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Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education

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From the Director

In 2012, I came to the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) to direct a project that would allow three states to operate college programs in their prisons and to connect people upon their release with local colleges in their communities. The goal was to remove the most significant hurdle to providing high-quality postsecondary education behind bars—funding—and, in partnership with the colleges and corrections agencies with whom we worked, learn which practices best support persistence, success, and the attainment of credentials and other educational goals among incarcerated people and those who have recently left prison. During the four years of the Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education (Pathways) project, Vera and our partners in Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina learned what many who open the doors to schools had learned before us—that education has the power to transform individuals, institutions, and communities.

When the project began, interest in offering higher education in prison was growing among colleges, spurred in part by several well-known and innovative programs that were becoming increasingly visible in the higher education and corrections fields. After incarcerated people were stripped of their eligibility for need-based financial aid for postsecondary education—most notably with the end of such Pell Grants

in 1994—the number of higher education programs in prison had dropped from more than 300 to just a handful in the years that followed. The few college programs that fought hard to stay open or found means to begin programs in the next two decades reflected the efficacy of postsecondary education on a number of fronts. Their graduates went on to successful careers and did not return to prison. Their programs gained support among the staff at the prisons where they operated, as their presence had a calming influence that could be tracked in the lowered incidents of violence that staff and incarcerated people endured.

The project was launched just two years after the number of people in U.S. prisons reached its peak, bringing the incarcerated population to one in 100 adults for the first time in history. As the country was coming out of the depths of the deepest economic recession since the Great Depression, state departments of corrections were dealing with unprecedented budget pressures and seeking strategies to cut their prison populations. Every year, several states were passing sentencing reform legislation that promised to achieve their population goals by instituting practices that had proved to reduce recidivism and protect public safety. Postsecondary education had a long track record of reducing returns to prison among participating students, so the governors' offices, higher education offices, and corrections

agencies Vera invited to apply for the Pathways project welcomed the opportunity to build a substantial program with the aid of private funding.

We have passed many significant milestones since we started the Pathways project. We began with the ultimate goal of building the evidence base that would support reinstatement of Pell Grants. The field has rapidly advanced toward that goal. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance to colleges that cleared the way for them to enroll students in jails and juvenile facilities using Pell Grants. Also that year, California paved the way for community colleges to teach in state prisons, seeding the ground for college programs to spring up in 34 of the state's 35 prisons just a few years later. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative, a pilot project that allows participating schools to provide federal Pell Grants to otherwise eligible students who are incarcerated in state or federal penal institutions. The announcement was met with intense interest by colleges across the country, more than 200 of which applied to take part, with 67 eventually selected to participate. Notably, in 2019 there appear to be widespread discussions and increased momentum for reinstatement of eligibility for Pell Grants for people in prison as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act by the end of the year.

Today, more than 20,000 people are enrolled in post-secondary education while in prison, a higher number than at any time in the past quarter century. As time goes on, we'll know more about their lives after they leave prison and rejoin their families, take up careers, and make their voices heard in their communities. If they are anything like the Pathways students, we have much to look forward to. In the words of one student, "I've seen people get out of prison and do good, but I've seen everybody that's gotten out of prison that's been in this program—a lot of them are doing really great. Because they had a chance, you know? They had a second chance to do something." Programs like Pathways, in which colleges and corrections agencies find countless ingenious ways to offer opportunities to people who are ready to reach up and grasp them, show all of us a path to a second chance: a second chance to right the wrongheaded policies of the past and pave the way to a new, different future.



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Introduction

*“It was the most transformative thing [you] have ever seen. . . .
You start thinking: ‘I might have a chance.’”**

Education has the capacity to transform. Education opens pathways to new futures. Education is freedom. That these benefits have been denied to people who are incarcerated, whose need for them affects us all, points to shortsighted public policies and the critical importance of a project like Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education (Pathways).

The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) launched the project in 2012. Supported by five national foundations, Pathways gave colleges and state corrections agencies in Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina the means to offer programs in prison and build reentry pathways that would keep participating students engaged in education after they left prison and began the difficult work of rebuilding their lives. During the five years of the project, Vera and its college and corrections partners piloted numerous strategies to support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students in their pursuit of higher education and laid the groundwork for a rigorous outcome evaluation.

This report describes the demonstration project’s design and implementation, the experiences of Pathways partners as they carried out the program model, and the ways in which partners learned, adjusted, reflected, and adapted to overcome the hurdles to running a high-quality college program in a prison and supporting education engagement during reentry.

*In 2018, Vera spoke with Pathways students who are now in the community; they are quoted throughout the report. These students represent various backgrounds and experiences in college programs; the Pathways sites selected them for interviews because they were among the most active participants in their programs. They were also recipients of a scholarship for educational or reentry expenses through a fund organized by a former Vera staff member. Their interviews reveal nuances about and reflections on the program experience. But because program staff selected these students for interviews, they do not necessarily cover the full range of perspectives of those who participated. Quotations from these conversations appear throughout the report.

