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First Step Act: Best Practices for Academic and Vocational Education for Offenders

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Background

On December 21, 2018, the First Step Act was passed and included in the *Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018. Similar to the Second Chance Act of 2007,* the 2018 reauthorization aims to improve opportunities for offenders returning to their communities by authorizing the Attorney General to support the provision of funding for adult and juvenile offender demonstration projects at the state, local, and tribal levels.

This report by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) fulfills the legislative mandate specified in Title V, the *Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018,* Part NN, Section 3041 (c).

Per Title V, the Attorney General must complete the following mandate by June 21, 2019:

"Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of the Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018, the Attorney General shall identify and publish best practices relating to academic and vocational education for offenders in prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities. The best practices shall consider the evaluations performed and recommendations made under grants made under subsection (a) before the date of enactment of the Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018."

Introduction

The American criminal justice system currently holds almost 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 122 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, residential reentry facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories.[1] At year-end 2016, more than 4.5 million adults were under probation and parole.[2] Most individuals in custody, close to 95 percent, will be released and some will reenter the criminal justice system.[3]

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[1] Sawyer, W., & Wagner, P. (2019). "Mass incarceration: The whole pie 2019." National Incarceration Briefing Series: Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/national/.

[2] Kaeble, D. (2018). Probation and parole in the United States, 2016. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ppus16.pdf.

[3] Bureau of Justice Statistics. Reentry Trends in the U.S. https://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/reentry.cfm.

A nine-year longitudinal study of 401,288 adult state prisoners released in 2005 conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found high rates of recidivism nationwide over time. Sixty-eight percent of formerly incarcerated state prisoners were rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years after release, 79 percent within six years, and 83 percent within nine years.[4]

This analysis highlights the critical nature of offender reentry and the pressing need to prepare offenders for release. As offenders reenter society, American communities will need to be able to provide the resources and support necessary to help steer these individuals away from returning to a life of crime.

A key component of reentry is providing useful skills for individuals to drawn upon. As specified in the *Second Chance Reauthorization Act of 2018,* academic and vocational education are important features of potential reentry success. Prisons (including state departments of corrections and BOP), jails, and juvenile facilities devote extensive resources to educating and training incarcerated individuals. Vocational training can engage offenders in constructive activities, fostering their employability upon release and their ability to successfully reintegrate into society.

The following discussion provides a high-level overview of best practices relating to academic and vocational education for offenders in prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities. Most empirical assessments of offender reentry are conducted to determine whether academic and vocational services reduce recidivism and improve post-release outcomes such as employment and housing. For those areas where best practices have not been identified in the empirical literature, guiding principles for the provision of academic and vocational education will be provided.

Evidence-Based Policymaking

If academic and vocational education programs for offenders in prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities are going to be of value in mitigating high recidivism rates, then the identification of best practices needs to be based on rigorous scientific evidence. A critical review of the scientific literature is a necessary step. The criminal justice policy arena is filled with assertions about what is or is not effective in reducing crime. Many of these assertions 1) confuse correlation with causation, 2) rely on anecdotes, or 3) rely on studies that lack scientific rigor.

The belief that correlation proves causation is most often seen when the presence of two events occurring simultaneously is assumed to be evidence of a cause-and-effect relationship. For example, noting that after a particular state adopted certain prison reforms, crime rates subsequently decreased — without any rigorous scientific analysis — confuses correlation with causation. Such an observation is not conclusive evidence that the policies helped to decrease crime. In fact, the claim is weak evidence, because longstanding crime trends, socioeconomic factors, and other criminal justice policies may have played more significant roles in changing crime rates.

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[4] Alper, M., & Durose, M. R. (2018). 2018 Update on prisoner recidivism: A 9-Year follow-up period (2005-2014). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf.

Anecdotal observations are problematic because of the absence of a counterfactual condition — the ability to know what would have happened in the absence of the event or program. When conclusions are based on anecdotes, we may, however unknowingly, selectively observe something that we want to see occur and ignore other important factors that could alter the conclusion. Consider the example of administrators of an in-custody vocational program noting the success of a few graduates who found employment upon release from prison and have not recidivated. While this anecdotal example of offenders successfully reentering society should be applauded, we cannot be certain that the outcome is the result of participation in the program; those individuals may have been simply more likely to be successful finding employment after release. Conversely, we should not judge the same program to be a failure based on an anecdotal example of an individual who immediately recidivated upon release.

