



Pursuant to *Public Act 24-81*

Needs Assessment of Higher Education in Connecticut Correctional Facilities

Initial Report

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Introduction

This Report has been prepared by the Office of Policy and Management Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division (OPM CJPPD) at the request of the Connecticut General Assembly. It is the only public sector report of its kind in the country. Key partners in its formation have included the leadership across the Department of Correction, an array of Connecticut's institutions of higher education including faculty, staff and leadership at community colleges, private mission-driven institutions of higher education, and UConn's School of Public Policy and the Institute for Regional and Municipal Policy (IMRP). Notably, a number of Connecticut residents who have served a sentence inside state prisons, have pursued and completed rigorous undergraduate and graduate education both in and after prison, have been instrumental in its creation. As with the leadership and staff in almost every facet of DOC operations, the experiences of these graduates in the pursuit of education have been foundational to the development of this Report, and we wish to acknowledge everyone's time and willingness to share their insights in support of this study.

Executive Summary

The people of Connecticut have long made heavy and sustained investments in both criminal justice and higher education. Yet there has been no serious consideration of how to align and leverage these investments to better serve the public. To meet or exceed efforts underway in other states across the country, OPM CJPPD believes that Connecticut can significantly improve criminal justice outcomes without any changes to its sentencing laws while also strengthening its foundational commitments to both personal accountability and public safety. As detailed throughout this Report, substantial opportunities currently exist to align and revise policies, practices and procedures at the Connecticut Department of Correction, our extensive Judicial Branch systems of court diversion and parole supervision. DOC and OPM can do much more to leverage the capacities of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), University of Connecticut (UConn), and the state's many private not-for-profit colleges and universities that have already shown leadership in this area.

Five key recommendations immediately follow this Executive Summary. The full Report then surveys the entire landscape of where higher education and criminal justice currently intersect and indicates the steps that need to be taken to move forward. The status quo is promising and shows what is possible for both systems and the people who pass through them – but output and outcomes fall far short of potential. The result is a lost opportunity for substantially increased returns on existing criminal justice investments. This survey offers an analysis of existing programs and offers nuanced estimates of the levels of unmet needs and the untapped capacity. It details the current landscape across seven key consideration areas based on extensive studies and engagement of the crucial stakeholders and institutions. Throughout the Report centers its analysis on sustainability, cost benefit analysis, core values, and the measurable goals of reduced recidivism and increased employment.

Recommendations

To augment this Report, this initial section offers five broad recommendations. Each broad recommendation requires future collaboration between the Department of Correction, OPM, Connecticut's public and private institutions of higher education, employers and other stakeholders.

1. Student capacity and agency goals

The DOC, OPM and higher education partners should estimate the total number of people passing through Connecticut correctional facilities who could benefit from higher education and post-secondary training. Chapter IV gets this effort started and identifies concrete estimates and goals. Future estimates must strive for greater clarity and reflect clearly defined policy goals. As such estimates and targets are refined, stakeholders must set year-over-year minimum and also aspirational targets for specified numbers of students, degree completions, and reentry outcomes. A commitment to these targets will in turn compel stakeholders to develop and maintain high-functioning degree pathways across all DOC facilities and, crucially, positive short and long-term outcomes after prison.

Metrics of success for higher education inside prison of different types (vocational, collegiate, and so on) need to track systems performance from admission up through release, supervision, and the successful end of all forms of custody, supervision, incapacitation and dependence. Higher education and vocational training partners must be held accountable for academic measures of success. Meaningful reentry outcome measures include post-release employment and payroll, health and well-being outcomes, continuing education, professional training, and professional certifications and licensure, and any other key correlates of safety and autonomy. Inside facilities, increased officer safety and decreased inmate idleness should be established as additional metrics of success.

2. Systemic opportunities at the DOC

Education may be among the best practices to augment well-being during a period of incarceration and to greater economic self-sufficiency in reentry. The DOC should immediately identify and then begin to pilot changes to policies, practices and procedures across its full range of functions: from intake to release and through

successful ending of community supervision. A collaborative process should identify numerous specific changes to be considered – including carceral exclusion factors that limit such programs, educational holds, paid programming assignments, and risk and discipline policies.

DOC leadership has already initiated some key elements of this work by exploring possible changes to the use of time, shifts, and spaces across all facilities that could be optimized. This work should be acted on systematically. The DOC has also initiated a ground-breaking partnership with OPM and the Department of Administrative Services to expand internet in facilities across the entire agency. The DOC should further partner with OPM and others to identify and expand opportunities for braided funding streams, in part through the expansion of higher educational, vocational, and job-placement partnerships. Post-release outcomes need to become metrics of agency performance.

In order to optimize partnerships, the agency should explore the viability of incremental but sustained staff reallocations to grow the share of correctional officers who can engage in and support such work as correctional counselor supervisors, reentry coordinators, and educational and career navigators. Only through far-sighted policies that lead to new approaches to postings and position descriptions for and among correctional officers can post-release outcomes become metrics of agency performance. Reentry operations should be expanded and further networked to include CSCU, the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (who administer Connecticut's probation system), private sector anchor employers and trade unions.

3. Officers are mission-critical

Correctional officers are critical to every successful DOC initiative. Yet they face structural obstacles to realizing professional and personal goals. The agency's best leaders have always risen up through the ranks, yet facility staff at all levels also have more to offer. Initial reports suggest that the single largest group of officers self-reporting educational attainment declare having "some college". This indicates that many hundreds of correctional officers have begun college careers but have not yet been able to graduate. OPM CJPPD sees this as a strategic opportunity. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities should join with OPM and the DOC to explore opportunities for leadership, including wardens and other stakeholders, to make staff recruitment, retention and mobility a strategic strength of the agency. Private non-profit anchor institutions of higher education are already deeply involved in both

criminal justice career education and higher education in prison, and could facilitate crucial opportunities for correctional officers, other staff and the agency as a whole.

4. Executive interagency leadership and private sector collaboration

Connecticut has lacked coordinated leadership or collaboration at the intersection of criminal justice and educational policy for over a decade. This is so despite the Obama Administration's Second Chance Pell experiment begun in 2015 and the Trump Administration's historic support for bi-partisan Congressional Pell restoration in 2020. Connecticut would benefit from leadership in this space that transcends but also aligns stakeholders at the agencies and in the community.

Perhaps through the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission, an interagency and intergovernmental effort should be coordinated to increase the chances of successful reentry. Post-secondary pathways begun in prison should be the backbone of such an effort. Community college and other campuses should partner with the DOC, the Judicial Branch, and 2nd Chance employers as well as the Human Resources departments of our anchor employers to become a vital part of the reentry ecology, fostering both degree completion, behavioral health and employment.

5. Higher ed systems changes

Because this work represents a unique opportunity at the intersection of higher education and criminal justice, systems change must occur in both institutional landscapes. As public investments in both are large scale and long-term, braiding these efforts is the only sensible let alone ambitious strategy. Community colleges, state universities, and private institutions of higher education should all identify concrete ways they can support this work. These might include supports for faculty and graduate students who teach in prison, initiatives that make it possible for full-time correctional officers and other DOC staff to obtain credentials and degrees if they so desire, and the scrutinizing of policies around student debt payment plans, campus-community housing partnerships, enrollment holds and hiring.

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I. Statement of Purpose

There is a long history in the United States, and in Connecticut, of the interaction between the systems of public safety, criminal justice, and education. Among these, successful partnerships between institutions of higher education and state prison systems have been a focus of policy and practice for decades. The reauthorization of the U.S. Higher Education Act passed by Congress and the restoration of Pell eligibility signed into law by the President in 2020, has intensified interest in the opportunities for efficiency, safety, and long-term economic well-being that may be at stake in the numerous existing partnerships in Connecticut between public and private colleges and universities, the private sector, and the Department of Correction and other public entities.

On May 7, 2024, the Connecticut legislature passed HB 5523, an omnibus bill subsequently signed into law by Governor Ned Lamont on May 30, 2024, as PA 24-81. Section 18 of Public Act 24-81, requires the Office of Policy and Management's (OPM) Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division (CJPPD), to conduct, in consultation with the Connecticut Department of Correction (DOC):

...a needs assessment of the facilities, materials and staffing required for the delivery of postsecondary education programs in correctional facilities. Such assessment shall include, but need not be limited to, (1) a solicitation of feedback from institutions of higher education that provide postsecondary education programs in correctional facilities to understand current needs, (2) an analysis of the policies of the Department of Correction concerning postsecondary education of incarcerated persons, (3) a determination of the level of unmet demand for postsecondary education among incarcerated persons, (4) an inventory of the (A) correctional facilities, including, but not limited to, classrooms, multipurpose rooms, libraries and study rooms, (B) staffing, and (C) materials, including, but not limited to, education technology and Internet access, currently available for the delivery of postsecondary education, (5) recommendations for and a cost analysis of the improvement of such facilities, staffing and materials to meet the unmet demand for postsecondary education, (6) a survey of (A) students of postsecondary education programs in correctional facilities, (B) former students of such programs, in consultation with regional reentry programs, and (C) any group or person the division deems necessary, and

(7) a listing of any other specific barriers to the effective delivery of postsecondary education programs to incarcerated persons.

Recognizing the vast complexity of both Connecticut's higher educational and correctional systems, OPM CJPPD intends this Report to provide policymakers and the public with a summary understanding of the following:

- The existing conditions and opportunities for higher education provision in the Connecticut Department of Correction (DOC);
- The capacity of people in and returning home from prison to leverage such opportunities for successful reentry;
- Key considerations that impact the provision of higher education to people in and returning home from prison, and lastly
- Opportunities to enhance the provision of higher education and a window into its measurable economic and related benefits and practices from other states

To develop this needs assessment, OPM CJPPD has used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. OPM CJPPD consulted key stakeholders including formerly incarcerated individuals who participated as students in higher education both during and following incarceration; higher education providers from across Connecticut; DOC leadership and facility staff and other higher education policymakers. In addition, OPM CJPPD sought out program information from higher education providers via a structured questionnaire, as well as reviewed numerous correctional policy, programming, and other documents informing the provision of higher education within DOC. Lastly, to assess the potential unmet student demand within DOC, we analyzed DOC administrative data regarding education levels and other characteristics of the October 1 facility population, as discussed in [Chapter IV](#).

OPM CJPPD has developed this initial report to be responsive to the requirements of PA 24-81. We note that several of the required research activities, most notably the survey of postsecondary students currently within correctional facilities, require research resources and approaches that exceed the current capacities of OPM CJPPD. OPM CJPPD will further pursue these activities going forward and aims to produce supplemental reports pursuant to PA 24-81. OPM CJPPD has also identified several important areas for further study. Should staffing and other statutory reporting duties permit, OPM CJPPD envisions the production of supplements to this Report later this year and in the future.

