to expand the use of key practices and programs created to accelerate credit accrual by awarding credit hours for experience gained outside of the classroom, such as in the workplace. These may include Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and the Defense Subject Standardized Test (DSST, formerly the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support, or DANTES).
4. HEIs work to develop a seal of transfer receptivity for coordinated display on institutional websites and other marketing materials.
5. DOC-based education staff and HEIs work to develop comprehensive transfer resources for integration into students' educational planning pre- and post-release.

Featured Practice

Under the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII) of the New York District Attorney's Office, the State University of New York has collaborated with participating education providers to create articulation agreements that standardize course requirements across all CJII-funded programs and enable seamless credit transfer (State University of New York, n.d.). This initiative involves both public and independent institutions and aims to encourage providers in the state to adopt transfer agreements, policies and pathways that promote educational opportunities for system-involved students.

Avenues for Continued Partnership and Advocacy: Opportunities for State-Level Collaborative Action

Recommendation J

Need:

Preparing for postsecondary education, identifying specific institutions and program opportunities, determining financing options and completing admissions and financial aid applications are daunting tasks for all potential students. Incarcerated people face even further barriers to successfully completing these activities and arrive at carceral facilities with substantially lower incomes than peers of the same age, race/ethnicity, gender and education level (Rabuy & Kopf, 2015). Supporting this population, therefore, requires additional strategic planning to minimize the effects of growing education costs.

Proposed Solution:

State governments and HEIs in New England should improve college readiness, access and affordability for system-involved students by taking the following steps:

- Utilize information collected under Recommendations A and B and draw on increased support for bridge programming by organizations like Petey Greene to increase readiness for educational engagement.¹⁶
- Maximize the benefits of federally supported programs, including TRIO, Education Opportunity Centers (EOCs), CareerOneStop Centers and other access-focused organizations to expand assistance to incarcerated people in applying for postsecondary admission and Pell Grants.¹⁷
- Identify and remove barriers to state-based financial aid programs.

Suggested Action Steps:

1. DOCs and their HEI partners collaborate to strategically leverage existing, federally supported TRIO staff and resources to expand counseling, training and assistance with admissions and financial aid processes in carceral facilities.
2. State policymakers, HEI leaders and financial aid specialists work alongside currently and formerly incarcerated students to identify any gaps in student eligibility for, and uptake of, state and federal financial aid opportunities.
3. Policymakers advocate for legislation that removes barriers to state financial aid access for system-involved students.
4. HEI leaders work to increase institutional capacity for supporting currently and formerly incarcerated students' use of available state and federal financial aid opportunities; states provide targeted resources to support HEIs as they expand services for these student populations.

Featured Practice

The Council for State Government's Justice Center reports that more than three-quarters of states impose statutory and/or administrative restrictions limiting postsecondary education access for currently and formerly incarcerated people. Funding streams such as state-based financial aid and federally supported, state-administered funds like those established through Perkins create an alternate or supplementary source to enable educational access. For example, in 2019, the State of New Jersey enacted SB 2055, permitting state-sentenced incarcerated people to receive student financial aid. State Higher Education Agencies can also play a role: in Minnesota, through Governor Tim Walz's support, a newly installed Project Manager coordinates between the DOC, the state public higher education system office and the State Department of Education. The staff member's efforts help to identify problem areas and explore solutions among these three entities. For example, they worked together to streamline the process for obtaining student transcripts and waive statutory language about collecting fees from incarcerated people.

¹⁶ Bridge programs prepare incarcerated students for postsecondary participation through focused instruction in literacy, writing, math and other core subjects (Benetollo & Hottman, 2022).

¹⁷ The U.S. Department of Labor created CareerOneStop and its state partners (American Job Centers) to provide people, including formerly incarcerated learners, with opportunities for career exploration, basic skills training, apprenticeships, practice job applications and a range of additional resources (CareerOneStop, 2023).

Avenues for Continued Partnership and Advocacy: Opportunities for Regional/Interstate Collaborative Action

Recommendation K

Need:

HEIs, students and DOCs have observed that there is often misalignment in the supply and demand of postsecondary programs operating within carceral settings. For instance, many programs serve a limited number of students, and waitlists for program enrollment are long. In other instances, programs struggle to fill enough seats with eligible students. It is in the best interest of students to expand access to educational offerings that meet their needs; similarly, providers may benefit from a better alignment of course offerings with eligible student populations. Providing more options to students is also viewed as a potential boon for student engagement and student success in postsecondary prison education, as research has demonstrated a correlation between increased autonomy in educational and career trajectories and increased rates of persistence and completion of degree programs (Howard et al., 2021).