Historical context

The limited public investment once made in prevention-oriented services in prison—such as therapeutic, work, and educational programs—largely ended by 1994 when the federal Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act took effect.¹ Among other provisions, the legislation stripped people in prison of eligibility for federal need-based financial aid—the primary mechanism by which low-income students pay for college; encouraged states to enact longer prison terms; and funded new state and federal prison construction.² The law was rooted in the crime policy prevalent in the late 1980s and 1990s, an ideological amalgam of deterrence, incapacitation, and retribution. The civil rights struggles of the previous decades had led to many advances in employment, voting rights, housing, and other areas—and many consider the turn to tougher sentencing laws and reductions in rehabilitative services a reaction to those gains. The consequences for people of color were disproportionately severe.³ A number of states had already reduced services in prison, but following the federal government, some states also restricted public funding to adult basic education and/or vocational training in prison and limited funds for other kinds of programming in correctional facilities.

As this century began, the results of the “tough on crime” era resounded throughout the country, even as crime rates started declining in the early 2000s.⁴ From 1970 to 2008, the number of people behind bars had ballooned 700 percent, reaching an unprecedented 2.3 million people, accounting for one in every 100 adults in the United States.⁵ The 2008 recession, the deepest in nearly 70 years, led to shrinking state revenues and threw into stark relief the enormous cost of operating correctional institutions to house an ever-growing population—with many people returning after previous terms of incarceration.⁶ Concerned policymakers connected with researchers and practitioners who had developed interventions shown to reduce recidivism—future arrests, convictions, and returns to prison among people after they are released. The evidence-based era of policymaking began to take shape.

The significance of this move to evidence-based approaches is enormous, coming as it did after 40 years of policymaking and prison operations based on the “nothing works” findings of 1970s sociologist Robert Martinson and others—the flawed premise that nothing could be

done to reduce recidivism among people leaving prison.⁷ This policy trend also supported a myopic focus on reducing corrections costs by cutting programming and otherwise enhancing the punitive nature of incarceration and maximizing its dehumanizing effects.⁸ In recent years, at least 35 states have passed laws and many more have adopted practices that build on evidence about effective interventions, research reestablishing that people in prison and on supervision are capable of futures that look different from their pasts.⁹ As corrections agencies have reshaped their practices in response to the evidence, a consensus has emerged among researchers,

Access to education in prison lowers the odds of recidivating by 43 percent and increases the likelihood of employment by 13 percent, while saving \$5 for every \$1 spent.

suggesting that education should be part of this forward-looking approach. The Pathways project offered an opportunity to put this research into practice while developing support for postsecondary education in prison among corrections agencies and policymakers. (See page 5 for more on anticipated outcomes.)

When Pathways launched in 2012, a small cadre of colleges and prisons were working to provide higher education in prison, and researchers were analyzing the effects on outcomes such as recidivism, employment, identity, and self-efficacy.¹⁰ The field has changed substantially since then. In 2013, the RAND Corporation (RAND) released a meta-analysis that estimated the aggregate effects of education programs offered in prison in relation to recidivism and employment. The researchers found that access to education in prison lowers the odds of recidivating by 43 percent and increases the likelihood of employment by 13 percent, while saving \$5 for every \$1

spent—findings that dramatically deepened interest in the expansion of education programs.¹¹

With this evidence in hand, the U.S. Department of Justice added education programs to its compendium of evidence-based programming and, in 2015, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative, a pilot project that temporarily reinstates federal financial aid eligibility to people in prison who enroll at participating colleges.¹² This pilot is now in its third year, with 65 colleges in 27 states enrolling about 11,000 students annually in postsecondary education programs that lead to a credential from an accredited program. Through this initiative, more than 1,000 students have completed certificates, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees before leaving prison—and many more have continued their education after release.¹³

Pathways funders

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation conceived of Pathways as part of its focus on increasing access to postsecondary education, completion, and success for hard-to-reach populations. The Gates Foundation engaged other funders who joined Pathways to meet their own philanthropic goals, broadening the project's focus. As Pathways took shape, this group of funders was led by the Ford Foundation, which invested in the project for its potential to engage on issues of race and equity and to increase the earnings and civic engagement of people leaving prison, who are disproportionately people of color. The Open Society

Foundations invested in Pathways through its Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation, given the potential of education to improve the circumstances of individuals and families at the lowest rung of the economic ladder. The Sunshine Lady Foundation joined the effort as part of its existing commitment to support the operations of college programs working in prisons. Finally, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation joined the initiative with a focus on family economic security, seeing the potential for a wider, intergenerational impact of education offered in prison.

The Pathways project

“I knew I had to do something different with my life. . . . I want to be a positive role model for my kids and my nieces and nephews.”

“In the beginning it was hard, but I had a lot of support, with the other guys there that helped me through it. . . . I didn’t do it by myself. It was a collective group . . . that was teaching me along with the professors.”

Before the Pathways project launched, Vera worked with the five funders to identify potential outcomes, develop a request for proposals, and perform a scan of states potentially well situated to participate in the demonstration project.

The project’s purpose and expected outcomes

Pathways was created to achieve the following outcomes.