II. Higher Education and Corrections in Connecticut: Historical Context

Connecticut's own 20th century correctional history intertwines with the broader U.S. expansion and contraction of prison higher education. Establishing its Department of Correction (CT DOC) July 1, 1968, Connecticut statutorily created the Commissioner-led, cabinet-level agency and consolidated separate jail and prison facilities across the state, as well as parole and related functions under the new agency's direction. In that same year, Connecticut launched a comprehensive adult basic education program for incarcerated individuals. Following legislation enacted in 1969, CT DOC became the second in the country to organize its correctional educational system into a unified school district, designated by the state as Unified School District #1 (USD #1). (CT DOC, [History of the Department of Correction 1968-2006](#)). In addition to USD #1 and adult basic ed, by 1973 the CT DOC reported 825 individuals pursued accredited college studies while incarcerated through an agreement with regional community colleges. (CT DOC, [Accomplishments in 1968-1993](#)).

Pell Grants and the impacts of their availability on Higher Education in Corrections

With the establishment of federal Pell grants, students nationwide meeting the financial need-based criteria were eligible for Pell grant funding, including individuals incarcerated in correctional facilities until 1994. Pell grants vastly expanded participation in two- and four-year college programs, with 176,000 students receiving \$47.6 million from the program in 1973-74, while 3.7 million students received \$5.7 billion by academic year 1993-94. (Robinson, 2022). Of these, 23,000 students receiving Pell Grants in 1993-94 were incarcerated (ibid).

The elimination of Pell grant funding for incarcerated individuals as part of the federal *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act* of 1994 rapidly impacted the provision of college programs in correctional settings. Studies by the American Correctional Association documented noteworthy declines in the number of prison college programs offered by states around the country, with the number dropping from 37 to 26 states by 1995, and then to 21 in 1997.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education launched an *Experimental Sites* initiative pursuant to the Department's experimental authority under the Higher Education Act,

enabling institutions of higher education to request permission to use Pell Grant funding for supporting college study for incarcerated but otherwise eligible students. An emphasis was laid on those likely to be released within five years of enrollment, but educators and corrections officials were granted broad discretionary authority on this as on nearly all other features, in keeping with state-level practice across the country prior to 1995. Known as the Second Chance Pell Experiment, the success of this approach led Congress to pass the FAFSA Simplification Act as a component of the Consolidated Appropriations Act in 2020, signed into law later that year by President Trump. The FAFSA Simplification Act included a provision restoring Pell eligibility for qualified students in correctional facilities across the country, effective July 1, 2023 for the 2023-24 academic year and going forward.

21st Century emergence of Higher Education in Connecticut Correctional Facilities

In the immediate aftermath of VCCLA, individual institutions of higher education spearheaded partnerships with state corrections officials to offer federally funded college degree pathways to incarcerated students. The Bard Prison Initiative (BPI) in New York, which began operations entirely with private funding in 1999, was one of the most notable institutions to leverage the return of structural public funding, supporting other experimental sites across the country through its national Consortium for the Liberal Arts in Prison. In Connecticut, adapting components of the approach established by BPI, the Wesleyan University Center for Prison Education (Wesleyan CPE) began operations in 2009 in partnership with the Consortium. After offering courses at Cheshire Correctional Institution, Wesleyan CPE expanded to York Correctional Institution in 2013. Trinity University founded the Trinity Prison Education Project (TPEP) in 2012, offering seminar courses also at York CI, which is now in partnership with Quinnipiac University. In fall of 2023, Trinity also began offering courses at Hartford Correctional Center, the only jail-based college courses available currently in Connecticut. In 2016, Yale University joined the Consortium and formed the Yale Prison Education Initiative (YPEI) and began offering courses at MacDougall-Walker beginning in 2018, then later partnering with the University of New Haven to offer a transfer degree pathway. Both the Yale and Wesleyan programs began with private funding, adding Pell funding under the 2nd Chance Pell initiative.

In the absence of state-level funding or initiative, Connecticut's community colleges did little to address the void left by the VCCLEA from 1995 until the Second Chance Pell experiment, while nevertheless continuing to offer a mix of vocational training across DOC facilities. Led by Middlesex Community College and its innovative partnership with Wesleyan University's CPE to provide associate degree credits at Cheshire and York, transfer pathways emerged with other state community colleges and universities following release. Beginning with Second Chance Pell in 2015, Asnuntuck Community College began offering associate degree courses in multiple DOC facilities and is presently operating programs at Carl Robinson CI, MacDougall-Walker CI, Osborn CI, and Willard-Cybulski CI. Three Rivers Community College currently operates degree credit courses in both Manson Youth Institution and York CI, while Housatonic Community College and Quinebaug Community College operates with Garner CI and Brooklyn CI respectively. On July 1, 2023, Connecticut's Community College System unified into one institution under the Connecticut State Colleges and University (CSCU) system. Any further evolution of the community college and state university systems to this field will likely emerge following the end of their federal waiver period in 2025.¹

Lastly, there are a number of non-degree bearing programs comprising the postsecondary landscape within the DOC. Among these, the Second Chance Education Alliance is one offering non-accredited college level courses at MacDougall-Walker. A number of other programs, primarily through USD #1, offer either technical or vocational training, sometime contributing toward trade certification requirements. While all of these program types comprise important components of the existing postsecondary landscape within DOC, for the purposes of this Report and in light of the 2020 restoration of Pell for incarcerated learners, this needs assessment focuses on associate and baccalaureate program provision within carceral contexts.

¹ For more information on the Second Chance Pell Waiver and US Department of Education Approval process, see *Sustainability* beginning p. 20

III. Assessing the Current Landscape: 7 Key Considerations

Connecticut has benefitted from an entrepreneurial approach to higher education in its correctional facilities, mainly driven by the initiative of committed individuals, associated private universities, and community colleges within the state. The reported impacts of participation in these programs from former students consulted by OPM is itself noteworthy and foundational for informing understanding regarding the provision of higher education within Connecticut DOC. Taken together, these personal and institutional experiences with higher education in and beyond prison, provide the state a solid foundation from which to grow.

Even with these accomplishments to date, however, OPM CJPPD believes that the higher education provision within DOC is quite far from its potential to yield the greatest possible benefits to the state. While OPM's full report will offer greater detail, in this brief, we present an overview of six key components that support the development of a higher education system and the degree to which these components exist within the current correctional programming landscape.

I. Eligibility and Enrollment

Of paramount importance to an effective higher education system is the identification and recruitment of potential college students among the facility population. The DOC collects information on educational attainment by individual self-report at admission to a DOC facility. Most educational programming, however, is unavailable to adults incarcerated prior to sentencing.² Sentenced adults interested in educational programming receive assessments by USD #1 staff, who verify any educational attainment and credentials earned and administer tests to measure for adult basic education levels. Individuals who have completed high school or high school equivalent degree programs and test at or above high school levels are typically referred to vocational or technical education programming for possible next steps they can pursue.

² One notable exception regarding higher education is Trinity's Prison Education Program which offers for credit college courses to unsentenced individuals housed in Hartford Correctional Center.

Furthermore, the issue of eligibility is truly two-fold and speaks to the fact that this work lies at the intersection of criminal justice and higher education. The present Report seeks to open the door to policy improvement by emphasizing, here and in the Report below, that *eligibility* consists in fact of two distinct sets of policymaking: *academic eligibility* and *carceral eligibility*. That is, for any given level of academic eligibility among cohorts of people passing through a period of incarceration, carceral policy and institutional practice dramatically reduces the numbers of people eligible. Such policies should be expected to clear a reasonable bar of data-based policy that justifies what is otherwise a lost opportunity.

Existing conditions:

Currently, there is no formal relationship between DOC's intake, assessment and educational referral procedures as well as available higher education programs. While DOC facility-based staff and USD #1 instructors may refer interested sentenced individuals to one, if any, of the colleges involved in prison programs in their facility, such referrals are made on an ad hoc basis. At present, initial information about the availability of these programs for prospective students comes primarily through flyers and are occasionally posted at facility housing units. Former students also reported word of mouth encouragements from other students within their housing units as an effective means of sharing information about program availability.

OPM CJPPD would welcome further information from either the State Department of Education (SDE) or CSCU to facilitate the confirmation of secondary credentials or postsecondary credits or to identify the most appropriate routes to postsecondary eligibility informed by current best practices within the community. Such coordination and efforts are necessary to facilitate improved levels of Pell-funded programming and related efforts to support incarcerated students and safe, successful reentry.

Once aware, interested prospective students have the ability to sign up to attend information sessions held by the programs at several points during the year. Even at this preliminary stage, DOC staff regularly excludes interested individuals from the list of attendees either based on disciplinary histories or perceived to present other security risks. Then, following these information sessions, prospective students must apply for admission which largely includes developing an application essay as well as gathering required paperwork, such as copies of high school degrees and transcripts. Often higher education program staff will coordinate with their institutions to provide prospective students additional supports, coordinating submission materials, and especially for those students seeking Pell Grants and/or other financial aid, completing their Federal Application of Financial Student Aid (FAFSA). Any such

records previously collected by DOC or USD #1 have not been provided to higher ed programs, nor are programs notified about the exact numbers of potentially college-eligible individuals residing within facilities.

2. Facilities and Learning Resources

Higher education facility needs can range from relatively simple to exceedingly complex, depending on the degree type and learning needs. At minimum, an effective higher education system should have classroom facilities with dedicated classroom spaces and outfitted with key technologies akin to those necessary on campus. These would include group learning spaces, lecture spaces, internet-connected learning tools, presentation and av capabilities, and student learning management systems (LMS).

Existing conditions:

Currently, most programs do not have dedicated classroom space, which not infrequently leads to the disruption of classes. Facility classroom space is administered and scheduled by USD #1, and several programs report having access to a subset of classrooms (at most 2 to 3 per facility) most commonly limited to the evenings, when USD #1 classes are not in use. Classrooms may also be limited due to training and other facility operational needs, as well as facility lock-down security incidents. In addition, higher ed use of classrooms may be limited due to concerns about specialized school equipment being potentially accessible without USD #1 faculty present. Sometimes other common area spaces within school buildings are converted into de facto classroom space to maintain scheduled course times. Some facilities also have more than one program operating concurrently, which increases demand for limited classroom space. OPM CJPPD is aware of some efforts to assess the use of class time and space to maximize high-value partnerships that utilize braided funding in concert with public or private partnerships, be they technical and vocational trade training or foundational and general education. Yet OPM CJPPD is not aware of any concerted effort by the DOC, USD #1, or CSCU to implement a DOC-wide or inter-governmental and agency-wide strategy that is producing a measurable increase in such programming.

Classrooms themselves are generally not equipped for supporting in-class technology. Metered or limited internet access is not yet available to support student activities. While some programs provide student laptops for supporting coursework,

these are non-networked and available only for use within school buildings during program times, including study halls, not in housing units. Digital LMS systems are not currently permitted for use by DOC. Students do have access to an offline indexed version of JSTOR, an academic research library, but any books and other materials furnished by affiliated institutional libraries are subject to security review and screening.