Proposed Solution:

Interested New England HEIs should form a cross-state, cross-facility collaborative that offers programs through a variety of educational modalities, with the goal of improving access to postsecondary programming and expanding the range of courses and degree pathways available to students, while ensuring the viability of existing programs by facilitating student access to programs with unused capacity. The collaborative would serve to increase options for students, expand the range of programs that prepare students for successful re-entry, increase students' access to specialized courses and ideally increase overall degree completion among this student population in the region.



Suggested Action Steps:

1. HEIs work to ensure seamless transferability of credits among new participating providers and providers already present in correctional facilities, including offering stackable credentials and transcripts for students. The collaborative would supplement and preserve existing programs' autonomy, avoiding duplication of program offerings.
2. Collaborative members remain connected to current and former students and employers to ensure courses offered remain relevant to all parties.
3. Collaborative members compile centralized resources about Pell Grant reinstatement and related state, accreditation and federal guidelines for institutions in the region.
4. Collaborative members might leverage remote synchronous learning to operate across state and facility lines.

Avenues for Continued Partnership and Advocacy: Opportunities for Regional/Interstate Collaborative Action

Recommendation L

Need:

Currently, there is not a clear picture of what postsecondary programming exists, and in which facilities, across the region. Equipped with a better understanding of current programming and regional workforce needs, DOCs, HEIs and other relevant partners can intentionally incorporate workplace-relevant skills across the programming spectrum to better prepare learners for successful re-entry and promote a more equitable and inclusive labor market. With space-constrained facilities, partners may consider optimizing educational and training spaces that are responsive to shifting labor market demands and leveraging technological innovation when possible.

Proposed Solution:

HEIs, DOCs and other relevant partners should spearhead a thorough assessment of the current postsecondary education landscape in carceral systems, mapping existing course offerings in New England facilities to strengthen and align programming with in-demand skills and labor market needs across the region.

Suggested Action Steps:

1. HEIs work with departments of labor to assess labor market opportunities across the region.
2. HEIs, community-based organizations and employers launch a task force in each state to evaluate licensure and certification barriers/requirements to ensure, at a minimum, that all postsecondary programs align with fields in which system-involved people can obtain employment.
3. HEIs, DOCs and employers work to integrate workplace-relevant skills into all programs.
4. HEIs, DOCs and employers (including industry associations and unions) collaborate to develop new programs that align with regional labor market demands.

Featured Practice

In fiscal years 2023-2024, the State of Minnesota invested \$3 million in a Pilot Re-Entry Competitive Grant Program (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2022). Prospective grantee organizations may request up to \$500,000 to provide formerly incarcerated people with one-on-one career counseling/case management, job search assistance, on-the-job training and other support services.



“By providing incarcerated individuals with access to education and aligning these programs with career pathways, we can equip them with the skills they need to successfully reintegrate into society and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.”

Abraham Santiago, *Student Advocate*,
Second Chance Educational Alliance

Avenues for Continued Partnership and Advocacy: Opportunities for Regional/Interstate Collaborative Action

Recommendation M

Need:

Currently, DOCs and HEIs employ siloed data systems to collect information about the populations they serve, and these data systems are rarely integrated. As a result, it is difficult to identify incarcerated students and track key indicators for student success, including participation in postsecondary programs, transfer across facilities, academic progress and/or graduation status and long-term career outcomes. To understand the scale of this work and track progress over time, disparate data systems need to be linked to track a core set of outcomes.

Proposed Solution:

Researchers, state governmental agencies and HEIs, in collaboration with currently and formerly incarcerated students, should launch a comprehensive research effort that documents the number of system-involved people during and post-incarceration. The educational and career outcomes and experiences of formerly incarcerated people across New England will provide necessary information for future improvements. Disaggregating data by race, ethnicity and other identifying characteristics will be essential to support the commitment to equity.

Suggested Action Steps:

1. Research organizations and/or researchers partner with state education and labor departments, DOCs and currently and formerly incarcerated learners to understand the current landscape and establish baseline regional enrollment data (including data necessary to fulfill Recommendation I regarding credit transfer agreements).
2. Develop data sharing agreements among HEIs, DOCs (including parole and probation) and departments of labor, so data can be pulled annually to track progress over time.
3. To ensure more inclusive and fair educational participation, DOCs and HEIs may commit to a regular, data-informed review of program access and completion to examine various equity-related dimensions of student access and success.