Similar to anecdotes, many evaluations of criminal justice programs suffer from selective observation or what scientists call "selection bias." In order to better understand how selection bias undermines causal assertions, consider the hypothetical example of a smoking cessation program. A smoking cessation evaluation that compared volunteer program participates who want to quit smoking to nonparticipants with no desire to quit will very likely overstate the effectiveness of the program.

Before we can judge a corrections program to be effective, we first must understand the importance of how selection bias influences evaluation results. It can be astoundingly difficult to distinguish between what is working and what is not, and nowhere is this predicament truer than when the criminal justice system tries to change human behavior. For example, inmates volunteering to enter an education program may be more motivated to change than inmates not seeking the benefits of the program. Motivation to change and other similar factors are often invisible to those assessing effectiveness. Failure to account for these crucial factors can produce a spurious association between program participation and recidivism outcomes. Unfortunately, the majority of evaluations of academic and vocational programs operating in prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities do not use methods that can adequately account for selection bias. A guide for rigorous evidence of what works in corrections and other criminal justice settings can be found at the National Institute of Justice's *CrimeSolutions.gov*.[5]

Prisons

Both state and federal corrections facilities offer an array of therapies and services to incarcerated individuals. These programs aim to improve inmate behavior and reduce misconduct and institutional violence, as well as reduce recidivism, and thus lead to increased public safety. The breadth and diversity of programs offered across state and federal institutions is extensive; however, most options include but are not limited to vocational and educational programming, institutional employment, and mental health and substance abuse treatment. Beyond these large categories, institutions may also incorporate programming tailored to specific populations, including mental health services, sex offender therapy, domestic violence programming, trauma-informed therapies, and reentry services for individuals nearing release. Although there is still more to know about *how* these programs work, or *why* they fail, there is a growing body of evidence detailing the impacts of corrections programs.

[5] For more information, see National Institute of Justice, CrimeSolutions.gov, https://www.crimesolutions.gov/.

The provision of education in prison has received the most empirical attention. To date, this large body of literature has produced mixed results; however, there is some evidence to suggest participation in vocational or academic programming — for example, Adult Based Education, GED, and postsecondary education — shows modest reductions in recidivism.[6] It is important to note that for those persons receiving correctional education, the odds of obtaining post-release employment are 12 percent higher than the odds of obtaining post-release employment among inmates not receiving correctional education. This impact holds for both traditional academic programs and vocational education programs.[7]

However, strong conclusions about the effectiveness of in-custody education programs cannot be made due to the lack of scientific rigor of the large majority of the completed evaluations. Simply put, the majority of these studies fail to adequately account for the previously mentioned problem of selection bias. Additionally, although providing employment and vocational training assistance can potentially be an important component of helping prisoners reenter society, such strategies should be coupled with other interventions, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, that change criminal thinking patterns.

Notwithstanding these research limitations, the provision of employment, educational, and vocational training opportunities has a positive effect on institutional operations and inmate management. Specific to academic and vocational education, BOP has identified several examples of best practices within the federal prison system.

English-as-a-Second Language Program (ESL)

Pursuant to the *Crime Control Act of 1990* (18 U.S.C. § 3624 (f)), limited English proficient inmates confined in BOP are required to attend an English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) program until they perform at the eighth-grade equivalency level for skill competency. Each inmate who has limited English proficiency is required to complete one mandatory period of ESL programming participation during his or her confinement. The mandatory period ends when the inmate has achieved the eighth-grade level as measured by a score of 225 on the ESL Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Level C Reading Certification test, and a score of 215 on Level B or C of the Listening Comprehension test.