3. Program staff and faculty

Program staffing broadly requires a mix of roles from each affiliated institution of higher education and requires support services that extend beyond the classroom. Faculty to conduct courses are essential, as well as program staff to coordinate between faculty, students, DOC staff, and their home Institution. But aside from these staffing needs, incarcerated students will also need direct or facilitated access to school administrative supports, such as the registrar and office of financial aid, to provide guidance and assistance with enrollment, financial aid, and other course registration needs. Programs also emphasized the need for regular study support services and tutoring availability. Future expansion of higher education provision must be mindful and wholistic about accounting for these supports beyond just course-specific staffing. One note calls for emphasis. The most impactful programs nationally create clear lines between correctional staff and campus staff. Part of the transformative impact of such programs is likely based on the introduction of new professional colleagues into the correctional environment, such that the college activity is in but not of the prison facility. Collaborations are essential, as are distinct areas of expertise. Future program assessment should reflect such an approach to best practices.

Existing conditions:

Overall, direct program staff are typically few in number, but they must manage a considerable load coordinating a network of people and resources between the affiliated higher ed institution and the DOC facilities in which they provide courses. Program teaching faculty are associated with the affiliated institution of higher education and may either serve on a volunteer or special dispensation basis

depending on the program. Sometimes unaffiliated faculty may also participate but their qualifications and course contents are vetted by the higher ed institution prior to the course start, just as would visiting faculty on the main campus. Program staff and faculty must also be screened in advanced by DOC and complete DOC volunteer orientation. Programs described generally few limitations on identifying willing faculty but reported that class schedules and DOC facility locations can be a limiting factor to faculty availability.

All programs described a practice of providing regular study hall sessions each week in addition to courses. Despite this, existing conditions appear to result in extensive obstacles in housing units that prevent participants from being able to complete assignments, work in groups, and access technology and other resources.

These are typically supported by campus staff, as well as undergraduate or graduate student volunteers, who offer assistance to students on course topics and material. In addition, programs typically utilize these convenings to also facilitate advising and support regarding registration, financial aid, and other student needs, sometimes including direct coordination with home institution administrative staff.

4. DOC staff and leadership

Successful higher education provision hinges in part on the support and collaboration of DOC staff and the priorities set by agency leadership. At the facility level, correction officers play a key role in providing transit between housing and class for students and maintaining safe and secure environments. Their disciplinary power to impose sanctions can and does have direct effects on students' initial carceral eligibility for and continued participation in courses. DOC programs and treatment staff are key liaisons for both students and higher ed program staff on regarding schedules, classroom and student availability, and other operational considerations. Beyond these functions, security division staff have essential roles in the operations of higher education programs, with their oversight of external materials, communications, technology uses all impacting course activities. Leadership of course makes crucial decisions at nearly every level of agency operations in ways that influence institutional culture overall and, more concretely, govern the policies, practices and procedures that support any work of this kind. The range of such policies and practices covers from setting inclusive or exclusive terms of carceral eligibility, to determining posting assignments of officers and the facilities at which individuals or cohorts will be housed,

to determining the rules that govern space and time, to setting terms of agency sanctions and monitoring their contribution to safety and efficient programming, to setting incentives and disincentives for inmate participation, to setting the guidelines that inform safety assessments for the purposes of parole and any other forms of discretionary release,

Taken together, the familiarity and attitudes of DOC staff at all levels toward higher education can nurture or inhibit any future expansion.

Existing conditions:

Everything DOC has achieved in vocational and higher education across our facilities has been due to supportive decisions made by agency leadership at both Central Office and in specific prisons across the state. The complex functions of such programs have depended on the daily work and ongoing support of both custody and program staff. Staff and leadership work in this space takes many forms, both formal and informal, undertaken in the midst of acutely challenging working environments. As noted below and emphasized in [Chapter V: Recommendations](#), any progress in Connecticut to more fully meet the opportunity of higher educational partnerships in and after prison will require intentional collaboration with, and support for, both staff and leadership at the DOC.

Officer efforts are essential to all programming and services across the agency, and the expansion of any partnerships with employers, vocational training and higher educational partners is difficult to imagine without a productive collaboration with correctional officers. Rather than simply hiring more, creative solutions need to be piloted and implemented that address agency and staff needs with efficiency and ambition. Recent leadership-supported initiatives, such as DOC's collaboration with Amend, UConn's IMRP and Norway on officer wellness, as well as interest in growing the depth and scope of the Officers Academy, offer strategic opportunities to state leaders.

In order to conduct classes, programs must provide DOC facility staff with a current list of students in advance of each class. These lists are printed out and provided to DOC Counselor Supervisors at the facilities that typically coordinate with the programs. Counselor Supervisors will in turn coordinate with Housing Unit Correctional Officers to notify students in specific housing units about class and securely escort students to classrooms. If a student is unavailable to attend, DOC staff will notify program staff and faculty. Once all students have been securely transitioned to the

classroom, course activities can begin, with Correctional Officers available during the course itself for security purposes.

The transition between housing unit and classroom is no minor step in the carceral student experience. Several former students of these programs described how the dynamics and interactions during this transition could have a significant impact on their participation in class as well as their conception of themselves as students. Security screening and monitoring activities can also impact timeliness of course resources, correspondence, and assignments, while impacting DOC capacities as well.

One particular issue warrants special emphasis. Policy conversation around higher education and criminal justice systems typically focus exclusively on opportunities for incarcerated students. This approach is understandable but should be examined. Opportunities are limited for DOC staff themselves. While many personnel in the DOC may be considering or working toward various forms of postsecondary degrees, the ability to complete higher education programs can be difficult with correctional work schedules. Such barriers likely reproduce obstacles faced by officers and their families prior to joining the department and conceivably contribute to resistance toward higher education programming for incarcerated students. Equally important, they may prevent common sense investments in human capital among officers, limit recruitment and undermine retention.

The assumption may be that Correctional Officers are themselves not interested in college. Yet preliminary analysis suggests the opposite appears to be the case. Currently, the CT DOC has approximately 3,300 Correctional Officers on staff serving in direct custodial positions. As self-reported, over 500 current Correctional Officers have college degrees, but the single largest group of officers - over 1000 - actually report having "some college". This suggests that they have begun college careers in the past but have not yet been able to complete them. In the event a plurality of officers harbor an unmet need or ambition to attain college degrees, this presents both a significant challenge and an exciting opportunity for cross-agency initiative to respond.

5. Degree pathways

Correctional settings present considerable complexity for structuring postsecondary degree pathways. An effective higher education system within corrections would

evolve to a place where it can establish the continuity of studies that can co-exist with prison admissions, releases and inter-facility transfers. At a minimum, degree pathways should be accessible for prospective students regardless of their facility, while higher education institutions should be able to set and maintain the standards for enrollment required for prospective students. Moreover, a variety of program types and degrees should be offered and attainable during incarceration that are responsive to feasibility within prison, a range of individual capacity and agency, and post-release employment and continuing educational opportunities. Such pathways should lead to effective transitions in reentry, for completion, continuing training, or employment. Indeed, the extensive network of public two-year, four-year, and private institutions of higher education already plays an important role in successful reentry in Connecticut, and this Brief indicates significant room for growth. All of this must be done while balancing any conditions and other requirements imposed as part of any criminal sentence.

Existing conditions:

While vocational education and professional certificates are a key component of correctional postsecondary education historically, OPM's examination of degree pathways focuses on the needs and possible expansion of programs offering two-year associates degrees or four-year bachelor's degrees to incarcerated students. Programs are in operation across 9 DOC facilities, but not all of these facilities can support comparable community college and other four-year degree offerings due to differences in support, facility resources and faculty availability. Full bachelor's degree pathways are only available among private institution-affiliated programs. At present, no Connecticut public four-year universities offer degree programs inside DOC facilities. Wesleyan CPE, in partnership with CT State Community College Middlesex Campus, offers incarcerated students a full pathway to either a General Studies AS degree via Middlesex, and/or they may pursue a Bachelor of Liberal Studies pathway through Wesleyan University. For students pursuing the BLS degree pathway from Wesleyan, credits are transferable to another higher ed institution post-release, should students not continue with the BLS degree on campus at Wesleyan University. Yale's Prison Education Initiative partners with the University of New Haven to offer associates degrees as well as bachelor's degrees for completion during incarceration as well as following release. Trinity's Prison Education Project (TPEP) does not currently offer a degree pathway for incarcerated students at Hartford CC or York but reports that the program is exploring the potential to do so in future partnership with the CT State Community College system. In the interim,

students may earn credit and course transcript from Trinity College to transfer these credits upon release or discharge from a DOC facility.

The CT State Community College system's programs operate at the greatest scale, offering several different associates degrees and certificates across DOC facilities. Four participating campuses, Asnuntuck, Housatonic, Middlesex (in partnership with Wesleyan CPE described above) and Quinebaug Valley, currently offer incarcerated students a General Studies Associate of Science (AS) degree pathway across eight DOC facilities. This degree can be utilized to eventually transfer into a bachelor's degree program following completion. In addition, Asnuntuck, Housatonic, and Quinebaug Valley, offer Business Administration AS degrees as well at 6 DOC facilities. While Three Rivers Community College provides a Business Administration certificate in marketing at two DOC facilities, it does not offer any AS degree programs as of the most recent academic year.

As noted previously, with the exception of Trinity's TPEP, correctional program participation is limited to sentenced individuals housed in facilities with operating programs, not people incarcerated pretrial. But while CT State's offerings are broad, they face limitations in both intensity and continuity. In terms of degree attainment, students typically take only 2 or fewer courses a semester, which of course means a much longer time to complete than on campus degrees. For example, Wesleyan CPE estimates that under current operations, the AS degree pathway takes incarcerated students 3 to 5 years to fully complete, while the BLS degree likely requires 5 to 7 years to complete. Even if enrolled students may be serving sufficiently long sentences to complete degree requirements, changes in security risk scores necessitate mandatory facility transfers, which would prevent students from completing studies.

Finally, releases and discharges from facilities also provide notable barriers to degree attainment. As noted below under **Governance and Oversight**, post-secondary and higher educational programs of the sort at issue in this Report do not currently feature in the Department of Correction's formal pathways for rehabilitation and risk-reduction, known as *Offender Accountability Plans*. Future supplements to this Report will explore this in relationship to the DOC's existing systems of Classification and Assessment, and the possibility to optimize these in keeping with the opportunities discussed here.

Continuity of postsecondary studies is also not currently part of DOC release and reentry planning activities. While programs themselves do often provide students some information about continuing education upon release, existing policies on inmate communication limits programs ability to do active outreach and follow up.

Following release, former students described to OPM that parole, probation, and community supervision officers typically looked favorably upon their interest in continuing higher education, but reenrollment is not formally incorporated into supervision case planning. Often, particularly for individuals transitioning from facilities into halfway houses, initial employment conditions of release directly conflict with students' ability to re-enroll in postsecondary degree programs post-release.