Featured Practice

In its current legislative session, the State of Hawaii has proposed an appropriation (S.B. No. 711) to its Correctional System Oversight Commission to study all programming offered to people incarcerated at correctional facilities and convene a group of incarcerated women for the purpose of identifying gaps in the programming offered at women's facilities (A Bill for an Act Relating to Gender Parity in Programs for Incarcerated Women, 2023).



Avenues for Continued Partnership and Advocacy: Opportunities for Regional/Interstate Collaborative Action

Recommendation N

Need:

While the core work related to prison education programs occurs within states, there are notable opportunities for regional collaboration. New England, as a geographically compact and connected region, is known for collaboration and innovation. Further, transfer and release of incarcerated people across state lines within this highly connected region is not uncommon.

The Commission has demonstrated the importance of the six New England states working collectively toward shared goals and building strategic partnerships to increase the availability of quality education and employment pathways. Its varied activities have expanded relationships within and across the six states and laid the groundwork for sustained collaboration going forward. Subsequent to the Commission, the region will benefit from having an ongoing, trust-based network for sharing information, resources and promising practices, collaborating in the development of programs and services to reduce costs and improve effectiveness, and conducting outreach and raising awareness among key stakeholders to ensure adequate investment in prison education programs.

Proposed Solution:

To continue its momentum, Commission members and other representatives of the six New England states should develop and formally launch a regional postsecondary prison education collaborative to continue the dynamic synergy, communication, coordination and idea-sharing among all relevant stakeholders, including those with lived experience.

Suggested Action Steps:

1. The collaborative should develop a follow-up plan related to assisting the six states and relevant stakeholder groups to implement and act upon the Commission's recommendations, documenting the progress made over time.
2. To support such aims, the collaborative should work to identify and secure grants, philanthropic support and other resources to sustain its work.

“The Commission provided New England states an opportunity to work collaboratively to lift up and incorporate the voices of directly impacted individuals in order to design and implement student-centered programs.”

Brenda Dann-Messier, *Senior Advisor*,
Education Strategy Group

“[Students’] successes lead to better communication with friends and family [and] improved relationships. The prospect of a good life becomes attainable, and suddenly residents find themselves role models to their children, their families, and their communities. Everyone wins.”

Randall A. Liberty, *Commissioner*,
Maine Department of Corrections

Next Steps

The Commission's recommendations represent an action plan to expand and strengthen prison education programs in the region, increase the number of students who can access high-quality postsecondary programs while in prison, and support students' successful transitions back into society—including pursuit of further postsecondary education and thriving-wage careers.

From the outset, Commission members were clear about one important objective: their recommendations must have a life beyond the pages of the report. The restoration of Pell Grants for incarcerated learners will heighten the imperative to work strategically to support higher education in prison, and successful implementation of the Commission's recommendations in this context will require sustained collaboration among the many partners who came together over its duration.

While these undertakings are undoubtedly ambitious, the spirit of collaboration on display throughout the last nine months is a hopeful foundation upon which to build a future in which all incarcerated learners in New England have equitable access to a range of post-secondary and career pathways.



“Education is not something that should be viewed as a privilege reserved for a select few, but rather as an essential human right available to all.”

Steven Johnson, *Technical Support Specialist*,
Boston MA

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APPENDIX A - Commission Membership

Akunvabey, Stephanie, *Vice President for Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer*, Roger Williams University, RI

Audette, Bernie, *Director of Inmate Training & Education*, Massachusetts Department of Correction, MA

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Borden, Stacey, *Founder/Executive Director*, New Beginnings Reentry Services, Inc., MA

Bou, José, *Senior Associate*, Great Schools Partnership, MA

Brett, James, *President and CEO*, The New England Council, Regional

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Cannon, Andrew, *Senior Battery Scientist*, Titan Advanced Energy Solutions, Regional

Cheng, Terrence, *President*, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, CT

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DeSesto, Jayne, *Interdepartmental Project Manager*, Rhode Island Department of Corrections, RI

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Smith, Aaron, *Peer Recovery Specialist*, North Suffolk Mental Health Association, MA

Sullivan, Lynne, *Regional Manager*, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, The Petey Greene Program, MA

Thomas, Michael, *President and CEO*, New England Board of Higher Education, Commission Co-Chair, Regional

Thornell, Ryan, *(Former) Deputy Commissioner*, Maine Department of Corrections, ME*

Throop, Daniel, *Founder and Executive Director*, National Prison Debate League, Co-Chair, Career, Workforce and Employer Connections Working Group, MA

Villarreal, Rebecca, *Senior Director*, Center for Justice and Economic Advancement, Jobs for the Future, Co-Chair, Career, Workforce and Employer Connections Working Group, Regional

Watters, David, *State Senator*, New Hampshire General Court, NH

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Williamson, Quinn, *Assistant Director*, Tufts University Prison Initiative at Tisch College, MA

Winfield, Gary, *State Senator*, Connecticut General Assembly, CT

*Currently serving as Director of the Arizona Department of Corrections, Rehabilitation and Reentry.