Literacy Program for High School Equivalency Standard (e.g., General Education Development, or GED)

BOP's Literacy Program is designed to assist inmates in developing foundational knowledge and skills in reading, math, and written expression, and to prepare inmates in obtaining a GED/High School Equivalency (HSE) credential. A high school diploma is the basic

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[6] For more information on prison education, see Wilson, D. B., Gallagher, C. A., & MacKenzie, D. L. (2000). "A meta-analysis of corrections-based education, vocation, and work programs for adult offenders." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 37*(4), 347-368. As a note, the meta-analysis included a review of 33 independent experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations; Cho, R. M., & Tyler, J. H. (2013). "Does prison-based adult basic education improve post-release outcomes for male prisoners in Florida?" *Crime & Delinquency, 59*(7), 975-1000. As a note, this study used two nonexperimental comparison groups to assess the extent to which adult basic education improved post-release labor market outcomes; Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. N. V. (2013). *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education: A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. The RAND meta-analysis primarily assessed quasi-experimental research studies.

[7] 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*(3), 389-428.

academic requirement for most entry-level jobs. Individuals who function below this level often find it challenging to acquire a job, and subsequently to complete daily activities related to the job function. Thus, the acquisition of solid academic knowledge and skills is essential to job readiness. If a BOP inmate does not possess a verified high school diploma, GED credential, or any other BOP-accepted HSE Standard, they are required by federal law (18 U.S.C. § 3624 (f)) and BOP policy to attend an adult literacy program to obtain a GED/HSE credential.

Occupational Education

Eligible inmates may participate in Occupational Education (OE) courses to obtain marketable skills designed to enhance post-release employment opportunities. These courses include OE programs provided by either BOP staff, contract agencies, or schools and colleges. The competency-based curricula address skills required for current job market vacancies as support for post-release employment, are aligned with certification or accreditation from a state or other recognized accreditation from an association or agency, and offer opportunities to participate in UNICOR — Federal Prison Industries — as well as Literacy Program instruction. OE programs result in either a certificate, or an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science Degree; the latter must be occupationally-oriented (i.e., no liberal arts degrees).

Promising Prison-Based Interventions

As previously mentioned, NIJ's CrimeSolutions.gov is a valuable resource for identifying effective criminal justice programs. While educational and vocational programming should be offered in correctional settings, inmates may not be able to obtain the benefits of these programs until they overcome substance abuse, addiction, and other criminogenic factors that prevent inmates from breaking the cycle of recidivism. Fortunately, there is promising evidence suggesting that substance abuse treatments can be effective.

Although correctional institutions employ a variety of drug and alcohol treatment interventions, many evaluations focus on the use of therapeutic communities (TCs). TCs are treatment programs, usually delivered within a designated prison housing unit, that mimic many of the therapeutic conditions of residential treatment. TCs focus on substance abuse by inmates through a self-supporting and self-governing structure. While the results from examinations of TCs are mixed, they are frequently viewed as a promising intervention for reducing substance use and recidivism post-release.[8] A randomized controlled trial (RCT) of the Amity In-Prison Therapeutic Community found that participants had lower reincarceration rates when compared to the control groups, and the difference was statistically significant. However, the evaluation did not assess any other measures of recidivism.[9] Despite this finding, more RCTs for this population are necessary to determine if the promising results from this RCT can be replicated in other settings.

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[8] Mitchell, O., Wilson, D. B., & MacKenzie, D. L. (2007). "Does incarceration-based drug treatment reduce recidivism? A meta-analytic synthesis of the literature." *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 3*(4), 353-375. The meta-analysis synthesized findings from quasi-experimental and experimental research studies.

[9] Wexler, H. K., De Leon, G., Thomas, G., Kressel, D., & Peters, J. (1999). "The Amity Prison TC Evaluation: Reincarceration Outcomes." *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 26*(2), 147-167; Wexler, H. K., Melnick, G., Lowe, L., & Peters, J. (1999). "Three-Year Reincarceration Outcomes for Amity In-Prison Therapeutic Community and Aftercare in California." The Prison Journal, 79(3), 321-336; Prendergast, M. L., Hall, E. A., Wexler, H. K., Melnick, G., & Cao, Y. (2003). "Amity Prison-Based Therapeutic Community: 5-Year Outcomes." *The Prison Journal, 84*(1), 36-60. For a review of these evaluations, see https://crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=54.

