



National Association of State Directors of Adult Education

Adult Education In Correctional Settings

ISSUE BRIEF

Why Care? One in every 32 Americans passes through a correctional institution at some point in life. At any given time, more than 1.5 million person are incarcerated in the correctional institutions of America. People in correctional settings have disproportionately low levels of education, six percent of the incarcerated population hold a postsecondary degree, compared with 37 percent of non-incarcerated persons. The conversation around increasing education often focuses on employment outcomes, for those in correctional settings it also centers on societal benefits by reducing recidivism rates – the rates with which formerly incarcerated individuals engage in criminal acts that result in their re-arrest, re-conviction, or re-incarceration. At an average annual cost of \$31,000 and with an estimate that 95 percent of incarcerated individuals will eventually be released, reducing recidivism is an important metric. Those who participate in education programs while incarcerated are 43% less likely to return to a correctional setting than those who don't, according to a 2013 report from Rand.

The Second Chance Pell (SCP) Experimental Sites Initiative was launched by the U.S. Department of Education in 2015. Congress authorized the Experimental Sites Initiative under section 487A(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended. This Initiative—or "experiments," as they are frequently called—tests the effectiveness of statutory and regulatory flexibility for participating institutions disbursing Title IV student aid. The SCP Initiative waived the following specific statutory and regulatory requirements Section 401(b)(6) and 34 CFR 668.32(c)(2)(ii) at the postsecondary institutions to participate in the experiments. By contrasting the results achieved with the flexibilities with results under current regulations, the Department has data to support changes to regulations and statute. The outcomes of experiments have the potential to benefit all postsecondary institutions and the students they serve. SCP has recently expanded to include 100+ participating schools in providing needs-based Pell grants to otherwise eligible students who are incarcerated.

Important Issues to consider:

- Increased opportunities for postsecondary credentials and certificates for incarcerated individuals incentivize the need to complete high school equivalency programs and/or build literacy skills necessary to transition to college and beyond.
- The SCP can work in partnership with ATB (see issue brief) increasing access, contextualizing the content of adult education and possibly modeling Integrated Education and Training activities within the correctional setting
- By 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school, having access to high quality programming within correctional settings including pathways that incorporate elements of adult education and literacy to eligible individuals, those that are returning citizens are better able to engage with the community.
- Increased awareness of the SCP opportunities available at the correctional setting will allow for alignment and the contextualization of adult education with the postsecondary offerings to streamline the education process.
- The Vera Institute estimates that roughly 463,000 people in correctional settings are Pell eligible. If adult education services increased that number and/or served to support the eligible participants in being college ready, the employment rate for returning citizens could jump 2.1% and states together could save nearly \$366 million a year on incarceration costs.

- In 2020, the US Department of Education invited an expansion of the Second Chance Pell Experiment with applications for a second cohort. Of the 180 applications, 67 institutions were selected. As of April 24, 130 school located in 42 states and the District of Columbia have been given the waiver. Adult education programs can support future expansions with key data of services and supports provided by detailing the needs and laying strong foundations for access to career pathways within the correctional settings.

Questions to Ask:

- Does your state have SCP pilots operating and if so, are there connections established for referrals between adult education services and the postsecondary institution(s)?
- Are there ways to better prepare our adult education population served in correctional settings for postsecondary success?
- What technology or digital literacy skills are being taught in the correctional setting that could be supported beyond adult education services?
- How are adult education participants in a correctional setting being advised on their next steps for accessing additional educational services?

Resources:

- Office of Justice Programs, *Reentry Trends in the US*, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/reentry.cfm>
- Vera Institute, *Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison*, <https://www.vera.org/publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison>
- US Department of Education, *Answering your Frequently Asked Questions about Second Chance Pell*, <https://blog.ed.gov/2019/04/answering-frequently-asked-questions-second-chance-pell/>
- RAND, *How Effective is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?* https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html