- › **For individuals.** The model allowed participants to begin postsecondary education in prison, continue it after release, and attain a credential, enabling them to obtain living-wage employment and avoid future incarceration. The premise was that by attaining a degree or certification, participants would have the qualifications to secure employment and economic self-sufficiency, as well as the cognitive skills to navigate the challenges of rebuilding their lives after prison.¹⁴
- › **For the community.** Reduced recidivism would increase public safety in students’ communities, while education would promote greater civic engagement among participants after release. If those returning to communities were earning a living wage, their

presence might also be a boon to the economic well-being of their neighborhoods, which are typically poor and underserved by necessary businesses like grocery stores, clinics, and banks.¹⁵ These benefits would extend to employers and local economies as a deeper pool of qualified workers might spur economic activity.¹⁶

- > **For families.** Earning a decent wage would increase the standard of living for participants' families, while higher education would foster students' investment in their families' well-being and generate interest and engagement in education among family members.¹⁷
- > **For corrections staff.** In addition to anticipating lower rates of recidivism among participants, Vera expected that Pathways would catalyze other changes, including fewer infractions and safer working and living conditions. Because higher education programs in prison engage participants in meaningful activities and inspire hope about the future, the programs would provide powerful incentives for people to avoid conflict that could lead to removal from the program.¹⁸ This would reduce violence in facilities hosting college programs, offer prison staff a different view of those in their custody, and improve overall conditions for people living and working in those institutions.
- > **For society at large.** If successful, Pathways would increase the number of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people with high-quality postsecondary degrees and credentials. And with the completion of the outcome evaluation, Pathways would build the case for replication and public investment at the state and federal levels to increase access to these programs for the thousands of people incarcerated nationwide.¹⁹ Expanded access and participation could provide more stability, economic security, and safety to families and communities throughout the country.
- > **For all of the institutions involved.** Vera's proposed design anticipated that agencies would need to make substantial changes in order to remove the barriers that deter incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people from pursuing postsecondary education during and after prison—and to support student success. This would mean

reworking the practices of institutional and community corrections agencies, higher education institutions, and reentry services organizations. In identifying and implementing those changes, Vera and its college and corrections partners expected to learn promising strategies for collaboration among multiple complex institutions and develop effective approaches to delivering high-quality college programs in a corrections setting.

The Pathways model

“[The college program] came in and changed the prison. People started not even paying attention to the guards who were trying to disrupt the process because two guys would just be walking and talking about help with your paper or getting a book sent. . . . Everything was like being locked in a college.”

“They changed my whole thinking process, really.”

The model Vera developed for Pathways is a continuum of high-quality postsecondary education programming, combined with academic and reentry support, beginning in prison and continuing in the community. The programs would enable participants to attain a postsecondary credential while cultivating support among corrections agencies, policymakers, and communities for access to postsecondary education for incarcerated people. The model consists of three parts: activities in prison; activities after release; and activities to foster stakeholder engagement, policy change, and sustainability.

Activities in prison include the following:

- › credit-bearing or developmental college courses offered in prison that build to a postsecondary credential (certificate or associate’s or bachelor’s degree);
- › academic supports in prison (such as academic advising, library access, computer labs, and access to Internet resources) and peer supports (such as study groups and education dorms);

- › reentry planning that begins in prison and guides continued progress toward credential attainment after release (such as assisting students in identifying a community-based college where they could continue their education, gathering transcripts, submitting applications before release, understanding credit transfer and articulation agreements, and communicating education goals to community supervision officers); and
- › policy and practice changes to support education programs in prison (such as developing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between colleges and corrections, implementing prison transfer holds on students to minimize disruptions in academic coursework, training corrections staff on project goals and expectations, and training faculty on teaching in prison and on good time/earned time incentives for participation).²⁰

Activities after release include the following:

- › college enrollment, financial aid, and academic supports to facilitate post-prison college persistence in an academic course of study through completion and credential attainment;
- › community supervision practices that support persistence in post-secondary education (reexamination of curfews, required meeting times, work requirements, and prohibitions of associating with known felons);
- › peer networks of formerly incarcerated people who are supportive of education (such as hiring and training peer counselors to assist with navigating college in the community and identifying space and time for peers to meet on campus or elsewhere);
- › support of local social service organizations to assist with concerns such as housing, health care, job placement, and mental health and substance use treatment; and
- › meaningful engagement of a group of government agencies, community-based organizations, and employers to implement the project—for example, by forming a leadership group to coordinate and improve services available to people after release (such as housing, transportation, and employment supports).

Activities to foster stakeholder engagement, policy change, and sustainability include the following:

- › completion of an outcome evaluation to test the effects of the Pathways model on recidivism, employment and earnings, family, and community;
- › outreach to state and federal policymakers to build awareness of the project and support for policy changes that would ensure sustainability, replication, and expansion after it ends; and
- › engagement with a national advisory board of formerly incarcerated college graduates, researchers, leaders in postsecondary education in prison, leaders from higher education and corrections, employers, and liaisons from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. (For a full list of advisory board members, see Appendix C at page 61. For a sample meeting agenda, see Appendix D at page 63.)