6. Governance and oversight

Higher education for incarcerated students exists at the complex intersection between institutions of vocational training and higher education, the criminal-legal system, and the Department of Correction. The view of OPM CJPPD is that this nexus should be understood and utilized as a crucial pillar of a coherent reentry strategy, engaging private employers, trades and trade unions, and other pathways to successful employment. Above all, governance and oversight should reflect the fact that Connecticut already makes very substantial investments in corrections and higher education, but there is little to no coordination across these systems. The prudent way forward begins with simply leveraging and aligning existing investments. This Report can serve as the beginning of the comprehensive approach that is called for. As indicated in the Recommendations that culminate this Brief, OPM CJPPD finds that realizing the opportunity in this field will require a collaborative and comprehensive review of policies, practices and procedures in corrections and supervision, public and private higher education, and at critical bottlenecks in the job market. To reiterate, the goals of governance and oversight are to be measured by decreased recidivism, increased job-market attachment, and successful reentry.

On college campuses, higher ed institutions generally control facilities and set policies and procedures regarding access, students, faculty, and curricular activities. In carceral environments, higher education programs operate at the approval and under the ultimate responsibility of the DOC. In the DOC, even this oversight can be multifaceted, spread out amongst the DOC facility staff, the facility Warden, USD #1 school administration, DOC classification and assessment staff, Programs and Treatment leadership, and up to the DOC Commissioner's office itself. At any given point in a higher education partnership, any one or more of these DOC functions regularly impact the day-to-day operations and continuity of the program. Programs must also navigate and reconcile gaps between correction facilities and the requirements of their affiliated institutions. Any sufficient higher education system

requires oversight with expertise that can coordinate and arbitrage across these institutional interests.

Existing conditions:

Due to the complexity of any state department of corrections, a 24/7 carceral institution with multiple facilities and dozens of functional responsibilities and statutory duties, creating and implementing a coordinated approach to programming is a challenge and progress in this area requires clear leadership intent and cross-agency collaboration. The Connecticut DOC is hierarchically organized, with all agency activities ultimately falling under the direct or designated authority of the acting DOC Commissioner. So too the programming available across all DOC facilities, including higher education, which falls within the DOC central office's administration and oversight, primarily under the Director of the Programs and Treatment Division, but ultimately answering to the DOC Commissioner. DOC programs are administered within and across DOC facilities, but it is important to note that DOC facilities are administered separately from direct Program and Treatment Leadership. This organizational set up means that facility-level implementation of DOC programming inherently requires multi-level coordination across facility leadership, facility staff, DOC program leadership, and DOC program staff. Beyond DOC central leadership, administration and coordination of higher education programming necessitates frequent coordination across college program staff, DOC program staff, USD #1 education staff, as well as coordination with facility administration and staff.

The DOC's current classification and needs assessment approach, which DOC utilizes to ascertain needs, develop offender accountability plans, and deliver programming and treatment resources during incarceration, do not appear well-suited to answer key questions about individual's educational possibilities and interests beyond high school completion. OPM CJPPD suggests that progress in this policy area will require renewed attention to the agency's policies here on both educational and risk assessment. Such review, based on usable correctional and interagency data, would likely generate opportunities for policy change and more efficient practices. While benefitting higher educational partnerships they would contribute to overall agency performance.

Per DOC policy (notably Administrative Directive 10.2, section 8. *Educational Programs*), higher education programs are not easily assignable under existing program and treatment areas but will need to exist in concert with the DOC treatment and programming framework. [Appendix A](#) presents the decision-making model governing

the DOC adult male assessment and offender accountability planning process. As depicted, DOC assessment procedures largely route individuals into a USD #1 directed ecosystem primarily oriented to career-technical courses and adult continuing education for incarcerated postsecondary learners. Further, this framework does not formally incorporate any advance planning or referrals to the higher education programs currently offering non-technical two and four-year degree pathways in any routinized manner.

Higher education programs within DOC to date have been established and governed largely via individual memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or letters of agreement, which are contractual agreements negotiated between individual higher education institutions and DOC leadership. These largely define the rights and responsibilities of both entities pursuant to a given program, including potential requirements pertaining to factors such as limiting costs to DOC, permitted technologies, facilities and scheduling, program eligibility, and security and risk restrictions.

Lastly, the current federal approval process implemented by the Department of Education for Pell eligible *Prison Education Programs* (PEPs) assigns state DOCs as de facto oversight entities and requires programs reach agreement with the oversight entity and complete accreditation prior to receiving Department of Education approval for Pell eligibility. Oversight entities also have ongoing responsibility to assess PEP programs with an eye to PEP renewal.

OPM CJPPD raises concerns, however, that the oversight and assessment of an appropriate higher education system that addresses people in and population flows through corrections would likely exceed the capabilities and resources solely of the DOC. Given the central role such efforts can have to an effective higher educational system statewide, and the particular role that post-secondary education can and should play in reentry, both for employment and other pros-social outcomes, this matter looms large. Due to the complex mix of institutions, legal and educational requirements, and student needs, coordinating such a system would require considerable expertise and skills in addition to those developed in correctional settings. Oversight certainly requires DOC leadership involvement but must be conceived and led by a range of higher education practitioners in collaboration with those who play a disproportionate role in successful reentry.

7. Sustainability

As mentioned in the Historical Context, the availability of Pell Grants has accelerated the ability to sustain higher education provided within correctional institutions. However, some of Connecticut's and the United States's most important programs began before Pell restoration and flourished, albeit on a small scale, without any Pell funding. Furthermore, it is important to note that Pell restoration has not led, either since its experimental expansion in 2016 or its full legislative enactment in 2020, with an expansion to meet the need or any meaningful systems changes within the DOC or Connecticut's public and private systems of education. Thus while Pell restoration has been an historic watershed, progress in this policy area, important to both criminal justice and higher education outcomes, should not be conflated with the availability of Pell. With the restoration of Pell eligibility in July 2023, incarcerated students, many of whom might be Pell eligible otherwise, again had access to vital financial aid to support their pursuit of higher education. However, under the current Pell Grant eligibility rules for incarcerated students, to be eligible to utilize Pell awards, an incarcerated student must be enrolled in an approved PEP. As noted in the previous section, U.S. Department of Education (U.S. DoE) regulations require a three-part PEP approval process: 1) approval by the state's oversight entity or DOC, 2) PEP accreditation by the regional accreditation entity, and 3) US DOE approval. Programs previously in operation that participated in the Second Chance Pell pilot, including those in Connecticut's, were able to continue operating for up to three years without approval via waiver, but mandated to complete the PEP approval process before modifying program offerings.

Existing conditions:

As of a December 4, 2024 report by U.S. DoE, there were 64 collegiate prison education programs fully approved by the DoE, none yet in Connecticut. Wesleyan CPE in partnership with CT State Community College Middlesex Campus, the YPEI-UNH partnership, and the CT State Community College programs are all currently in the formal PEP approval process.

For these higher education programs and students, Pell awards are a vital mechanism for access and sustaining higher education. For incarcerated students, with otherwise limited means to self-fund their higher education, the maximum \$7,395 academic year award significantly contributes to any academic costs potentially incurred. CT State Community College system estimates that higher ed courses across their campuses in offered in DOC facilities cost \$830 per course, inclusive of tuition, fees,

books and supplies. Pell awards would sufficiently cover these estimated student costs fully. Among the private institution-affiliated programs Pell awards may be mixed with direct institutional support and grant funding sources. At Wesleyan's CPE, for example, a limited number of students currently receive Pell Grant awards to cover costs through its partnership with CT State Community College Middlesex Campus, while the remainder receive Wesleyan tuition waivers and additional scholarships.

From the higher education institutional perspective, this federal funding source can offset a significant portion of operational costs, but Pell drawdown alone cannot solely support program operations. Wesleyan CPE estimated that even at maximum student Pell utilization, these funds would only cover one third of program operating costs, given the complexity and staffing needs of operating in a carceral context. Further, full reliance on Pell funding carries inherent risk should availability of these funds for incarcerated students shift in the future.

Additional state-level sources of student financial assistance for low-income students should also be considered. Based on OPM CJPPD's review of the Roberta B. Willis Need-based Grant program, created by Public Act 16-179, this source of potential braided funding does not necessarily preclude eligibility based on a student's current or former incarceration status. Per the Office of Higher Education, Roberta B. Willis need-based awards are available to Connecticut residents who attend "a four-year CT public or non-profit private college" and "have a federal SAI (Student Aid Index) within the allowable range." Mary Ann Handley awards (formerly known as PACT) do not appear to exclude incarcerated students and are intended to cover the gap between federal and state funding awards and any remaining community college tuition and mandatory fees. Unlike student loans, neither of these funding sources require student repayment following completion or withdrawal from school. OPM CJPPD recommends additional study of the long-term suitability of these state awards to support higher education enrollment, as well as to better understand to what extent, if any, these awards may currently support formerly justice-involved students across the state.

Pell funding and any other similar grants and support for work of this kind raises a high-level of responsibility on leaders in higher education and corrections for stewardship. This generates duties for leaders both in higher education and corrections. Partnerships between institutions of higher education and departments of correction raise the costs imposed by disruptions. Semesters are not very elastic, faculty time is costly and difficult to arrange, and often academic workloads are structured in mandatory sequences. Each of these features contribute to the transformative effects of higher educational programming in prison – assimilating

incarcerated students into deadlines, workloads, and high expectations that are closely associated with lower recidivism and higher-life success post-release. Yet these same factors mean that interruptions to the semester can produce a cascade of costs. Pell funding in particular is capped in various ways, and any Pell award counts towards a student's lifetime limit, so that beyond a certain point lost time – and lost funding – cannot be recovered. Any strategy for fiscal sustainability requires, then, strong partnerships and high levels of support for and with the Department of Correction.

IV. Initial Assessment of *Unmet* Demand for Higher Education

The third item listed under Section 18 of Public Act 24-18 instructs OPM's needs assessment of higher education in DOC to make a determination of the *level of unmet demand for postsecondary education among incarcerated persons*. As will become clear below, this Report begins with the full universe of how many people in and returning home from the DOC are currently eligible and potentially ready for college.

For the purposes of this initial report, OPM CJPPD approaches this requirement akin to a preliminary market assessment, wherein we attempt to quantify the potential incarcerated student market size for higher education programming. To do this, we use DOC administrative data regarding the facility population as of October 1, 2024, including self-reported data on educational attainment, DOC classification scores, and other population characteristics, to estimate the number of individuals incarcerated within DOC for whom higher education participation might be possible in the immediate or near future. With this preliminary estimate of a potential college-eligible DOC population, we then compare against existing higher education participation estimates for Fall 2024 to provide initial understanding into the remaining potential student market, i.e. the current *unmet* student market. OPM CJPPD takes this provisional approach with the understanding that policies, practices, and availability are themselves factors that shape the market itself. Should practices evolve over time to accommodate the range of educational, training and job-placement partnerships at issue in this Report, we anticipate the marginal transactional costs of implementing such partnerships should go down while their contributions to successful reentry and job-market attachment should go up.