Appendix B - Working Groups

Access, Cost and Funding

Summarized Charge: While a variety of diverse prison education programs exist across New England, the demand for educational programming often exceeds providers' capacity. This working group will explore opportunities for expanding prison education programming in the region to reach more students with new and existing program delivery models. For instance, this working group may explore the use of synchronous online education as a means of reaching more system-involved students across the region. Additionally, this group will seek to identify ways that postsecondary programming can be delivered more equitably. This working group will explore potential costs of scaling program provision, along with funding sources, in addition to the availability of federal Pell Grants.

Career, Workforce and Employer Connections

Summarized Charge: In the wake of COVID-19, employers around the region are experiencing labor shortages; even before the pandemic, many experienced a dearth of applicants bearing the skills and credentials needed for successful employment. Formerly incarcerated people represent a wealth of talent that is often untapped due to stigma and a misalignment of their skills upon release with the current needs of employers. This working group has a unique opportunity to explore methods for improving the career-readiness of system-involved people by sharing recommendations that help to align credential offerings to current career and workforce opportunities. This group will work to deepen partnerships among departments of corrections, higher education institutions and employers to improve incarcerated people's likelihood of obtaining thriving-wage employment.

Partnerships and Policy Alignment

Summarized Charge: The Commission aims to secure long-term, structural changes to the prison education system to better serve New England's system-involved populations. To do so, this working group will focus on strategies for strengthening partnerships among policymakers, DOCs, HEIs, community organizations serving system-involved people, businesses and other key stakeholders to facilitate more successful transitions out of the carceral system, as well as reduce recidivism and increase employment in the region. Policy alignment will be instrumental in creating and solidifying these pathways, as well as maintaining the interconnectedness among the varied organizations, institutions and systems involved in postsecondary prison education.

Program and Delivery Models

Summarized Charge: Differing priorities and lack of regular communication among departments of corrections, higher education institutions and employers has made it challenging to deliver high-quality, credential-bearing, workforce-aligned postsecondary education programs in prisons across the U.S. For instance, facility transfers may disrupt educational progress and prevent students from completing postsecondary programs once enrolled at the facility of intake. Prioritizing students' educational needs and goals in the intake and transfer processes may be an area of exploration for this group. This Working Group will explore models for delivering innovative educational programming that embeds high-quality instruction and student supports to improve student success and degree completion.

Appendix C - Commission Timeline

July-September 2022: Commission membership invitations sent; introductory and orientation calls with individual members and stakeholder groups.

October 14, 2022: Commission Launch Event at MIT, *Cambridge, MA*

November 28 – December 5, 2022: First round of virtual Working Group meetings

December 14, 2022: Second meeting of the Commission at Bentley University, *Waltham, MA*

January 26 – February 8, 2023: Second round of virtual Working Group meetings

March 2023: Commission member site visits to select correctional facilities and education programs in New England

March 24, 2023: Third meeting of the Commission at Bentley University, *Waltham, MA*

April 3 – 7, 2023: Third and final round of virtual Working Group meetings

June 7, 2023: Commission Report Release and Launch, *Framingham, MA*

Appendix D - Select Glossary

This report uses person-first language to emphasize and center system-involved people's dignity and humanity. Since expanding educational opportunities for system-involved people represents a rapidly developing policy area, it is possible that future readers of this report may encounter words or phrases that have been replaced in the time since publication.

Person-First Terminology

Carceral System is used in place of the term "criminal justice system" to acknowledge that justice is a relative term that many in this country do not see presently existing in the current system. "Carceral system" is intended to signal a more far-reaching network of systems that goes beyond law enforcement and the courts to include other entities and sectors who both actively support and tacitly benefit from the existence of mass incarceration (Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative, 2020, 28).

Formerly Incarcerated Person is used to refer to anyone who has been in a carceral setting and is now released. Carceral settings include prisons, immigration detention centers, local jails, and juvenile detention centers. It is considered a preferable term to language that employs the prefix “ex” (e.g., ex-convict or ex-felon) (Cerda-Jara et al., 2019). This term is usually used instead of “returning citizen,” which can fail to fully capture the complexities of formerly incarcerated people’s immigration statuses and voting rights.

