

COMMISSION ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HIGHER EDUCATION BEHIND BARS

With support from the Ascendium Foundation, the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), and the Educational Justice Institute (TEJI) will launch the Commission on the Effectiveness of Higher Education Behind Bars in mid 2022. There are a significant number of postsecondary education programs for incarcerated students provided by public and independent colleges and universities in the six New England states--and nationally. While many of these programs are high-impact, there is often a misalignment of the resources, stakeholders, policies and programs that are critical to effectiveness.

Turnover and transfer between prisons and jails results in many incarcerated students being unable to finish courses and degree programs. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic altered the delivery of prison education in ways that were not previously possible. Incarcerated students were taught via synchronous distance learning which provided new access to technology and allowed for the delivery of interstate distance education programs. The Commission will focus on strategies, including the potential increased utilization of remote learning, to minimize this misalignment, help incarcerated students finish courses and earn credentials.

The Commission hopes to formally convene approximately 65 individuals who represent key stakeholder groups relevant to prison education, including: key corrections and postsecondary leaders, previously incarcerated individuals, employers, policymakers and governors. The Commission will issue a formal report that includes stakeholder-specific recommendations and a detailed action plan to make New England a leader in higher education behind bars ahead of the Pell release in 2023.

Commission Activities

- Collaborate with partners and experts to convene multi-state conversations engaging key prison education providers and stakeholders
- Consider testimony and presentations from subject-matter experts, scholars, stakeholders and policy innovators
- Analyze data related to the completion of prison education programs and how postsecondary education impacts the overall and economic success of incarcerated individuals, their states and communities
- Explore collaborative, multi-state models for increasing the effectiveness of prison education programs (in-person and online) through policy reform and alignment, including protocols for the transfer of credits post-release, better integrated credential pathways, and the assessment of skills and competencies leading to the award of academic credit

Incarceration & Education in New England

- **There are 201,860 people who are incarcerated, on parole or on probation in New England**
- **Incarcerated people who participate in higher education behind bars are 48 percent less likely to recidivate than those who do not.**
- **In New England, 58% of all formerly incarcerated people in the region do not have a high school diploma or equivalency (Couloute, 2018)**
- By comparison, among non-incarcerated New Englanders, only 13% do not have a high school diploma or GED

The Partnership

The Commission on the Effectiveness of Higher Education Behind Bars is a partnership of the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), The Educational Justice Institute (TEJI). To learn more about our organizations, click above to access our respective websites.

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