Overview of October 2024 DOC Facility Population

To support our needs assessment, OPM CJPPD analyzed DOC administrative data pertaining to individuals housed in DOC facilities at the beginning of October 2024. On that date, the Connecticut DOC held **10,817** individuals across 13 facilities. As a unified system, Connecticut's DOC primarily houses sentenced individuals as well as unsentenced individuals held pretrial pending bail or the resolution of their criminal case(s). In addition, the DOC also typically holds a small number of individuals held for federal or other state jurisdictions or violations of Special Parole conditions.

Table 1 below provides a quick overview of the October 1 population by pretrial and sentenced populations.

For reference, Chart 1 above provides an overview of the October 1 total population sized by facility location. As shown, MacDougall-Walker³ holds the largest total number of individuals, while Manson Youth Institute (MYI), the DOC's dedicated facility for individuals under the age of 21, has the fewest. Also of note, York CI, is the DOC's only women's facility and houses both pretrial and sentenced populations.

**Table 1: DOC population by key types,
October 1, 2024**

DOC Facility Total Population	10,817
Unsented:	3,840
Sentenced:	6,767
Federal/Other/Special Parole:	210

Chart 1: Connecticut DOC total population by facility as of October 1, 2024

MACDOUGALL 1,472	OSBORN CI 1,165	HARTFORD CC 965	YORK CI 843	NEW HAVEN CC 687
		CORRIGAN CI 665	BRIDGEPORT CC 584	BROOKLYN CI 417
CHESHIRE CI 1,203	ROBINSON CI 1,047			WILLARD- CYBULSKI CI 588
		MANSON YI 302		

³ Note: DOC reports MacDougall-Walker facility population data as two distinct facilities, *MacDougall* and *Walker RC*.

DOC facilities are differentiated by security level. MacDougall-Walker CI, Garner CI, and Cheshire CI hold some of the highest security risk designated adult males, while Willard-Cybulski holds some of the lowest risk individuals. York houses women at any security levels, while MYI holds youth of any security risk level. In addition, facilities are somewhat designated by sentence status, with Hartford CC, New Haven CC, Bridgeport CC and Corrigan CI housing the majority of adult males held pretrial in the DOC.

Current education levels among the DOC population

In an effort to assess the share of the DOC population who might participate in higher education programs, OPM CJPPD analyzed information collected by DOC on educational attainment for individuals in DOC on October 1, 2024. Data analyzed by OPM was derived from two main DOC sources: educational *need assessment* scores as part of the DOC classification process, and educational attainment recorded on the inmate master record, typically self-reported at the time of the most recent admission. Using these two sources, OPM examined the population in an effort to quantify the number who have completed high school or its equivalent and thus may be academically eligible to participate in postsecondary education, as well as those currently at a high school level of education and could in the future become postsecondary eligible.

The DOC's current educational need classification process, similar to other classification factors the DOC uses in its security and treatment needs classification process, applies a scoring system of 1 through 5, and per the DOC classification manual, is scored accordingly:

- 1 - Individuals who have a verified completion of 1 or more college courses.*
- 2 - Individuals who have a verified high school diploma (verified by the Education Unit).*
- 3 - Individuals who self report or the education achievement testing indicates the offender is performing at a grade level of 9 through 12.*
- 4 - Individuals who self report or the education achievement testing indicates the offender is performing at a grade level of 5 through 8.9.*
- 5 - Individuals who self-report or the education achievement testing indicates the offender is performing at a grade level of 0 through 4.9.*

Initial educational needs scores are assessed based on self-reported educational information provided at admission intake but may be updated at subsequent classification reassessments. Individuals are generally reassessed on a six-month interval, though some may have longer or shorter timespans between assessments.

For the purposes of this study, OPM CJPPD analyzed the most recent recorded educational need score to reorder the population into three groupings as considered from the lens of potential higher education program participation:

Currently college-ready: Individuals with DOC education classification scores of 1 and 2,

Potentially college-ready: Individuals with DOC education classification scores of 3 or self-reported attainment of high school grade levels and beyond

Future college-ready: Individuals with DOC education classification scores of 4 or 5, or self-reported attainment of middle school grade levels or below.

For those recently admitted who did not yet have an educational need score, we utilized the self-reported educational attainment and assigned them accordingly into either the potentially college-ready or future college-ready groupings. Only those with a DOC verified high school or equivalent degree were included within the currently college-ready group.

Chart 2 below presents the October 1 DOC facility population as reflected across these three groupings. As shown, broadly 40% of the October 1 population, 4,328 people, had a verified high school credential, while just over half (5,739) were at least testing at high school grade levels or higher but did not have a verified high school completion. Only 750 individuals (7%) held in the DOC on October 1 were testing or reporting educational attainment at or below the middle school grade level.

Chart 2: DOC Population by College-ready Groupings, derived from DOC classification scores

**DOC Facility Population
October 1, 2024: 10,817**

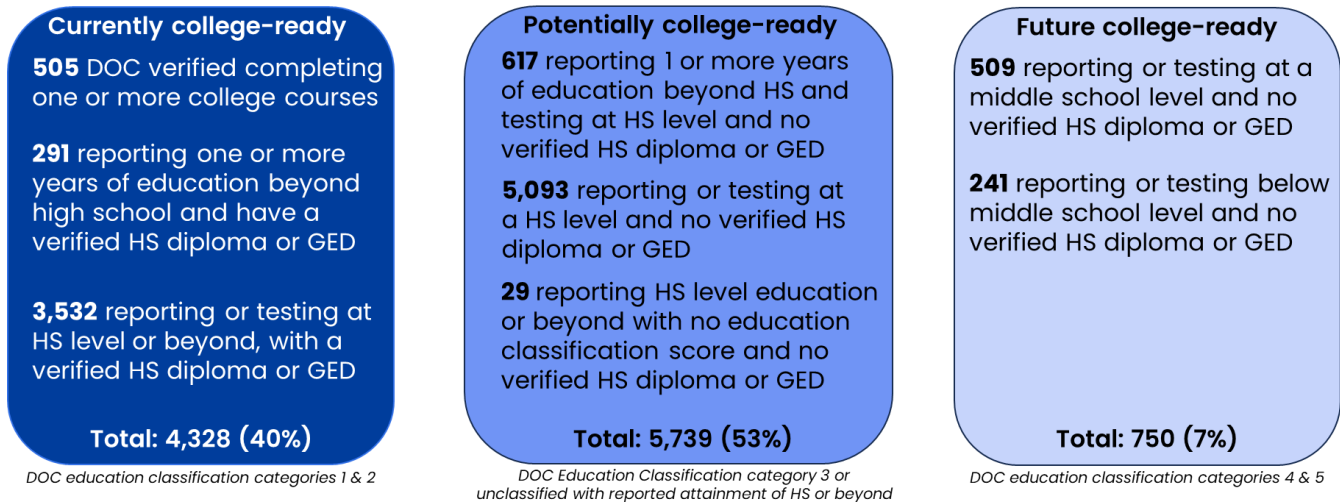


Chart 2 provides a broad baseline of the potential DOC college student pool as reflected on October 1, important for two reasons: First, it affirms that the DOC's population of high school level students and beyond comprises 93% of the facility population, which is substantial. Second, it provides clarity on the max number with verified high school completion who could possibly participate in higher education in the immediate near term.

Potential limiting factors and impacts on DOC population

In actuality, however, a number of factors may limit the potential pool of higher education students both in the near and long term. For policymakers, one important broad distinction may be useful: academic as distinct from *carceral* eligibility. The first is a function of an individual having the educational skills, pre-requisites or credentials to qualify for a post-secondary, vocational, or higher educational program; the second is a function of exclusions generated by the criminal legal system such as sentence status, risk classification, disciplinary record, or correctional administrative priorities.

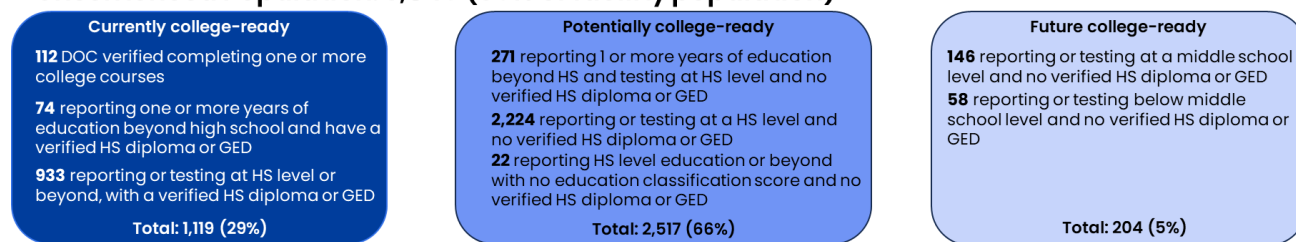
In order to develop a more nuanced estimate of the potential student market using the October 1 population, we step through a series of these carceral factors and examine their impact upon these groupings. We emphasize that OPM CJPPD does not necessarily support limiting eligibility by such factors and believes that any such participation requirements ideally be determined through collaboration among DOC officials, higher educational faculty and staff, students and alumni. Nevertheless, it is imperative to identify some likely factors that may constrain higher education **carceral** eligibility and to consider the magnitude of impacts upon subsets of potential students.

Sentence Status

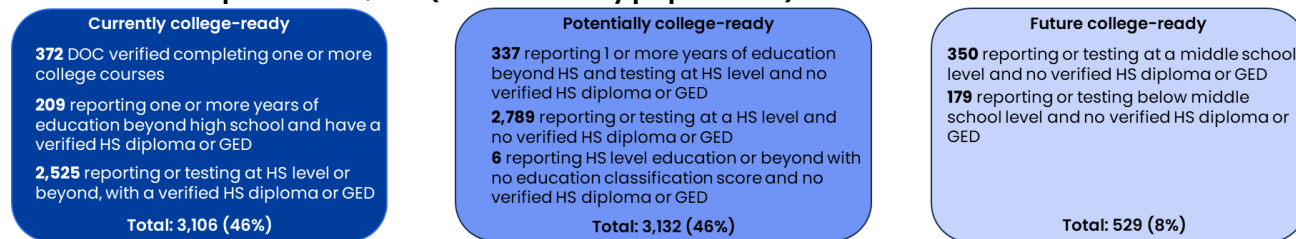
First and foremost, the DOC houses both sentenced and unsentenced individuals. As referenced previously, unsentenced individuals are largely ineligible for DOC program participation at present, which dramatically impacts the potential student pool. Chart N examines the college-ready groupings by sentence status, showing that 1,119 individuals with verified high school completion are largely excluded from pursuing any form of higher education while their case resolves.

Chart 3: DOC Population by Sentence Status and College-ready Groupings

Unsentenced Population: 3,840 (35% of facility population)



Sentenced Population: 6,767 (63% of facility population)



DOC education classification categories 1 & 2

DOC Education Classification category 3 or unclassified with reported attainment of HS or beyond

DOC education classification categories 4 & 5

Essentially comprising the state's jail population, individuals in the unsentenced population's length of stay may be brief pending their release after posting bond. However, per the October 1 data, a sizable number of unsentenced individuals held for periods that could potentially accommodate course or other program participation. **Table 2** presents the college-ready groups for the unsentenced population and the median length of stay as of October 1.