In addition to in-custody substance abuse treatment, there are two promising multifaceted prisoner reentry programs in Minnesota and Wisconsin that offer continual services to inmates while in prison and as they transition back to their communities. First, the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP), a reentry program for inmates released to Hennepin, Ramsey, Dodge, Fillmore, and Olmstead Counties, began in 2008.[10] Inmates were randomly assigned to intervention and control groups at least 60 days prior to their scheduled release date. To be eligible to participate, in addition to the county requirement, inmates needed to have at least six months of community supervision remaining on their sentences and not be required to register as a sex offender.

MCORP attempted to increase the level of services to inmates while they were institutionalized and released to the community.[11] With about half of the caseload of agents supervising members of the control group, "MCORP agents focused on helping offenders access services related to employment, vocational training, education, housing, chemical health, mentoring, faith-based programming, and income support."[12] The evaluation found that the intervention group was more likely to obtain employment, housing, social support, mentoring, educational services, and income support.[13] They were no more likely to receive faith-based services and vocational training than members of the control group.

The RCT found that MCORP reduced recidivism during a 16-month follow-up period.[14] Specifically,

> Controlling for the effects of the pre-release predictors, MCORP lowered the hazard ratio by 37% for rearrest, 43% for reconviction, and 57% for new offense reincarceration. That is, MCORP offenders reoffended less often and more slowly than the offenders in the control group; as a result, they survived longer in the community without a new offense.[15]

However, MCORP failed to have any effect on technical violation revocation rates.

The second promising reentry program is the Milwaukee Safe Street Prisoner Release Initiative (PRI).[16] Operated by the Wisconsin Department of Corrections, PRI provided "reach in" services, including drug abuse counseling, anti-gang counseling, and employment preparation, to inmates six months prior to their release, along with after-release employment-focused services.[17] Through the Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative, which was created in 2006 and developed out of Project Safe Neighborhoods, DOJ provided grant funding to Milwaukee to operate PRI.[18] After release, PRI participants were offered

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[10] Duwe, G. (2012). "Evaluating the Minnesota Comprehensive Offender Reentry Plan (MCORP): Results from a Randomized Experiment." *Justice Quarterly, 29*(3), 347-383. For a review of the evaluation, see https://crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=486.

[11] Duwe, 2012, 352.

[12] Ibid., 353.

[13] Ibid., 365, Table 2.

[14] Ibid., 368, Table 5.

[15] Ibid., 366.

[16] Cook, P. J., Kang, S., Braga, A. A., Ludwig, J., & O'Brien, M. E. "An Experimental Evaluation of a Comprehensive Employment-Oriented Prisoner Re-Entry Program." Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 31(3), 355-382. For a review of the evaluation, see https://crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=589.

[17] Cook et al., 2015.

[18] Ibid.

subsidized employment for six months and assistance in finding unsubsidized employment. Improving the employment opportunities of the released inmates was the principal instrument for reducing recidivism.[19]

While in prison, members of the intervention group were offered vocational skills assessments, vocational training, soft-skills training, restorative justice counseling, a Community Corrections Employment Program (CCEP), alcohol and drug treatment, remedial education, and Breaking Barriers, a life skills and behavioral/cognitive change program.[20] After release, the intervention group was eligible for substance-abuse treatment and continued CCEP services, which included subsidized employment and job search assistance.

A small-scale RCT found members of the intervention group had statistically significant lower arrest rates over the one-year follow-up period.[21] As for imprisonment one year after release, the difference in reincarceration rates was not statistically significant.[22]

State-Level Innovation

In addition to NIJ's role in identifying effective criminal justice programs, corrections professionals can learn from the innovative work being performed by federal, state, and local agencies. NIJ has found the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PA DOC) to be a leading example of a corrections agency committed to innovation and improvement in order to become more efficient and effective in achieving its mission. PA DOC is implementing rigorous research, including RCTs, to improve agency performance. In 2015, PA DOC partnered with BetaGov,[23] a nonprofit organization that helps policymakers and government agencies promote innovation, to facilitate internal innovation around specific agency goals. BetaGov provides technical assistance to PA DOC in their goals to: 1) reduce the use of solitary confinement, 2) reduce violence and assaults within PA DOC prisons, and 3) improve staff wellness.