This model anticipated two potential points at which students could complete a credential: in the two years before their release from prison and within two years after their release. (See “Initial focus of the Pathways model,” below.)

In addition to the financial support the five foundations offered, Vera provided technical assistance to the three participating states in four areas.

Initial focus of the Pathways model



*Potential point of attaining a postsecondary degree or other credential

- › Developing strong partnerships between correction agencies and colleges, one of the most challenging parts of the project. Vera staff engaged staff and faculty of the corrections agencies and the colleges in frequent site visits and facilitated meetings of implementation teams; helped develop MOUs as needed among the partners; and supported information sharing among them.²¹
- › Providing research support on specific areas of interest to Pathways sites. This included conducting research on practices and program elements both well-established in the literature and emerging in the field.
- › Facilitating contacts across sites, engaging external subject-matter experts to provide information and resources to sites implementing relevant program elements, and sharing new research and practice publications.
- › Convening the Pathways National Advisory Board to advise Vera and the sites on project implementation. Annual meetings brought teams from the states into direct conversation with board members.

The Pathways National Advisory Board

Vera convened the Pathways National Advisory Board to support and guide the project and sites. At four convenings from 2012 through 2016, board members gave their time and expertise to strengthen the project's efforts. The Pathways sites sent representatives to the meetings: both staff and faculty from the colleges, formerly incarcerated students, and staff from institutional and community corrections agencies. The meetings featured updates from the sites and from the evaluation team, discussions on program implementation, presentations from members and invited experts, discussions with students in the program, and a

visit to one of the Pathways sites in North Carolina. These meetings were extremely valuable: experts came together with the people charged with implementing the project to discuss ideals, goals, and the day-to-day challenges of operating the programs. These conversations contributed to more creative problem-solving and led to connections across sites and challenged Pathways sites to recognize competing priorities, cultivate champions in corrections, maintain the integrity of their educational programs, and keep their students at the heart of their planning.

The Pathways states and their approaches

“These guys really had to produce work, and [the professor] stayed on top of everybody.”

“Every professor that I deal with . . . it’s an extraordinary experience of getting to . . . learn from them and gaining the insight of how to interact with others. . . . Before I started school, I was a bit of an introvert.”

“It was so rewarding when you start breaking [the material] down and start understanding what the author was saying.”

Vera developed the model described above after a series of conversations with Pathways funders, officials with the U.S. Department of Education, college and corrections officials who were already running college programs in prison, and organizations working with returning students in the community.²² Vera then developed a request for proposals (RFP) that asked applicants to describe the ways in which they would implement the promising practices in the field that Vera had identified through these conversations.

But as the states’ proposals and later implementation plans demonstrated, the model was only that: a framework to which the states added their own ideas and modifications to adjust to local circumstances. What follows are descriptions of how the states Vera selected—Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina—implemented, adapted, and innovated to bring higher education to their states’ prisons and communities. These descriptions reveal the extraordinary commitment to change that the prison systems and colleges brought to this collaborative work. The remainder of the report examines what happened in these three states with regard to each component of the model: higher education in prison, continuation of support for degree or certification after release, and outreach to policymakers to build support.

State selection and funding

In 2012, Vera invited seven states—Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Washington—to apply for grants of up to \$2 million to implement projects that included the program elements of the Pathways model. Vera issued these invitations based on evidence of each state’s commitment to offering high-quality, credential-focused postsecondary education in prison; the presence or history of colleges working in prisons; and demonstrated support from the leadership of the state department of corrections.

Each applicant included a lead institution to receive grant funding on behalf of the state, but also had to demonstrate strong support from a variety of institutional partners,

including leaders of participating colleges and universities, the department of corrections, community supervision agencies, and reentry service providers. Proposals had to demonstrate support from the governor’s office, leadership in both houses of the state legislature, and government and community-based agencies the applicants planned to engage (such as employment programs or business roundtables).

Vera staff and the project’s funders selected Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina for the project. Michigan received \$960,000, North Carolina received \$1 million, and New Jersey received \$2 million. Each state provided a 25 percent match (15 percent in kind and 10 percent cash).

Pathways development in each state

The sites came into the project with various strengths they drew on to develop their approaches to Pathways.

Michigan

Prior to Pathways, the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) staff and personnel from contracted agencies provided some educational opportunities in prison, including adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency, career and technical training, employment readiness, and workforce development. College was available to incarcerated students who could pay for correspondence courses or, at three facilities, for in-person instruction.

Michigan had long been a leader in the effort to reshape release practices with the goal of reducing the number of people who return to prison. In 2005, the state established the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative, which directs state funding to local communities according to the needs of people leaving prison who will reside there. Those who are about to leave prison meet with their parole officers and community volunteers prior to release, either in person or via teleconference. Together, they develop a reentry plan that addresses obtaining housing, treatment,

employment, and necessary legal documents, such as state identification and Social Security cards.

New Jersey

In 2012, New Jersey was already providing postsecondary education in prison through Project Inside, an initiative begun in 2008 and funded through a federal grant program. Project Inside enabled colleges to offer courses in four prisons. But although the courses taught were credit-bearing and could lead to certificates, many were not transferable to degree programs offered by either the matriculating college or other colleges.