Table 2: Unsented population length of stay by education grouping, October 1, 2024

Educational grouping	Median (in months)
College-ready	6
Potentially college-ready	4
Future college-ready	5

We note that for the currently college-ready group, the median stay to date of 6 months seemingly could accommodate successful completion of a higher education course.

Broadly speaking, while degree-completion is likely unfeasible for much of this population, other states, such as Minnesota, Maryland and California, maintain partnerships between the DOC and community college systems that make enrollment, planning, or preparation an effective part of reentry among the jail or pretrial population.

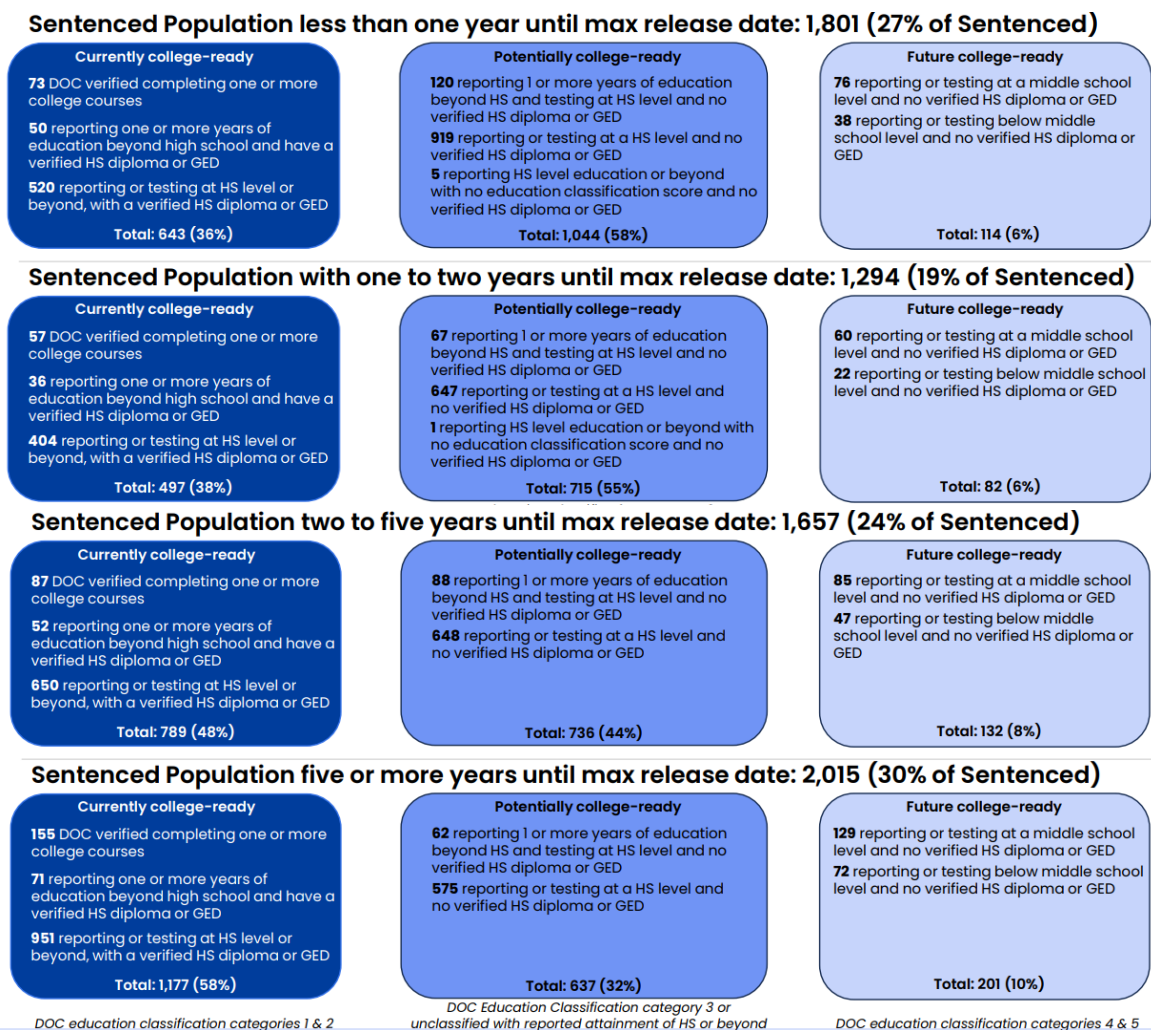
Sentence Length

Presuming no change in program eligibility for unsentenced individuals, we further focus our analysis on just the 6,767 sentenced individuals potentially eligible to participate in correctional programming. For the sentenced population, the anticipated length of incarceration stay might be used to prioritize program eligibility amongst potential participants. For example, during the Second Chance Pell Pilot, program guidelines prioritized enrollment for individuals with five or fewer years remaining until release. Alternately, consider that programs might wish to potentially prioritize enrollment amongst those with an estimated stay long enough to accommodate full completion of degree requirements. In either of these scenarios, the anticipated length of incarceration stay becomes a determining factor in potential student eligibility.

Sentencing dictates the length of incarceration, but exact lengths of stay will often differ from the sentenced amount. Estimating an expected length of stay can be

complex owing to a number of discretionary and other early release mechanisms, and their varying eligibility requirements. For the purposes of this analysis, we first examined the sentenced college-ready groups according to the time remaining until their maximum sentence release date, and compared by those less than 1 year to release/discharge, between 1 and 2 years until release/discharge, between 2 and 5 years until release/discharge, and those with five or more years until their latest possible release/discharge date. **Chart 4** presents these max remaining sentence lengths by college-ready groupings. As shown, 1,177 of the currently college-ready group have 5 or more years remaining on their maximum sentence though a nearly equal amount has two or fewer years remaining on their max sentence. Overall, using max sentence length, the college-ready group had a median stay of 35 months or nearly three years until their maximum release date.

Chart 4: Sentenced Population by Maximum Remaining Sentence and College-ready Groupings



DOC education classification categories 1 & 2

DOC Education Classification category 3 or unclassified with reported attainment of HS or beyond

DOC education classification categories 4 & 5

Again, maximum sentence date represents the longest possible incarceration stay, so we also attempted to examine the population similarly using an estimate of the earliest possible release. For this analysis, we selected the earliest across a variety of potential discretionary and other estimated release dates as calculated by the DOC and calculated the time remaining from October 1. **Table 3** presents the sentenced college-ready groupings according to this estimated minimum stay, with nearly 1,500 college-ready potential students with less than year to their earliest eligibility or release date. Compared to 35 months using max release date, the median minimum stay for the college-ready group dropped to 12 months, or 1 year.

Table 3: Sentenced population minimum length of stay by education grouping, October 1, 2024

Educational grouping	Median (months remaining)	<1 year (n)	1 to <2 years (n)	2 to <5 years (n)	5 or more years (n)
College-ready	12	1,506	495	438	618
Potentially college-ready	7	2,107	427	292	260
Future college-ready	11	267	73	68	114

Actual incarceration stays will likely range between these two bounds, but this establishes a median length between 1 to 3 years of the remaining sentence for the college-ready sentenced population as of October 1. Clearly, any eligibility criteria based upon remaining length of stay and the dates utilized for that calculation can significantly shift the size of the potential student pool.

Offense Severity

Another potential common factor in program eligibility requirements can be risks related to individuals' criminal offense severity. For example, individuals with severe violent or sexual offenses may be precluded from program participation due to the potential risk to program staff and others from their inclusion. To consider such impacts on potential student pool, OPM CJPPD utilized both offense severity scores and sex treatment need scores for sentenced individuals. DOC Offense severity scores

assess the violence and severity of individuals sentenced offense on a 1 to 4 scale, with 3 encompassing numerous offenses such as assault, sexual assault, robbery etc. that result in serious or moderate injury, and 4 inclusive of the most serious offenses resulting in death or serious physical injury except involving a motor vehicle. Level 4 offenses include murder, assaults with firearms or deadly weapons, rape, and others. Similarly, sex treatment scores use a 5-point scale, with scores 3 and higher encompassing sex offenses including physical contact (3), two or more victims (4), and the use of violence (5). Scores below 3 include non-contact offenses such as voyeurism and possession or distribution of child pornography.

For the purposes of our analysis, OPM CJPPD wished to examine the impacts if program eligibility were based on either offense severity or sex treatment scores. Table 4 below presents the number within the sentenced population's college-ready groupings with scores of 3 or higher per each of these assessment criteria. We wish to emphasize that OPM CJPPD neither endorses nor recommends these criteria to determine eligibility. Rather OPM CJPPD utilized these for our analysis to assess the greatest extent of impact were such criteria to be just broadly, and not selectively, implemented.

Table 4: Sentenced population offense severity impacts per education grouping, October 1, 2024

Educational grouping	Total Pop (n)	Offense Severity	Sex Treatment
		Score 3 or higher (n)	Score 3 or higher (n)
College-ready	3,106	649	615
Potentially college-ready	3,132	551	555
Future college-ready	529	129	123

Should eligibility consideration for either overall offense or specific sex offense severity be applied using similar thresholds, Table 4 shows that approximately 600 or 20 percent of the college-ready group would be precluded from program participation. OPM CJPPD anticipates the number potentially excluded from eligibility could shrink further with a more tightly defined criteria incorporating offense severity.

Disciplinary History

Disciplinary history while incarcerated can also impact program eligibility. Individuals with recent or frequent histories of disciplinary incidents may be ineligible from accessing or participating in non-mandatory programming while incarcerated. Regarding existing higher education programming, agreements with the DOC sometimes contained provisions excluding participation among individuals with disciplinary incidents within 6 months.

To assess the impact of such criteria on the potential student pool, OPM CJPPD analyzed data regarding individuals most recent disciplinary incidents. For this analysis, we examined the number having at least one Class A disciplinary incident or more within one year of October 1, 2024. Class A disciplinary consist of the most severe class of facility disciplinary infractions. This class of incidents however encompass a wide range of non-permissible behavior while incarcerated, including assault, contraband possession, violent conduct, and other forms of non-compliance with DOC policies (for further description, see the DOC's [Attachment B, Code of Penal Discipline Offenses](#), available via the DOC website)..

Table 5 presents the number potentially impacted applying these criteria across the college-ready groupings for the sentence population. As shown, 510 people, or 16 percent of the college-ready group, would be excluded from higher education participation by these criteria among the October 1 sentenced population.

