



CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM: STATE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED LEARNERS IN CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Career Technical Education (CTE) calls upon states to lead with an equity lens, which requires vigilance to quality expectations while also ensuring that CTE programs and interventions intentionally meet the needs of learners with the greatest need, including justice-involved learners.¹ As of 2015, approximately 75 percent of incarcerated youth were age 16 and older.² These learners are often seeking to enter the workforce and transition to independence as efficiently as possible. For these learners, CTE can and should serve a critical role in their successful re-entry into the workforce. This brief will examine how justice-involved learners are supported by education and workforce systems and highlight ways states can strengthen policy to ensure high-quality programming and equitable access and outcomes for this learner population.

“Justice-involved learner” is the human-centered term that refers to a person who has interacted with the justice system. For higher education in prison programs within a correctional facility, the term usually refers to anyone currently incarcerated, though it may also be used to describe alumni who have been released from prison; those who are under local, state or federal supervision; or those who experienced alternative sentencing.³



HOW ARE STATES LEVERAGING FEDERAL FUNDS TO SUPPORT CTE PROGRAMS SERVING JUSTICE-INVOLVED LEARNERS?

In fiscal year (FY) 2022, Congress appropriated \$1,356,056,776 to support the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V).⁴ States are authorized to allocate up to 2 percent of the entire state allocation (paid for out of state leadership funds) to serve individuals in state institutions, including correctional institutions, juvenile justice facilities, and institutions that serve individuals with disabilities. As of FY 2022, only seven states had chosen to allot the full 2 percent for programs that serve individuals in state institutions, of which \$10,347,659 was dedicated to support justice-involved learners (both juveniles and adults).

Investing in high-quality education opportunities for justice-involved learners has a demonstrated economic return. A study produced by the RAND Corporation found that, for every \$1 invested in prison education programs, there is a \$4–\$5 reduction in incarceration costs during the first three years post-release of a prisoner.⁵ In addition to Perkins, the federal government has allocated multiple other funding streams to support states' efforts to connect justice-involved learners with workforce skills including, but not limited to, Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Grants, Second Chance Pell Pilot programs, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds. WIOA Title II funds allow states to use up to 20 percent of their workforce development funding on correctional education – for both adult and juvenile populations.⁶