As the funding that supported Project Inside was discontinued, the colleges and the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) saw a need for a more coordinated approach—one that would offer degree-granting higher education in prison. Together they developed the New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prison (NJ-STEP) consortium, to coordinate the efforts of the four colleges working in prisons at the time and to add several more.²³ The Pathways project began just as this reconfiguration had been completed, allowing those colleges to continue offering courses while New Jersey revised its model for Pathways.

North Carolina

In 2013, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) already had a long-established partnership with the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). NCCCS taught courses in prison that could lead to an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree, a terminal degree in a career-technical education track that includes a limited number of transferable credits.²⁴ Although this arrangement held significant promise for incarcerated students, in practice the courses were not well coordinated and often resulted in participants earning a smattering of credits without making real progress toward a degree.

In addition, legislation passed in 2010 barred the use of state funds to develop new postsecondary programs in prison, requiring instead that NCDPS or NCCCS find outside funding to launch other initiatives. Once any new college program was up and running, the legislation permitted state funding streams to cover the ongoing costs. Pathways provided start-up funding, and the state supported continued operations.

The states' approaches

Pathways launched on January 1, 2013, in New Jersey, and on July 1, 2013, in Michigan and North Carolina, and ran for four years in each state. As a demonstration project, Pathways offered the sites time and funding to test implementation strategies and develop successful practices in areas that were new to them—and in some instances—such as in North Carolina's introduction of live Internet services for Pathways students in prison—were cutting-edge advances in the field of corrections. Figure 1 at page 15 captures the components of each state's approach to implementing the Pathways model.

Figure 1

The states' approaches to Pathways implementation

Activities in prison	Michigan	New Jersey	North Carolina
Credit-bearing or developmental college courses offered in prison that build to a postsecondary credential			
Developmental coursework	✓	✓	✓
Credit-bearing coursework	✓	✓	✓
Postsecondary certificate	✓		✓
Associate in arts degree	✓	✓	
Planned completion of a credential while still in prison	✓	✓	✓
Transcript reviews for credits earned before participating in Pathways	✓	✓	
Academic supports in prison			
Tutoring	✓	✓	✓
Academic advising	✓	✓	✓
Peer study groups	✓	✓	✓
Education-focused housing	✓	✓	✓
Dedicated study space	✓		✓
Access to college library resources	✓	✓	✓
Access to computer labs	✓	✓	✓
Access to the Internet			✓

Reentry planning that begins in prison and facilitates continued progress toward credential attainment after release

Including education plans in formal DOC reentry planning practices	✓		✓
Application assistance for students before release, including collecting transcripts	✓	✓	✓

Policy and practice implementation to support education programs in corrections settings

MOU between colleges and corrections agency	✓	✓	✓
Written code of conduct for students	✓		✓
Training for faculty teaching in prison	✓	✓	
Training for DOC staff working in project prisons	✓		✓
Incentive pay for students participating in college	✓		✓
Qualification for good time/earned time			✓
Transfer holds (within prison)	✓	✓	✓
Student advisory boards, focus groups, or town hall meetings	✓	✓	✓

Activities after release from prison

Community supervision practices that support persistence in postsecondary education (such as reexamination of curfews, required meeting times, work requirements, and prohibitions of associating with known felons)

Dedicated reentry communities	✓		✓
Training for supervision agents on education priorities	✓		✓
Peer networks of formerly incarcerated students		✓	✓

	Michigan	New Jersey	North Carolina
Peer navigators/counselors at college in the community	✓	✓	✓
Financial support to released participants	✓		✓
Meaningful engagement of a group of government agencies, community-based organizations, and employers in the implementation of the project (for example, by forming a leadership group to coordinate services available to people after release)			
Regular implementation meetings among key partners	✓	✓	✓
Formal or informal partnerships with community-based reentry support organizations and agencies	✓	✓	✓
Activities to foster stakeholder engagement, policy change, and sustainability			
Plan for an external outcome evaluation to test the effects of the Pathways model on recidivism, employment and earnings, family, and community, as well as a cost-benefit analysis and a mid-project process evaluation.*			
Randomization	✓		✓
Quasi-experimental design		✓	
Process evaluation	✓	✓	✓
Cost-benefit analysis	✓	✓	✓
Outreach to state and federal policymakers to build awareness of the project and support for policy change that would ensure sustainability after the close of the demonstration project.			
Information sharing with state policymakers	✓	✓	✓
Information sharing with federal agencies and policymakers	✓	✓	✓

*The Pathways project includes plans for an outcome evaluation and a cost-benefit analysis. (See “Preparing for evaluation” at page 24.) The funds for this evaluation have not yet been secured.