Lived experience is used to refer to personal knowledge about the carceral system gained through direct, first-hand involvement. Crucially, it denotes a form of experiential knowledge that is of equal importance to formal or academic expertise and should be similarly influential in analysis and decision-making.

Incarcerated Person is used to refer to anyone who is currently incarcerated. Unlike the label “convict,” this term makes no claim about guilt or innocence, nor does it attach a permanent identity to an often-temporary status as does the term “prisoner” (Cerda-Jara et al., 2019).

System-involved is used to describe people who are currently incarcerated as well as people who have been incarcerated and those with arrests or convictions but no incarceration. In certain contexts, this same term is used to refer to those who have been directly impacted by a loved one being incarcerated.

Commission-Specific Terminology

Stakeholders relevant to the field of higher education in prison include but are not limited to higher education leaders and program providers, state policymakers, corrections leaders and staff, re-entry providers, parole and probation officers, workforce specialists, people with lived experience and subject matter experts.

Carceral System Procedures Terminology

Included to explain common procedures in the carceral system that are relevant to the recommendations put forth by the Commission; corrections language and related policies may vary from state to state.

Intake/classification is used to describe the process of assessing an incarcerated person’s risks and needs that balances the security concerns of the institution and the treatment needs of the individual. Examples of risk classification systems are the Adult Internal Management System (AIMS) and the Adult Internal Classification System (AICS).

Institutional Service Plan (ISP) is used to describe the product of the intake/classification process: a coordinated and individualized treatment plan that classifies incarcerated people to social and emotional programming (including substance use, mental health and life skills programming), educational offerings, employment training and work assignments. An incarcerated person’s compliance with their ISP is reviewed at re-classification hearings and often determines readiness for lower security levels.

Appendix E - Estimating Impacts

Estimates about the number of incarcerated people who stand to benefit from Pell Grant restoration vary across the literature. The authors of the 2019 Investing in Futures report, co-produced by the Vera Institute of Justice and the Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, estimate that 463,000 incarcerated people would be eligible for reinstated Pell Grants (Oakford et al., 2019, 13-14). This estimate was made before the final parameters of eligibility for Pell restoration were determined by lawmakers revising the FAFSA Simplification Act; as a result, the figure excludes students who are serving life

or death sentences. However, the version of legislation signed into law in December 2020 contains no restrictions on educational programming based on sentence length. Much more modest anticipated uptake figures have been provided from the federal government. According to October 2022 estimates from the U.S. OMB, to ascertain the net federal budget impacts of reinstatement, about two percent of the approximately 1.6 million people incarcerated nationwide will enroll in a PEP (Pell Grants for prison education programs, 2022, 869). According to these estimates, then, about 32,000 people nationwide would likely take advantage of this restored grant funding for higher education pursuits.

Appendix F – Subject Matter Experts and Speakers

The Commission would like to extend a special thanks to members who provided expertise in Commission meetings and proceedings. These subject matter experts and speakers included:

Hilary Binda, *Founder and Director/ Senior Lecturer*, Tufts University Prison Initiative at Tisch College

Andrew Cannon, *Senior Battery Scientist*, Titan Advanced Energy Solutions

Erin Corbett, *Chief Executive Officer/ Program Director*, Second Chance Educational Alliance, Inc./ Quinnipiac University

Ruth Delaney, *Associate Initiative Director*, Vera Institute of Justice

Nicholas Deml, *Commissioner*, Vermont Department of Corrections

Billi Dunham, *Associate Director of Corrections Post-Secondary Education Initiative*, Community College of Vermont

Teresa Foley, *Interim Associate Dean of Non-Traditional Transition Programs*, Connecticut State Community College at Asnuntuck

Eulalia Garcia, *District Administrator/
Director of Programs*, Connecticut
Department of Correction

Brian Hill, *CEO/Founder*, Edovo

Mackenzie Kelley, *Student/Re-Entry
Specialist*, University of Maine at Augusta

Brittany LaMarr, *Project Manager*,
Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight
Committee, Tow Youth Justice Institute

Marvin Loiseau, *Dean of Academics*,
Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute
of Technology

Joshua Long, *Assistant Professor*,
University of Massachusetts Lowell

Carol Mici, *Commissioner*, Massachusetts
Department of Correction

James Monteiro, *Founder/Director*,
Reentry Campus Program

Laura Rodas, *Director of Education*,
Staff Development & Training, Maine
Department of Corrections

Abraham Santiago, *Student/Advocate*,
Second Chance Educational Alliance, Inc.

Rebecca Villarreal, *Senior Director*,
Center for Justice and Economic
Advancement, Jobs for the Future

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