STATE PERKINS V ALLOCATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS IN STATE INSTITUTIONS

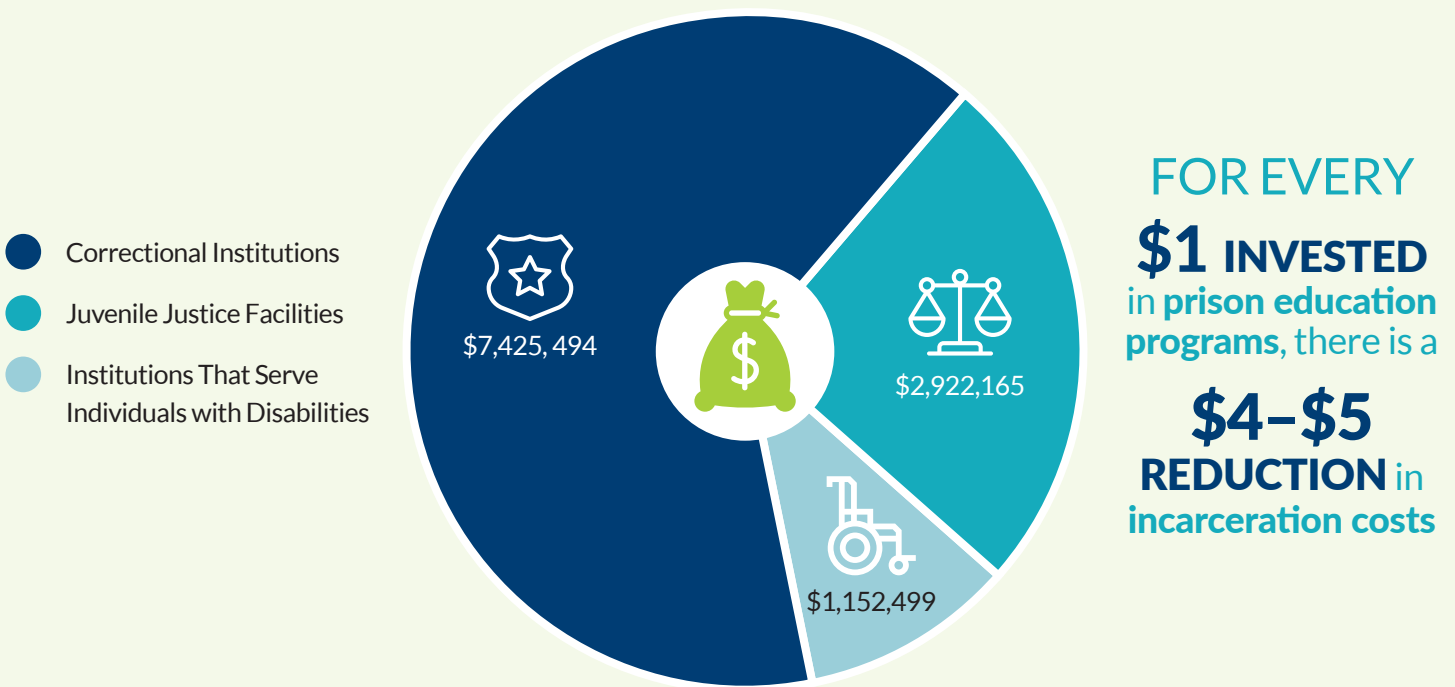


Figure 1. State institution funding distribution by facility type.

Source: National Summary Funding Distribution, U.S. Department of Education, National Perkins Reporting System, 2022.



WHAT DOES ACCOUNTABILITY LOOK LIKE FOR CTE PROGRAMS SERVING JUSTICE-INVOLVED LEARNERS?



In its 2018 [50-state survey](#), The Council of State Governments Justice Center sought to understand the type of workforce development programs that states are providing to justice-involved learners and their mechanisms for collecting outcomes data. The survey results showed that many justice-involved learners do not have access to training aligned to career pathways, state juvenile correctional agencies lack the partnerships needed to establish aligned career pathways for learners, and state agencies lack mechanisms for tracking employment outcomes once learners are released.⁷ These barriers were reinforced in recent research, featured below, conducted by [Richard Crosby](#) and [Janelle Washington](#), two Fellows from the inaugural cohort of [The Postsecondary State Career Technical Education Leaders Fellowship at Advance CTE](#) – [Sponsored by ECMC Foundation](#).

JUSTICE-INVOLVED LEARNERS FACE A SUITE OF CHALLENGES

From program entry requirements to a systemic lack of accountability for learner outcomes to low awareness of available resources, justice-involved learners face numerous obstacles in accessing high-quality career pathways.

In a recent state-level study of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), institutional data was analyzed to understand the current program policies, procedures and accountability practices of the CTE coursework available to justice-involved learners. IDOC receives both state funding and a federal Perkins V allocation and contracts with three community colleges to provide CTE programs at 25 state correctional facilities. The study found that current eligibility policies create a systemic barrier that prevents learners from accessing CTE programming. To be eligible to enroll in postsecondary CTE programs, IDOC requires that individuals possess a high school diploma or high school equivalency and score an 8.0 or higher on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) at intake. When the data for this research was collected, only 28 percent of justice-involved learners possessed the prerequisite education. Sixty-three percent of individuals failed to meet the minimum TABE score and were required to enroll in Adult Basic Education for a minimum of 90 days. The study also found a lack of a formalized system for assessing learner outcomes to inform the design and implementation of CTE programs within IDOC.⁸

In Illinois, 63 percent of individuals failed to meet the minimum TABE score and were required to enroll in Adult Basic Education for a minimum of 90 days.



The IDOC's Postsecondary Education for Credit Bearing Programs Administrative Directive details provisions that may be used in prioritizing postsecondary offerings, including course length, the number of learners that can be accommodated in a single course, course accessibility, course diversity, programs of study over single course,

education pathways and transferability. The research found that this directive may be sufficient for general postsecondary education but needs to provide a complete assessment to adequately inform CTE programming. Further, the directive establishes requirements that are inconsistent with the methods used by the state community colleges to inform CTE program offerings.⁹ These policies create systemic inequity by establishing different processes and expectations for post-secondary CTE programs within correctional facilities compared to those outside the facilities.