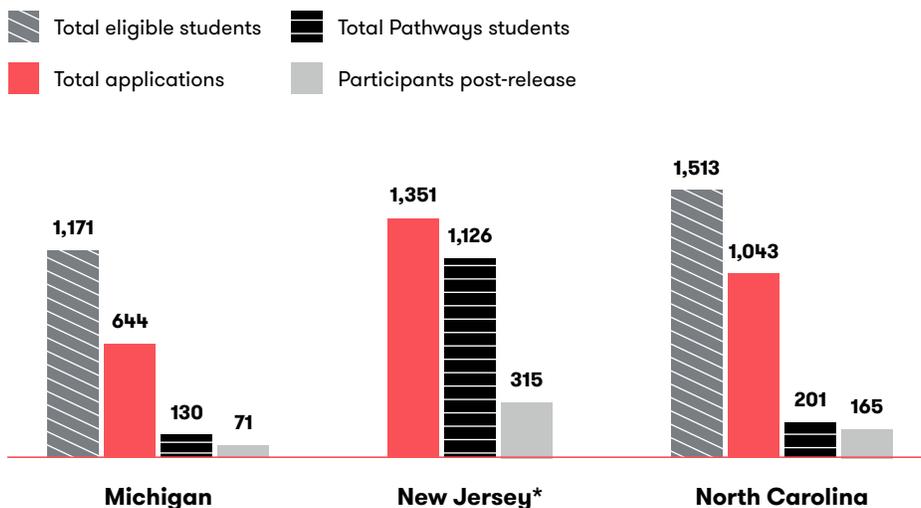
Pathways in prison

“I didn’t even know how to get into college if it wasn’t for [the program]. . . . I never had so much help in my entire life.”

All three states elected to use Pathways funding to overcome the primary hurdle to postsecondary education in prison: the ability of students to pay for college courses. All three decided to fund courses using a per-class structure: colleges agreed to teach courses based on a contracted price per class rather than receiving individual tuition from each enrolled student, enabling the states to serve a greater number of participants with their grant funds. In North Carolina, this fit into the agreement already in place between NCDPS and NCCCS and, in New Jersey, the grants that predated Pathways were structured the same way.

Figure 2

Pathways students



*The New Jersey programs used a rolling admissions model to recruit students, drawing participants from throughout the state corrections system.

In Michigan, however, this approach was a departure from the previous practice that relied on students paying for individual courses. In addition to paying course fees, the sites used Pathways funding to develop academic supports, facilitate education-focused reentry planning, and implement policies and practices in prison that supported education.

Educational offerings and academic supports in prison

“Going to school was good for me . . . because having people come in, instructors . . . they didn’t treat us any different than another student. . . . They treated us with utmost respect. . . . I thought that part was great, that they could come in and not be scared and treat us like we were human beings.”

“This might sound weird: Being in this program, it . . . made me feel I guess in a sense human again, while I was in such an inhumane place. Picking up textbooks, doing homework and studying and stuff like that was definitely positive vibes for me. . . . [It] is mind-blowing for me to be able to say that although I made a mistake, I was still in a position to better myself.”

Offering typical course loads and the academic supports available on most college campuses (such as libraries, access, and advisers) to students in prison is a challenge, particularly in systems long divorced from providing serious reentry preparation to people in their custody. Pathways was designed and Vera’s technical assistance to states was delivered with the recognition that the participating states would need to tackle these parts of the model with ingenuity and persistence. The following sections describe what each state did—and some of the challenges and the most inventive strategies the Pathways sites employed to overcome those challenges.

Michigan

The MDOC education staff had offered a variety of classes and training opportunities prior to Pathways. As the project began, Jackson College, a

community college located in south central Michigan, became the higher education partner for the program. Two men's facilities were selected for Pathways: Macomb and Parnall correctional institutions. To be eligible, applicants had to be nearing two years until their release from prison; they had to intend to return to one of the pilot communities, the cities of Kalamazoo and Pontiac (or an area nearby); and they must have completed high school.

Offering typical course loads and the academic supports available on most college campuses to students in prison is a challenge, particularly in systems long divorced from providing serious reentry preparation to people in their custody.

MDOC staff conducted a variety of academic, vocational, and college-readiness assessments and completed college plans for each student, while Jackson College administered a college placement test (the ACCUPLACER) and assigned students to developmental or credit-bearing work accordingly. To earn Michigan Transfer Certificates, students in prison completed 30 credits of general education requirements, with a minimum grade of 2.0 in each course. The credits were transferable to any institution that adhered to the Michigan Transfer Agreement.²⁵ Jackson College offered courses in English composition, natural and social sciences, mathematics, and, at students' request, entrepreneurship. The college identified early on that many students also needed developmental education before they would be academically prepared to enroll in a credit-bearing college course.

MDOC sought to cultivate peer learning communities in which students lived and studied together at the two participating prisons. Students

lived together, had access to study halls at all times until institutional lights out, and participated in peer tutoring. Jackson College also provided academic supports to students, including access to a computer lab, although it was not connected to the Internet. (MDOC also offered digital literacy training that awarded a Microsoft-issued certificate of completion.) The college also ran college success and study skills workshops for students during the first year of the program, giving them a shared understanding of the college experience and the tools they would need.