Table 5: Sentenced population disciplinary history impacts by education grouping, October 1, 2024

Educational grouping	Total Population (n)	Disciplinary incident within 1 year (n)
College-ready	3,106	510
Potentially college-ready	3,132	585
Future college-ready	529	90

In this section, we demonstrated in a simplified form how such eligibility criteria can each have sizable impacts on the number of potential program participants. Each of these factors have, in some form, acted as barriers on potential higher education participation to date. Some factors, like sentencing status, remain consistent barriers, while others, like a clean disciplinary history have shifted as a requirement over time

and across DOC agreements implemented with programs. OPM CJPPD raises these in effort to inform any future consideration of such criteria for higher education program design, so that the quantifiable impacts of such requirements are more clearly understood.

Estimates of potential student pool

In the previous section, we examined some but not necessarily all of the carceral factors that impact incarcerated individuals' eligibility for educational programming in CT prisons. That analysis examined the impacts on potential higher education eligibility individually. Such criteria, if incorporated into Connecticut's higher education system design, can have even greater impact in combination on the scale of the potential student pool for higher education. In this final section, we develop preliminary estimates of the potential student market eligible for higher education, concurrently applying varying levels of the limiting factors examined in the previous section. In doing so, we can estimate the varying numbers of possible students under different eligibility scenarios.

For these estimates, we focus exclusively again on the sentenced population as of October 1. OPM CJPPD stresses, however, that both the unsentenced population as well as the population supervised in the community by the DOC and Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division remain crucial justice-involved populations necessary for consideration in Connecticut's overall higher education system design. **Future studies dedicated to examining the higher education needs and availability gaps for these populations are needed.**

To develop the estimates, we first make two simple exclusions from the sentenced population. First, we remove the small number of individuals under 18 in DOC currently in high school (n=16), as these individuals are mandatorily enrolled as USD #1 students. While absolutely potential future students in any higher education system, we remove them simply to focus our estimates on the existing adult population.

Second, we need to exclude individuals who may have already completed a four-year degree from our estimates. Precise determinations of those who successfully completed a college degree prior to or during their incarceration were not readily available. OPM CJPPD imputed this population using educational need scores and self-reported information for those reporting 4 or more years of education beyond high school. Using this approach, we estimate **167** total potential college graduates in the sentenced DOC population as of October 1. Removing these two subsets from our sentenced population, **Table 6** presents the remaining sentenced population by our college ready groupings. The **3,023** individuals remaining in our college-ready group is the broadest estimate of the potential near term student market, representing **28 percent** of the total October 1 facility population.

Table 6: Sentenced population (juvenile and probable college degree-holders excluded) by education grouping, October 1, 2024

Educational grouping	Total Population (n)
College-ready	3,023
Potentially college-ready	3,032
Future college-ready	529

Next, we apply two varying levels of carceral eligibility constraint, combining factors identified in the previous section. The second set of estimates excludes anyone with an offense severity score or sex treatment needs score of 3 or higher, as well as anyone with a Class A disciplinary incident within the past calendar year. The third and final set of estimates further excludes anyone with a minimum sentence of less than two years to potential release or discharge. We apply this filter as a proxy to account for the population likely lacking a sufficient period of incarceration remaining to complete at least a two-year associates degree program.

Table 7 on the following page presents these three estimates of potential student market size side by side for comparison. We emphasize again that any such eligibility considerations should be carefully considered, as their impact in combination on the potential student pool is pronounced.

Table 7: Estimated number of potential students among the sentenced population by education grouping, October 1, 2024

Educational grouping	Sentenced Population (no exclusions)	Estimated Number of Potential Students		
		Baseline estimate (less under 18 & college deg.)	Scenario 1 estimate (Offense severity and disciplinary criteria applied)	Scenario 2 estimate (2 or more years minimum length of stay requirement applied)
College-ready	3,106	3,023	1,630	573
Potentially college-ready	3,132	3,032	1,646	274
Future college-ready	529	529	259	92

Finally, we can juxtapose each of these college-ready group estimates against the current higher education participation to describe the remaining potential student market. Per DOC programming data analyzed, OPM identified approximately **323** individuals enrolled in one of the higher education programs as of October 1, 2024. Using our baseline and scenario 2 estimates, we estimate the remaining gap of near-term potential higher ed students between **2,700** (3,023 - 323) at max, and potentially as small as **270** (573-323), based upon the October 1 population. Including those in the medium-term potentially college-ready grouping only further expands the gap any higher education expansion would need to address.

While greater clarity on the applicable eligibility criteria for existing postsecondary programming in the DOC might improve the precision of this estimate, clearly a demonstrated pool of potential students beyond those actively participating exists. In short, likely sizable, unmet demand exists. Moreover, as demonstrated throughout this analysis, any carceral eligibility requirements instituted can have marked effect on the size of that student pool. Future expansions to develop a comprehensive higher education system must consider the implementation of such factors carefully and holistically.

Potential cost/benefits of higher education system expansion

The anticipated benefits relative to the investment cost is one additional factor important to consider in concert with any potential expansion of partnerships between the DOC, Connecticut's systems and institutions of higher education, employers and other stakeholders. At present, OPM CJPPD is unaware of any recent cost-benefit analyses available pertaining to the existing higher education programs within DOC. Further studies on this topic on both current and future higher education program activities are recommended. However, some studies, including formal cost-benefit analysis as discussed below, find substantial measurable cost benefits to programming of this kind, both nationally and in Connecticut.

Evidence from prior studies in Connecticut, as well as in other states, suggest positive net benefits for the state relative to the costs of correctional education. Specifically, Connecticut's Results First Initiative partnered with the [Pew Charitable Trusts](#) from 2011 through 2019 and produced a series of cost-benefit analyses on state criminal justice programs, including those funded by the Department of Correction. The most recent report containing cost-benefit analyses on Department of Correctional programming was in 2019⁴. This report provided information on both Adult Basic Education (USD #1) and Vocational Education programs. Both programs saw a net positive in benefits minus costs - \$16,406 and \$10,551, respectively. Higher educational programming within various correctional facilities was not considered in this report as it was not directly funded by the Department of Correction.

The Pew Results First cost-benefit model utilized in that report was based on an econometric model developed by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP). WSIPP recently updated their CBA for higher educational programming within Washington state prisons and determined the benefits minus costs to equal \$30,528⁵. The cost to benefit ratio (the return on every \$1 of investment) was \$14.51. In January 2023, the National Conference of State Legislatures produced a [brief](#) entitled *Postsecondary Education Programs for Incarcerated or Previously Incarcerated Individuals*⁶. In the brief they note that "estimates suggest that expanding access to

⁴ See the full report available at <http://resultsfirstct.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Benefit-Cost-Analyses-November-2019.pdf> (accessed as of March 2025).

⁵ See the full study description available at <https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/735> (accessed as of March 2025).

⁶ The full brief can be found via <https://www.ncsl.org/education/postsecondary-education-programs-for-incarcerated-or-previously-incarcerated-individuals> (accessed as of March 2025).

postsecondary education in prison could decrease incarceration costs across the country by more than \$365 million.”

Finally, OPM generally encourages agencies to follow sound financial management practices and to seek out and prioritize opportunities for what is known as *braided funding*. This simply means aligning multiple funding sources to amplify the ability to meet a single or concerted set of goals. For example, rather than relying on limited DOC programming budgets, conceived and implemented narrowly as agency-specific or “correctional” programming, higher educational partnerships of the sort under analysis here leverage multiple funding sources – such as federal Pell funds – and align them with DOC efforts to reduce idleness and increase safety inside prison and in the community after release. A fuller analysis of the fiscal and policy benefits of such an approach calls for further study.

As noted elsewhere in this Report, Connecticut already makes large and sustained investments in our public higher educational systems and these investments in our local economy, cultural life and civic vitality are already being brought to bare to reinforce the public safety priorities of the DOC and our criminal legal system broadly through existing programs. Similar analysis holds for the crucial roles private not-for-profit institutions of higher education play in the economic and social life of Connecticut and in its current levels of education in the criminal legal landscape. This Report is a first step to indicating future benefits that could accrue to the State by simply taking these benefits seriously as a policy opportunity and using braided funding and partnerships to grow them to meet existing demand, increase safety and job-market attachment.

Taken together, these studies suggest significant positive net benefits should Connecticut succeed in drawing down more existing federal Pell funding and otherwise aligning practice to expand post-secondary and higher education programming both in prisons and as a crucial pathway through reentry. OPM CJPPD supports future efforts to develop Connecticut-specific higher education estimates and to study program costs and benefits on an ongoing basis over time, with an emphasis on post-release job market outcomes and other economic benefits. Such studies would not only better inform state decision-making on partnerships between corrections, courts, and our higher education systems but also monitor the long-term safety, economic and well-being results of any such investments.

V. Pending Research and Opportunities for Further Study

To close, OPM CJPPD presents some of the questions raised during initial inquiries pursuant to Public Act 24-81. OPM CJPPD has developed a proposed research agenda responsive to the remaining activities specified by the act. We also propose some additional opportunities for further study to address some of these key questions should time and resources allow.

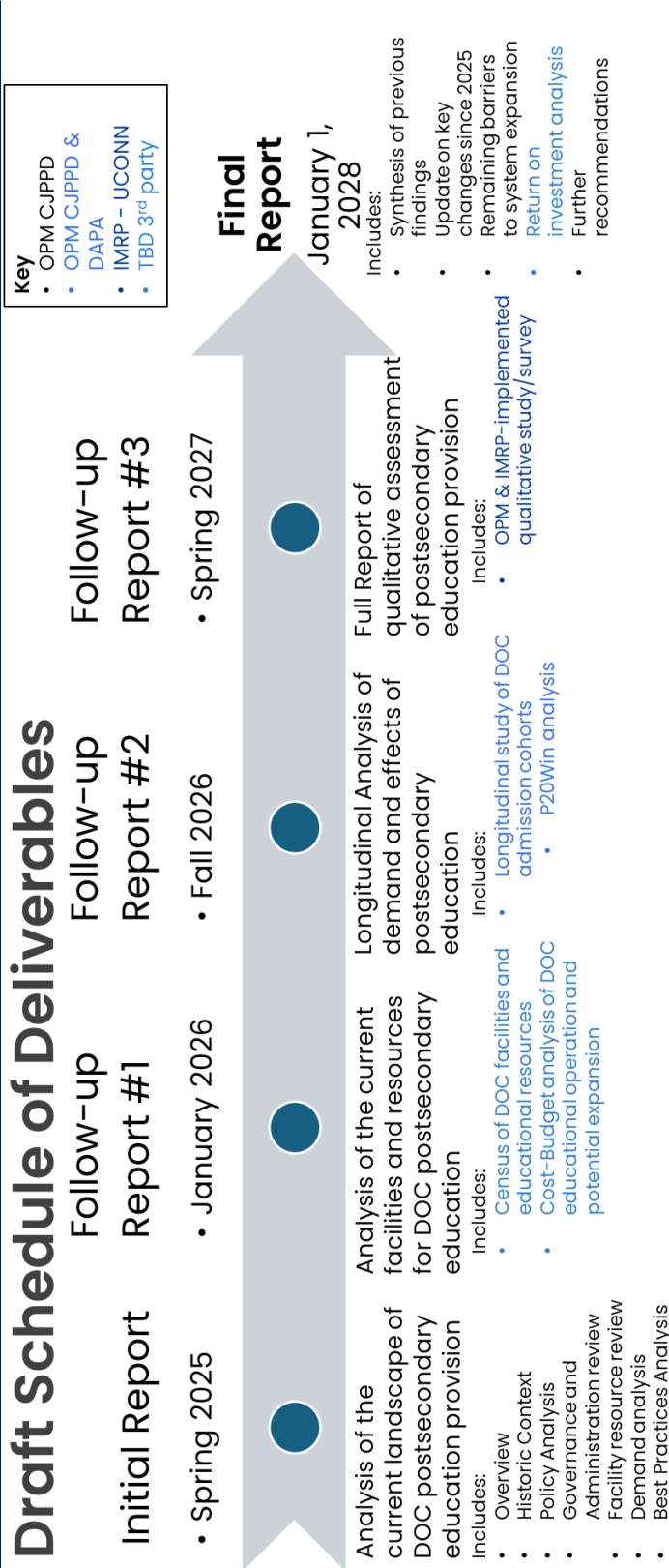
Pending Research Pursuant to Public Act 24-81