Adult learners in Texas face similar barriers when accessing CTE programs in correctional facilities. A recent study sought to assess the impact the Texas Adult Basic Education test (an educational assessment tool) has on learner access to the postsecondary correctional education vocational programs at Trinity Valley Community College. These assessments act as a secondary education level placement test that all learners, regardless of whether they hold a GED/high school diploma, are required in the first week of their incarceration. This study noted that the short timeline between intake and taking the assessment was not adequate for learners to review the testing materials and understand the implications of their score. It also noted that outside of the prison system learners would not face additional tests to qualify for postsecondary enrollment if they had already earned a high school diploma or equivalency.¹⁰ A learner's score on Texas' Adult Basic Education test determines the programs that they are able to access despite the fact that the test is not designed to measure how successful they will be in an environment working with hands-on skills, such as CTE.¹¹

Addressing systemic barriers such as program entry requirements and differing program quality and approval processes is necessary to unlock the potential of more justice-involved learners to gain the skills to re-enter the workforce securely. These steps are necessary to have a long-term and lasting reduction in recidivism.

A learner's score on Texas' Adult Basic Education test determines the programs that they are able to access despite the fact that the test is not designed to measure how successful they will be in an environment working with hands-on skills, such as CTE.¹¹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE LEADERS



The following are recommendations for state CTE leaders to better support and systemically reduce barriers for justice-involved learners to more fully access and benefit from CTE.

Funding

- Allocate the full 2 percent of a state's Perkins V allocation for programs that serve individuals in state institutions, with a proportional amount (based on demand and needed supports) being directed to programs for justice-involved learners.
- Encourage state institutions of higher education to apply for the Second Chance Pell Pilot program to obtain funding to provide high-quality postsecondary education to incarcerated learners. Additionally, states can support these programs by maximizing the allowable amount of the WIOA Title II funding allocation.
- Establish routines for regular internal review of how federal funding is allocated to promote postsecondary participation among justice-involved learners.¹²



Administrative Policies

- Remove eligibility criteria for justice-involved learners that are inconsistent with enrollment policies for postsecondary CTE programs.¹⁶
- Provide justice-involved learners with adequate time and information at intake to understand the process for enrolling in postsecondary courses and the implications of any entry requirements.¹⁷
- Establish strong partnerships that expose justice-involved learners to a robust array of services and supports to promote postsecondary education participation and completion after release.¹⁸



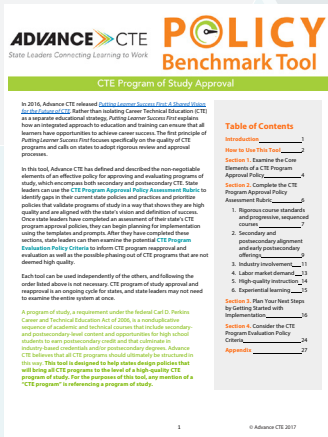
Program Quality

- Implement consistent program quality standards for all CTE programs in the state, regardless of the learner population (including justice-involved learners) they serve.¹³
- Establish a formal process for cross-agency collaboration among state justice and education agencies, including the Perkins eligible agency, to collect and share learner-level data and program outcome data to enhance the accountability of CTE programs for justice-involved learners.
- Develop articulation agreements offering learners transcribed credits between the state correctional agency and institutions of higher education.¹⁴
- Measure and evaluate justice-involved learner access to, participation in and outcomes for CTE program offerings at state correctional facilities.¹⁵

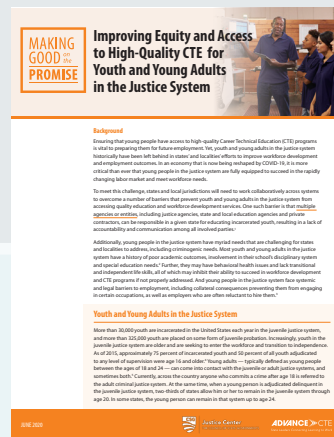




For additional resources and guidance that state leaders can consult to learn more about the distinct needs of justice-involved learners and the tools necessary to provide equitable, high-quality CTE programs, Advance CTE's Learning that Works Resource Center has numerous resources and tools to support state CTE leaders.