The college provided on-site academic advising once or twice per semester, including transcript review, assessment of credits needed to complete an Associate in Arts (AA) degree, and finalization of course schedules for the next semester. This is a transferable liberal arts degree that enables students to continue toward a bachelor's degree at a public or private college or university. Provided initially by college faculty, the advising was later taken over by Student Services, the on-campus department responsible for offering academic advising to all students. Eventually the college assigned each Pathways student a student success navigator who traveled to the prison to meet with each student two or three times each semester.

Jackson College identified a need for additional assistance outside of class time and coordinated the assistance of 12 writing fellows from its main campus to work with each Pathways student 10 to 12 times per semester.²⁶ After the first year of the Pathways program, Jackson College began enrolling some of the incarcerated students as writing fellows, who provided assistance to their peers inside; the school also made the same kinds of fellowships available to students on the outside.

New Jersey

Eight colleges taught in seven prisons as part of the NJ-STEP consortium.²⁷ To be eligible to enroll in college through NJ-STEP, applicants must have completed high school and be cleared by NJDOC to participate; unlike students in Michigan and North Carolina, they did not have to be within two years of release. NJ-STEP offered an AA degree in liberal studies to students in prison. In the final year of the project, it also offered a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree program in justice studies.

NJ-STEP recruited participants every year to two years in each facility. After seeing high attrition among newly recruited students, NJ-STEP

Figure 3

Pathways courses, credits and credentials

In-prison program	Michigan	New Jersey	North Carolina
Developmental courses offered	1	119	70
Credit-bearing courses offered	50	555	96
Continuing education courses offered	*	*	23
Total credits earned	441	23,547	3,750
Total credentials earned	76	110	259
Certificates	69	*	259
Associate in Arts degrees	7	110	*
Associate of Applied Science degrees	*	*	0
Bachelor of Arts degrees	*	0	*
Post-release program	Michigan	New Jersey	North Carolina
Total credits earned	**	1,720	1,552
Total credentials earned	4	7	15
Certificates	0	*	2
Associate in Arts degrees	3	7	5
Associate of Applied Science degrees	*	*	8
Bachelor of Arts degrees	1	0	0

*These were not part of the state’s program.

**This information will be collected for the evaluation.

added a letter of interest and an interview to the application process to assess prospective participants' commitment to college. All newly enrolled students took a semester-long "college success" course that introduced relevant practices such as group discussions and study skills.

Due to its rolling admissions policy, NJ-STEP elected not to randomize its admissions (a key step to preparing for an evaluation of the most rigorous type: a randomized controlled trial) but to pursue a quasi-experimental design at the evaluation phase. Some students in New Jersey prisons had already enrolled in college through the schools that participated in Project Inside, and NJ-STEP sought funding to continue offering college in prison after the end of the Pathways project. Thus the opportunity for college might come up multiple times during a person's sentence. Because NJ-STEP did not use a cohort model, students moved through the program from different starting points and at different paces.

Because of this, one of NJ-STEP's priorities was figuring out which credits each student had already earned. This involved collecting transcripts from the colleges, working with the articulating college to transfer those credits, and conducting degree audits to determine the courses students needed to take to complete an AA or a BA.²⁸ With this complicated system of more than 550 students and eight colleges teaching 77 courses every semester, NJ-STEP invested in registration software called Edvance to enable it to track students who had earned credits from multiple institutions.

The complexity of this academic program made clear communication essential among the New Jersey partners. NJ-STEP developed several staff positions to coordinate operations, including a registrar/data manager to track credit completion (as described above), an institutional liaison to serve as the point of contact for requests from prison education staff and college faculty, and academic counselors to guide students through their academic programs.²⁹ NJDOC also revised its staffing structure, creating a position in the education director's office to coordinate facility-based staff who work with all education programs. During the second year of the project, NJ-STEP and NJDOC began holding monthly implementation meetings, which Vera staff also attended. The meetings covered both granular and high-level implementation issues, ranging from determining the dates of NJDOC trainings for incoming faculty to making plans to expand the program to a new prison.

NJ-STEP and NJDOC provided academic supports to students. NJ-STEP hired academic counselors to work in prison, advising students on credits they needed to complete a degree, applying to colleges in the community, and completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). In one facility, NJDOC grouped students together in housing units. In all facilities, students had limited access to existing computer labs, but like students in Michigan, they had no Internet access. The New Jersey program developed work-arounds to provide academic library access. Students relied on academic counselors and faculty to supply materials necessary to complete their research projects.³⁰

Preparing for evaluation

As part of the first phase of the evaluation, RAND and RTI International (RTI) provided research assistance to the three sites. This included developing data-collection protocols. Each corrections department created unique identifiers in their data systems for Pathways students and implemented systems for tracking their engagement with support services such as tutoring, mentoring, study halls, and computer labs. Colleges tracked student enrollment. (Because student records are protected under federal law, project partners had to secure students' approval for the release of their information.)

The second phase of the evaluation, which includes the outcome evaluation and cost-benefit analysis, is expected to begin in 2019, when the last cohorts of Pathways students will have been out of prison for a minimum of three years, the amount of time RAND and RTI proposed to use in measuring recidivism, employment, postsecondary credential attainment, and other outcomes. This phase of the proposed evaluation is pending full funding.