As mentioned at the outset, PA 24-81 specifies seven distinct research activities to inform needs assessment regarding higher education in the correctional system. This Report comprises OPM CJPPD's initial efforts to respond within current capacities to these requirements, specifically: 1) *the solicitation of feedback from institutions of higher education that provide post-secondary education in correctional facilities to understand current needs*; 2) *an analysis of the policies of the DOC concerning post-secondary education*; 3) *a determination of the level of unmet demand for post-secondary education among incarcerated persons*, and 7) *a listing of any other specific barriers to the effective delivery of post-secondary education programs*. The remaining study activities require additional coordination, resources, and expertise to augment current Division capabilities. Crucially, item 6) *a survey of (A) students of postsecondary education programs in correctional facilities* will require human subjects research review by an Institutional Review Board.

To support these efforts, OPM CJPPD has developed a research agenda incorporating these activities identified by the public act. Figure 1 presents a timeline of planned supplemental reports. These reports will provide in depth insights pursuant to activities 4, 5, and 6 in the public act, while further building upon this Report's initial findings. OPM CJPPD intends to pursue this research slate in partnership with the Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy (IMRP) at UConn, OPM Data and Policy Analytics (OPM DAPA), who administer the state's longitudinal education and workforce data system, as well as yet to be determined third parties.

Figure 1: Higher Education Needs Assessment Research Agenda

Needs Assessment Research Agenda: Planned Study Activities and Reports



Recommended Future Research: Employment, Workforce Engagement and Tax Revenues, Recidivism, children at risk

To augment the sort of cost-benefit analysis discussed in [Chapter IV](#), OPM CJPPD also encourages additional state-level research into the long-term benefits for higher education participants and the public safety landscape broadly.

To begin with, little is known currently about the post-release effectiveness of existing DOC career and technical education, and how those workforce outcomes might eventually compare with higher education participation among incarcerated students. To support establishing some current baselines, OPM CJPPD, in partnership with the DOC and OPM DAPA, are developing several studies to link DOC program participation to post-release workforce and education data, to better understand whether and how participation in these programs may be impacting post-release economic opportunities for incarcerated individuals. In addition, future research could look to the effect of both higher education and other types of educational programming on participants post-release contributions to state tax-revenues.

In addition, OPM CJPPD identifies a need to further study to what extent education programming, and higher education participation specifically, impact recidivism observed following prison release. One of the most widely cited studies reviewing education program outcomes was conducted by the Rand Corporation in 2013, finding among other things, that adults who participate in such programs showed 43 percent lower odds of recidivating. (Davis, 2013) While the potential impact on recidivism this finding suggests is encouraging, additional research could further inform state understanding of the many participatory benefits of higher education across Connecticut.

Additionally, OPM CJPPD would welcome research, aimed at practical and affordable policy changes – especially those that explored the effect of college in prison on intergenerational outcomes. Although a lack of quality data specifically measuring the benefits of higher education in a correctional environment for the children of the incarcerated student exists, a number of relevant studies suggest myriad benefits for children with incarcerated parent students.

The degree and impact of stigma associated with loving someone serving time in a correctional facility is significant (Phillips, 2011), likely contributing to the documented trauma (Kampfner, 1995), toxic stress (Shonkoff, 2021), and attachment disruption (Murray, 2010). Having an incarcerated family member has been identified by the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) within the Household Challenge category (CDC, 2021), likely to contribute to lifelong negative health and wellbeing outcomes. (Dube, 2003) It is distinguished from other ACEs, however, due to its unique combination of stigma, stress and trauma. Stigma is associated with how children perceive others' judgment of their loved one, not the child's inherent shame. (Saunders, 2018) Therefore, when a child's parent is in a college program, that child can feel a sense of pride and honor. They can also see that higher education is possible for them. Their parent's identity can change from one of a prisoner or felon, to a dad or mom, a college student. (Conway, 2024)

Children with incarcerated parents tend to struggle to perform well in school while they are enduring the hurricane of negative consequences directly and indirectly associated with parental incarceration. (Nichols, 2016) However, when their incarcerated parent is also in school, that child and parent can discuss what they're reading and studying, when their next test is or assignment is due, they can motivate each other to study and commit to their education. They can check in with each other when grades are received. In addition to helping with stigma, parental identity from the parent and child's perspectives, and educational performance, higher education in prison can also serve to connect children with their incarcerated parent. (Lagemann, 2016)

Current and future expansions to the provision of higher education within DOC would present an opportunity for Connecticut-specific study of such potential inter-generational benefits. To do such research effectively, consideration needs to be holistic and to begin concurrently alongside planning for potential higher education expansion. For these reasons and more, OPM CJPPD thought it important to identify these research topics in this Report.

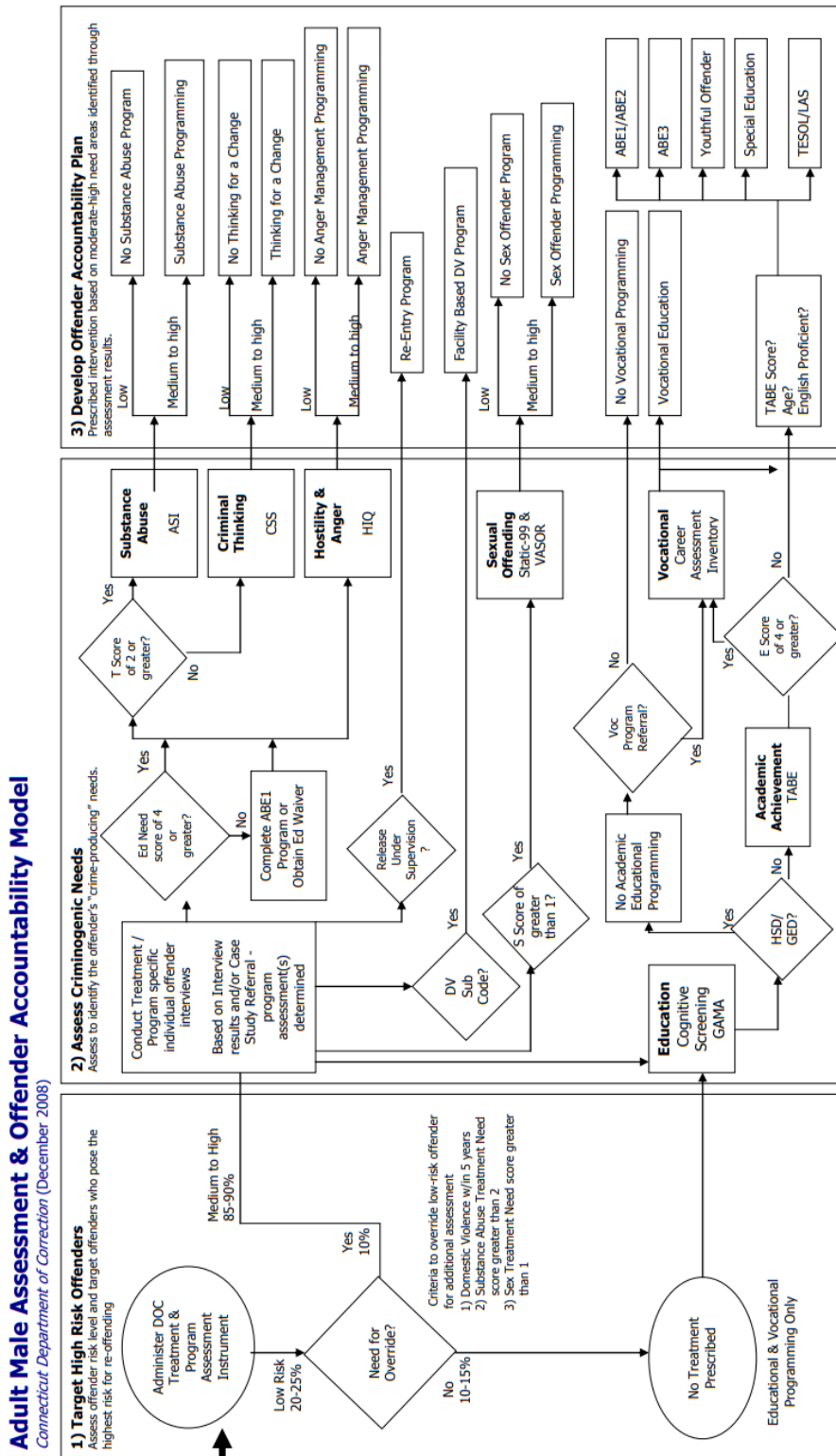
Opportunities for Further Study

Beyond the pending and potential study activities identified in the preceding research agenda, OPM CJPPD has already identified numerous topics warranting further study. The following is a list of suggested key questions for stakeholders to pursue in the near term. OPM CJPPD only anticipates this list to grow and evolve as additional questions are identified over time:

- Over the next three years, can the DOC partner with community colleges, regional state universities, UConn and private institutions of higher education to measurably improve in-prison conditions and reentry outcomes across Connecticut?
- What is the recent participation across Connecticut-based colleges and universities of students with prior incarceration history? What are these students' financial and academic needs, and how do existing need-based supports align with these needs?
- What benefits accrue to agency efficiency and DOC staff when the restoration of Pell is implemented at scale?
- What are the current rates of idleness among people incarcerated in Connecticut and is this idleness criminogenic, as it has been shown to be elsewhere? Can expansion of post-secondary work help address this?
- What are the current rates of post-release employment in Connecticut and do positive outcomes correlate with existing vocational and career technical education offered by the DOC and higher educational programs offered by community college and private higher educational partners? Can prospective employers be a part of expansion?
- Do at-risk children in households with a family member in prison do better when adults in their household network undertake post-secondary education in and after prison? Are there measurable intergenerational effects on high school graduation rates, behavioral health, and earnings?

Appendix A:

DOC Adult Male Assessment & Offender Accountability Model



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