

# WASHINGTON'S COLLEGE IN PRISONS PROGRAM

*"I thought of myself as nothing but a street monger and did not believe that I was worth more than anything other than to die a statistic. I know that (education) has changed my life and it gave me a purpose."*<sup>1</sup>

*Gina McConnell, former Purdy inmate and past Seattle Central College student. McConnell travels throughout the prison system encouraging inmates to pursue education.*



## Improving lives and public safety

The Department of Corrections contracts with community colleges to provide basic education and job training at each of the state's 12 adult prisons so upon release, individuals are more likely to get jobs and less likely to return.

Most incarcerated individuals entering the prison system lack the education to find work and succeed in society. The average Washington offender scores at an eighth-grade level or lower in basic literacy skills, such as reading and math. Sixty percent are unemployed, and 75 percent lack job skills and vocational training.<sup>2</sup>

Community colleges build a bridge for incarcerated individuals to successfully re-enter communities. In 2015-16, 8,960 incarcerated individuals participated in community college programs. These students earned:

- 544 GED™ certificates.
- 1,709 vocational certificates.
- 47 associate degrees.<sup>3</sup>

## A smart investment

On average, inmates who participate in correction education programs have 43 percent lower odds of returning to prison than inmates who do not, according to a 2014 study by the RAND Corporation.<sup>4</sup>

The return to taxpayers and society is substantial. A 2016 update by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that for every dollar invested in these programs, up to \$18.36 is saved from fewer new crimes and costly incarcerations.<sup>5</sup> Instead of paying for prison beds, money is freed for public education, infrastructure, job creation and other priorities that impact the lives of everyday Washingtonians.

Prison education programs also give students hope, focus, goals and a new way of thinking even before they leave the prison walls.<sup>6</sup>

Every year, anywhere from 7,000 to 8,000 inmates are released from Washington prisons.<sup>7</sup> Corrections education helps ensure they don't come back. In doing so, it gives prisoners a fresh chance to be successful community members and gives residents a safeguard from crime.

## Legislative request: AA degrees

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the Washington State Department of Corrections are seeking to broaden educational pathways available to incarcerated individuals. Proposed legislation would authorize the Department of Corrections to use existing public funds for associate degrees along with the standard basic education and job training programs.

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## College and prison partnerships

Airway Heights Corrections Center  
Community Colleges of Spokane

Cedar Creek Corrections Center  
Centralia College

Clallam Bay Corrections Center  
Peninsula College

Coyote Ridge Corrections Center  
Walla Walla Community College

Larch Corrections Center  
Clark College

Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women  
Tacoma Community College

Monroe Correctional Complex  
Edmonds Community College

Olympic Corrections Center  
Peninsula College

Stafford Creek Corrections Center  
Grays Harbor College

Washington Corrections Center  
Centralia College

Washington Corrections Center for Women  
Tacoma Community College

Washington State Penitentiary  
Walla Walla Community College

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### Sources:

1. Gina McConnell testimony before House Higher Education Committee, Feb. 21, 2013.
2. Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (Oct. 30, 2014). Washington Community Colleges Correctional Education Annual Report 2013-2014. Olympia: SBCTC.
3. Washington Community Colleges Correctional Education Annual Report FY 2016. Olympia: SBCTC.
4. RAND Corporation and Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice (2014). How Effective Is Correctional Education and Where Do We Go from Here?
5. Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP). (Cost-benefit data last updated 2016). Inventory of Evidence-Based and Research-Based programs for Adult Corrections. WSIPP.
6. Washington Department of Corrections testimony before Senate Human Services and Corrections Committee, Feb. 6, 2014.
7. Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC). (Aug. 4, 2015). Number of Prison Releases by County of Release. Olympia: DOC.

## Programs offered

Every prison offers adult basic education programs, which provide a foundational education in reading, writing, math and English language. This includes GED™ preparation programs. Several also offer High School 21+, a competency-based high school diploma program. With High School 21+, students can earn high school credits by proving they have mastered required subjects through past education or life experience. They then take classes to fill in the gaps and earn a high school diploma.

Job-search and anger management courses are also available at every prison.

Workforce programs vary by institution and include:

- Automotive Mechanics Technology
- Automotive Rebuilding and Refinishing
- Automotive Services
- Building Maintenance
- Business Management and Entrepreneurship
- Business Technology
- Carpentry
- Computer Numerical Controlled Manufacturing (CNC)
- Computer Programming
- Diesel Mechanics
- Drywall, Roofing and Siding
- Graphic Design
- Green Building
- Horticulture
- HVAC Technology
- I-BEST Automotive\*
- I-BEST Carpentry\*
- I-BEST HVAC Technology\*
- I-BEST Material Composites\*
- Institutional Sanitation
- Pastry and Artisan Baking
- Technical Design and Computer Aided Design (CAD)
- Upholstery
- Welding

\*Washington's nationally recognized I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) program pairs basic education with hands-on job experience so students learn in real-world settings.