With regard to reaching these goals, staff at all levels of PA DOC were invited to submit proposals for ideas to accomplish these results. Since November 2015, more than 100 ideas have been submitted by staff and more than two dozen studies have been concluded. For those ideas that were found to have an impact, PA DOC is in some cases moving to expand the ideas or formalize them into agency policy. In those cases where the proposed ideas didn't work, PA DOC is working to discontinue or adjust current practices.

In December 2017, a fourth goal was added to PA DOC's BetaGov initiative. The goal — to improve community-based corrections and reentry outcomes — aligns with the recent agency merger of PA DOC and the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP). All PA DOC and PBPP staff have now been invited to submit trial ideas for improving community-based corrections. To date, at least 40 proposals have been submitted. Findings from the research will inform, in part, the Second Chance Act Community-Based Adult Reentry Program, assist practitioners and policymakers seeking to implement effective interventions in their jurisdictions, and advance the body of knowledge on best practices in offender reentry.

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 363.

[21] Ibid., 374-375, Table 6.

[22] Ibid.

[23] More information on BetaGov is available at http://betagov.org/.

Jails

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on the effectiveness of programming implemented in jails.[24] Most jails — county and local — are not set up to provide rehabilitative services over the long term, including academic programs and vocational programs, because pre-trial detention or imprisonment terms are usually short (the latter due to the fact that many offenders are in custody due primarily to misdemeanant offenses). More research is needed in this area. To address this shortcoming, NIJ is working with a Practitioner-in-Residence for the next two years to address the shortcomings of empirical literature on jails through the development of a jails research agenda and to become more engaged with the jail practitioner community.

Providing educational and vocational programming in jails may be difficult due to the frequent turnover from short imprisonment terms, and inmates may not be able to obtain the benefits of these programs until they overcome substance abuse addiction and other criminogenic factors. A promising in-custody substance abuse intervention for jail settings is Changing Course, a jail-based interactive journal program designed to help inmates make the connection between their substance use and criminal activity.[25] Changing Course was implemented at the Buncombe County Detention Facility in Asheville, North Carolina. As a self-directed resource for inmates, Changing Course helps inmates begin the process of making positive life changes. By offering a way for inmates to assess the costs and benefits associated with different life choices, Changing Course assists participants in developing a plan for changing their behavior following release. An RCT found that inmates who participated in the programs were significantly less likely to recidivate than members of the control group.

Juvenile facilities

Even in the juvenile justice system, juveniles are expected to receive an education. This requirement complicates the assessment of best practices because the question is not a matter of whether or not to provide services but rather what type of intervention is most promising. Many juvenile facilities include a component education module which is tied into the local school district. Providing education in juvenile facilities can present challenges for the administrators, teachers, and staff who are responsible for the education, rehabilitation, and welfare of youths committed to their care.

Effective and promising programs[26] and practices[27] are not those traditionally tied to standard education curricula but rather those that target risks and needs related to

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[24] See Brazzell, D., Crayton, A., Mukamal, D. A., Solomon, A. L., & Lindahl, N. (2009). *From the classroom to the community: Exploring the role of education during incarceration and reentry*. Urban Institute. http://johnjay.jjay.cuny.edu/files/Roundtable_Monograph.pdf; Wheeldon, J. (2011). "Visualizing the future of research on postsecondary correctional education: Designs, data, and deliverables." *Journal of Correctional Education, 62*(2), 94-115. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23282665.

[25] Proctor, S. L., Hoffman, N. G., & Allison, S. (2012). "The Effectiveness of Interactive Journaling in Reducing Recidivism Among Substance-Dependent Jail Inmates." *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 56*(2), 317-332. For a review of the evaluation, see https://crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=307.