Policy Benchmark Tool: CTE Program of Study Approval This tool lays out the non-negotiable elements of an effective policy for approving and evaluating programs of study and offers an assessment rubric that state leaders can use to identify gaps in their current state policy and prioritize areas for improvement. The tool will also help states plan



Making Good on the Promise Series: Improving Equity and Access to High-Quality CTE for Youth and Young Adults in the Justice System This resource, developed in collaboration with The Council of State Governments Justice Center, outlines five key actions that state CTE leaders can take in partner-

for implementation and program reapproval to ensure that they have policies and programs that are high quality and aligned with the state's vision and definition of success.

ship with juvenile and adult criminal justice agencies and other entities to ensure that youths and young adults in these systems have access to high-quality CTE programs and the opportunity to secure and maintain viable employment.

The **Postsecondary STATE CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION LEADERS FELLOWSHIP** at **ADVANCE CTE** sponsored by **ECMCF** Foundation

The Postsecondary State Career Technical Education Leaders Fellowship at Advance CTE – Sponsored by ECMCF Foundation (The Fellowship) strives to address the growing shortage of state postsecondary CTE leadership by closing racial representation gaps and removing equity barriers to leadership advancement. Through individualized support, intentional network building and a real-world fellowship project, Advance CTE – ECMCF Fellows will gain the skills and network to pursue leadership positions and advance high-quality, equitable state postsecondary CTE systems.

ENDNOTES

¹ Advance CTE. (2021). *Without limits: A shared vision for the future of Career Technical Education*. https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/CTEWithoutLimits_Vision_2021.pdf

² Advance CTE. (2020). *Making good on the promise: Improving equity and access to high-quality CTE for youth and young adults in the justice system*. https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/files/resources/AdvanceCTE_Making_Good_on_Promise_Youth_in_Justice_System_05282020.pdf

³ Brick, M. S., & Ajinkya, J. (2020). *Supporting success: The Higher Education in Prison Key Performance Indicator Framework*. https://www.ihep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ihep_kpi_report_rd5_web_3.pdf

⁴ Perkins Collaborative Resource Network. (2022). *Funding distribution, state profiles*. <https://cte.ed.gov/profiles/national-summary>

⁵ RAND Corporation. (n.d.). *Policy impact*. <https://www.rand.org/well-being/justice-policy/portfolios/correctional-education/policy-impact.html>

⁶ Bacon, L., Lee, G., Weber, J., & Duran, L. (2020). *Laying the groundwork: How states can improve access to continued education for people in the criminal justice system*. The Council of State Governments Justice Center. https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Laying-the-Groundwork_Feb2020.pdf

⁷ Agus-Kleinman, J., Salomon, N., & Weber, J. (2019). *On track: How well are states preparing youth in the juvenile justice system for employment?* The Council of State Governments Justice Center. https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CSG_Juvenile-Workforce-Development-Brief.pdf

⁸ Washington, J. (2023). *Advancing equitable access to Career Technical Education programing in Illinois correctional facilities*. Advance CTE. <https://careertech.org/resource/equitable-access-career-technical-education-program-washington>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Crosby, R. (2023). *Barriers to postsecondary Career Technical Education in correctional education: Removing Educational Assessment scores as entrance criteria*. Advance CTE. <https://careertech.org/resource/barriers-correctional-career-technical-education-crosby>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Bacon et al. (2020)

¹³ Washington, J. (2023) and Crosby, R. (2023)

¹⁴ Bacon et al. (2020)

¹⁵ Washington, J. (2023) and Crosby, R. (2023)

¹⁶ Washington, J. (2023)

¹⁷ Crosby, R. (2023)

¹⁸ Bacon et al. (2020)



Advance CTE is grateful for the partnership and gracious support from ECMC Foundation. Additionally, we would like to sincerely thank the following individuals for their support in this work.

- **Richard Crosby**, Division Chair at Trinity Valley Community College, Alumni of the Postsecondary State Career Technical Education (CTE) Leaders Fellowship at Advance CTE – Sponsored by ECMC Foundation
- **Jacob Agus-Kleinman**, Program Manager, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Advance CTE – ECMCF Fellow
- **Janelle Washington**, Director for Career and Technical Education at Illinois Community College Board, Alumni of the Postsecondary State Career Technical Education (CTE) Leaders Fellowship at Advance CTE – Sponsored by ECMC Foundation

This brief features original research and presents policy recommendations to highlight new and relevant CTE research topics being pursued by the inaugural class of The Fellowship highlighting this work and positioning the findings as potential action steps for Advance CTE's members and the national CTE landscape, we aspire to elevate a new – more diverse– generation of CTE leaders.