



HB 5261/SB 1649

FACT SHEET

March 2025

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Postsecondary education is a vital component of the reentry experience for incarcerated individuals, their families, and their communities. By 2030, 62% of all jobs in Texas will require a postsecondary credential,¹ meaning a vast majority of workers will need more than just a high school diploma to obtain a job. Given that the average educational achievement score of someone confined in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) is equivalent to a 7th-grade education, educational programming is a critical long-term priority.²

Recognizing the importance and utility of education, Congress passed the FAFSA Simplification Act in 2020, allowing individuals to receive financial assistance for their education while incarcerated. Pell Reinstatement ushers the opportunity for students in TDCJ to strengthen their employment prospects and improve reentry outcomes.

However, the success of this policy change depends on strong collaboration and commitment among education-in-corrections stakeholders, including TDCJ, Windham School District (WSD), and the educational institutions that offer programming. **The Texas Sunset Advisory Commission Report for TDCJ underscores the need for this continued commitment through enhanced data collection techniques and program evaluation measures.**³ Ensuring that prison education programs are both effective and sustainable for TDCJ students.

RESEARCH SUPPORTING POLICY CHANGE

Nationally, individuals without a high school diploma are 1.4 times more likely to be unemployed than those with one and 2.5 times more likely than someone with a bachelor's degree. Incarcerated individuals face even more significant challenges – 25% of formerly incarcerated people lack a high school diploma or GED, and they are 8 times *less* likely to complete college than the general population.

Higher education in prison programming can close this gap. Education provides structure, opportunities for personal growth, and legitimate pathways to success - both during incarceration *and* after release. Studies over the past 40 years show that **education reduces the risk of reoffending by an average of 28%**⁴, making it one of the most effective ways to improve public safety. Further, one portion of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) 2030 Plan is to have a 95% employment rate for people released from its custody.⁵ “Enhancing education through Pell Grant opportunities” is a key strategy towards this achievement.

To ensure these initiatives are successful, we must evaluate the impact of educational programming through comprehensive data collection and evaluation. Data collection allows institutions to track critical indicators of program success, including instructor qualifications, credit transferability, academic advising opportunities, recidivism rates, completion rates, job placement, and more. By collecting data on these metrics, we can assess program effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This evidence-based approach helps stakeholders make informed decisions that strengthen educational offerings for those in TDCJ.

Data sharing across relevant state agencies is also key to thoroughly evaluating these outcomes. For example, assessing job placement requires information from multiple sources, such as the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). These agreements enable consistent data sharing, allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of program quality and outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

Texas Appleseed recommends that the Texas Legislature adopt and implement policies to expand access to higher education in prisons through a data-driven lens, including:

- ✓ **Adopt recommendation 4.12 of the TDCJ Sunset Report⁶**, which recommends the transfer of the administration of postsecondary educational programming from TDCJ to Windham School District (WSD);
- ✓ **Codify TDCJ's Postsecondary Education Program Advisory Committee** into the state's Higher Education code so WSD and TDCJ can meet their goals of providing effective higher education programming;
- ✓ **Mandate consistent data evaluation and reporting** to assess program effectiveness, track student outcomes, and identify areas for improvement (see Recommendations 4.2 and 4.5 of the TDCJ Sunset Report⁷); and
- ✓ **Authorize data-sharing agreements** amongst relevant state agencies to ensure consistent access to relevant workforce, academic, and post-release data.

The benefits of passing proactive higher-education-in-prison programming include:

- Improving efficiency through data-informed decision-making;
- Promoting transformative educational opportunities for individuals in TDCJ; and
- Reducing recidivism rates and sparking economic growth by equipping individuals with the tangible skills needed for post-release employment.

REFERENCES & ENDNOTES

¹ Washington, J. (May 2022). College enrollment down with more Texas jobs to require more education in 10 years. *KXAN*. <https://www.kxan.com/news/texas-politics/college-enrollment-down-with-62-of-texas-jobs-to-require-post-high-school-education-in-10-years/>.

² Texas Department of Criminal Justice. (2023). *Statistical report: FY 2023*. https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/documents/Statistical_Report_FY2023.pdf.

³ Sunset Advisory Commission. (2024). *Staff report with Commission decisions: Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Correctional Managed Health Care Committee, Windham School District, Board of Pardons and Paroles*. 2024-2025 89th Texas State Legislature. <https://www.sunset.texas.gov/public/uploads/2025-02/Criminal%20Justice%20Entities%20Staff%20Report%20with%20Commission%20Decisions.pdf>.

⁴ Bozick, R., Steele, J., Davis, L., & Turner, S. (2018). Does providing inmates with education improve postrelease outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 14, 389-428.

⁵ Texas Department of Criminal Justice. (2023, Jan 3). *2030 plan: Recidivism* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TexasDepartmentofCriminalJustice/videos/529982479098348>.

⁶ Sunset Advisory Commission. (2024). *Staff report with Commission decisions: Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Correctional Managed Health Care Committee, Windham School District, Board of Pardons and Paroles*. 2024-2025 89th Texas State Legislature. <https://www.sunset.texas.gov/public/uploads/2025-02/Criminal%20Justice%20Entities%20Staff%20Report%20with%20Commission%20Decisions.pdf>.

⁷ *Ibid.*



For more information, contact:

Cole Meyer, MPAff., Criminal Justice Policy Analyst
cmeyer@texasappleseed.org
www.TexasAppleseed.org