[26] A planned, coordinated group of activities and processes designed to achieve a specific purpose. A program should have specified procedures (e.g., a defined curriculum, an explicit number of treatment or service hours, and an optimal length of treatment) to ensure the program is implemented with fidelity to its model. It may have, but does not necessarily need, a "brand" name and may be implemented at single or multiple locations. See https://www.crimesolutions.gov/Glossary.aspx#P.

[27] A general category of programs, strategies, or procedures that share similar characteristics with regard to the issues they address and how they address them. See https://www.crimesolutions.gov/Glossary.aspx#P.

delinquency. While an exhaustive list of effective and promising programs is outside the scope of the current memorandum,[28] programs that address risk factors are those that are more likely to demonstrate a positive effect on delinquency or one or more risk factors for delinquency.[29]

It is important to note that programs identified as effective or promising for one jurisdiction or for a specific population subgroup will likely not work the same way for everyone or in every circumstance. When determining the appropriateness of a particular program for a specific youth, their individual risk, needs, and responsivity should be taken into consideration.[30] Responsivity factors are a youth's personal characteristics and circumstances that can impact the likelihood that they will respond to an intervention, such as a youth's cognitive ability or transportation access.[31] Risk and needs assessments can also be used to guide decisions about which programs would be likely to reduce an individual's risk of engaging in delinquent activities.[32]

Although there is some evidence to suggest programs work to prevent, or minimally delay, delinquency among youth, many of these programs require strong coordinated efforts among family members, schools, and community resources. However, in resource-poor communities, it is unclear how these relationships can be built and who must initiate these relationships to secure and foster cohesion.

A key difference between distinguishing what works to prevent crime among youth and reducing the likelihood of recidivism among adults is the *focus* of the programming. While youth prevention programs address specific risk factors, adult programs tend to address deficiencies — for example, education, substance abuse treatment, and mental health.

A 2014 meta-analysis of correctional education in juvenile facilities[33] focused on the types of interventions provided to juveniles while in custody. This analysis found significant variation in the types of interventions, methods, and outcomes of interest. Two interventions — reading improvement and diploma completion — showed particular promise. Promising interventions that aim to reduce barriers to reenrollment in education include reintegration teams and plans (for example, requiring transition plans 45 days before youth are released,

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[28] For information on effective or promising youth programs, see the NIJ's web-based clearinghouse of programs and practices, CrimeSolutions.gov, available at https://www.crimesolutions.gov. Effective programs have strong evidence to indicate they achieve their intended outcomes when implemented with fidelity. Promising programs have some evidence to indicate they achieve their intended outcomes. For more information on the criteria, see https://crimesolutions.gov/about_starttofinish.aspx.

[29] An example of an effective youth program is Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies (PATHS). PATHS is a violence prevention program that aims to improved students' social information-processing difficulties. PATHS addresses the following risk/need factors: history of violence and aggression, and delinquency activity. For more information on PATHS, see https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=193.

[30] Development Services Group, Inc. (2015). *Protective Factors for Delinquency*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Protective%20Factors.pdf.

[31] Development Services Group, Inc. (2015). *Risk and Needs Assessment for Youths*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/RiskandNeeds.pdf.

[32] For an overview of youth risk assessment, see Vincent, G. M., Guy, L. S., & Grisso, T. (2012). *Risk Assessment in Juvenile Justice: A Guidebook for Implementation*. John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. http://modelsforchange.net/publications/346.

[33] See Davis, L. M., Steele, J. L., Bozick, R., Williams, M. V., Turner, S., Miles, J. V. N., Saunders, J., & Steinberg, P. S. (2014). *How effective is correctional education, and where do we go from here? The results of a comprehensive evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

the involvement of school district coordinators, the creation of educational "passports," and the use of transition coordinators to work across juvenile justice and education systems to facilitate a youth's timely reenrollment).[34]

More prominent in the field of juvenile corrections are guiding principles for the provision of high-quality educational opportunities to juveniles in secure facilities. In December 2014, the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice laid out five guiding principles.[35] They are:

- a safe, healthy, facility-wide climate that prioritizes education;
- necessary funding to support educational opportunities for all youth in long-term secure care facilities;
- recruitment, employment, and retention of qualified education staff with the necessary skill set for teaching in juvenile justice settings;
- rigorous and relevant curricula aligned with state academic and career and technical education standards that promote college and career readiness; and
- formal processes and procedures to ensure successful navigation across child-serving systems and smooth reentry into communities.

Additionally, the National Juvenile Justice Network[36] provides specific guidelines about addressing educational and vocational needs for juveniles upon return to the community. Specifically, and similar to adults, the process of reentry should begin immediately upon a juvenile's arrival into a custody setting. This process should include a delineation of the juvenile's needs, including how to continue their engagement in the academic environment during and after their time in custody, and should address their transitions to career and postsecondary education.

Conclusion

As it pertains to education, employment, and other correctional interventions, some correctional programming is promising, but this conclusion is based upon evidence that often lacks scientific rigor. Nevertheless, the provisions of such programs are considered to be valuable for purposes of correctional security management, and as scholars continue to evaluate correctional programs, there is much to be learned about, for example, dosage, inmate characteristics, and the quality of programming.

Correctional education has the potential to yield benefits such as greater societal productivity for returning citizens, increased tax revenue, and decreased reliance on governmental support. Continuing the momentum towards understanding "what works"

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[34] National Juvenile Justice Network. (2016). "Snapshot: Improving educational opportunities for youth in the juvenile justice system." http://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/NJJN_Educational%20Re-entry-snapshot_Mar2016_FINAL.pdf.

[35] *Guiding principles for providing high-quality education in juvenile justice secure care settings.* (2014). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/correctional-education/guiding-principles.pdf.

[36] National Juvenile Justice Network. (2016). "Snapshot: Improving educational opportunities for youth in the juvenile justice system." http://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/NJJN_Educational%20Re-entry-snapshot_Mar2016_FINAL.pdf.

will assist corrections administrators in making informed decisions about the types of programs they can and should implement inside their facilities, and improve the successful return of adult and juvenile Americans. The true potential of correctional education and vocational programs can be fully realized if policymakers provide resources and funding to expand programs, such that additional rigorous scientific evaluations can be conducted.

NIJ is committed to producing recommendations based on rigorous research that will work to improve public safety, save taxpayer dollars, strengthen public trust in the corrections system, and provide former prisoners with greater opportunities to access services and live productive lives. Therefore, NIJ is firmly committed to funding RCTs, which have the potential to identify effective programs that will serve as models for replication.

For fiscal years 2018 to 2019, NIJ has sought to build knowledge on best practices in offender reentry and corrections initiatives. In fiscal year 2018, NIJ awarded nearly $6.2 million to five recipients to perform rigorous research examining the success of reentry strategies, programs, and practices. The awards reflect an emphasis on using RCTs when evaluating the effectiveness and success of potentially promising practices. Findings from the research will inform, in part, the Second Chance Act Community-Based Adult Reentry Program, assist practitioners and policymakers seeking to implement effective interventions in their jurisdictions, and advance the body of knowledge on best practices in offender reentry. For fiscal year 2019, NIJ expects to make a similar investment in rigorous research applicable to juvenile residential facilities and institutional and/or community corrections. NIJ's goal is to identify effective correctional interventions that can serve as models for replication across the nation.

While NIJ is firmly committed to expanding the evidence base through RCTs, ethical, security, and operational concerns can make the design or implementation of RCTs difficult in correctional settings. One alternative to overcome concerns about denying treatment in correctional settings is to conduct an RCT when an agency pilots a new program or is considering modifying an existing program. Under these circumstances, inmates are not denied services. The research design would involve the control group receiving the standard treatment, while the intervention group would receive the new pilot program or modified treatment. Thus, all inmates involved in the evaluation receive services, though the new pilot program or modification would be under investigation. In other contexts where randomization is not permissible, however, it may be necessary to use other methods such as statistical comparison groups.

In conclusion, DOJ is committed to the vital tasks of identifying and assisting correctional professionals in implementing improved correctional programs, improving the reentry experience for adults and juveniles returning to their communities from incarceration, and keeping our communities safe.