North Carolina

North Carolina selected seven of its 66 prisons for the Pathways program, including one women's facility and six men's facilities.³¹ To be eligible, applicants had to be nearing two years until their release, they had to intend to return to one of the pilot communities (Asheville in Buncombe County, Charlotte in Mecklenburg County, or Greenville in Pitt County), and must have completed high school. Once enrolled, students in North Carolina could complete up to 30 credits in prison over several semesters. Four community colleges partnered with NCDPS to provide classes in the prisons. The colleges offered developmental, career and technical, and

general education courses that led to a certificate in business administration, computer information technology or, initially, entrepreneurship. (The entrepreneurship certificate was later replaced by distribution credits that could transfer toward a certificate or an associate's degree in business administration.)

NCDPS sought to create a learning community in the participating prisons. The agency assigned students to dedicated living areas and created structured study halls for students, facilitated by staff from the community colleges. Recognizing that attending college full time would preclude students from having prison jobs, the program offered them attendance and incentive payments.³² NCDPS also developed academic supports for students, including three hours of study hall every week and one hour of daily computer lab access. The college partners provided academic advising that included helping students select colleges that would accept the credits earned in prison per the articulation agreements among North Carolina colleges.

To support consistent implementation in the seven participating prisons, NCDPS developed a manual of Pathways standard operating procedures. It laid out the goals and purposes of the project and instructions on implementing the program model, specifying, among other things, time in class with faculty; the number of hours prescribed for computer labs and study halls; the policy for visitation hours for students missing regular visiting hours because of classes; recruitment and removal policies; orientation materials; and walk-throughs for staff on the use of the data collection tools NCDPS developed to capture student engagement with the program. (See Appendix E at page 65 for the manual's introduction and table of contents.)

Challenges and innovations in prison programs

As the Pathways sites implemented their programs, colleges and corrections agencies encountered challenges to providing high-quality postsecondary education in prison. In many instances, these challenges spurred innovative solutions.

Figure 4

Pathways academic supports

In-prison program	Michigan	New Jersey	North Carolina
Total tutoring hours	4,876	699	15,214
Total college applications submitted	18	84	8
Total transcripts collected	17	74	20
Post-release program	Michigan	New Jersey	North Carolina
Total tutoring hours	0	913	16
Total mentoring hours	203	1,852	0
Total college applications submitted	48	84	99

Bringing the 21st-century college into prison

“Everything was exciting, people were challenging each other in the way that allowed you to properly, you know, go against the guy next to you without posturing or making it physical. You would challenge each other based on facts and not assumptions. We were writing papers and it was just exciting.”

As Vera developed the Pathways model and spoke with many experienced providers of higher education in prison, Vera staff anticipated some of the likely challenges in trying to bring such different cultures and institutional priorities together for a common task. But the corrections departments and the colleges proved that they were committed and able to work through difficult issues as implementation progressed.

Each state proposed to offer multiple supports to students in prison, including academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, study space, access to computers, housing and, in North Carolina, Internet service. Through these supports, project partners sought to replicate the services available on a college campus as much as possible.

Making the most of students' time while incarcerated

“I got arrested and I went to the county jail. It was only a month, but [until this program, I thought] that was it for school.”

As Pathways began, the students selected in all three states had had varying levels of educational attainment and time since their last formal education. They'd also had different experiences with formal education prior to joining the Pathways program, ranging from early negative perceptions to high achievements and almost everything in between. Some participants had experienced success in high school—advanced placement courses, awards, and successful college applications—that was abruptly interrupted by struggles with substance use or an arrest and incarceration.³³ The Pathways colleges had to address those differences.

Each state proposed to offer multiple supports to students in prison, including academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, study space, access to computers, housing and, in North Carolina, Internet service.

In Michigan, having learned through its main campus that some students need only a brief reminder of the material typically covered in developmental courses, Jackson College enrolled all Pathways participants in an intensive three-week rapid-review module designed for students testing two levels below credit-bearing courses. (More advanced students were also enrolled but served as tutors to their classmates.) The college then ran 12-week developmental and credit-bearing math courses that began at the close of the review module. Instructors then completed an individualized assessment of each student, including an

interview—and either kept them at the same course level for another 12 weeks, moved them up a developmental level, or moved them into a credit-bearing course. This model allowed students to move from developmental into credit-bearing coursework within a single semester, greatly advancing their academic progress. Jackson College saw 80 percent of its incarcerated students move into higher-level courses after the rapid-review course.

All three states made efforts to provide individualized academic advising to maximize students' advancement while they were incarcerated. New Jersey brought on five full-time academic counselors to work in the prisons and made advising on course selection a core aspect of their work. In North Carolina, which enrolled cohorts, students did not need guidance in selecting courses, as only specific courses were offered in a facility each semester and were scheduled to enable students to move through the program in the appropriate sequence. The courses were arranged to move students through the programs and toward credentials on a set timetable. In Michigan, initially faculty—and later Student Services staff—from the main college campus provided academic advising. Working with a single college, Michigan was able to integrate routine advising into its prison program. But despite the planning and advising college staff and faculty provided, students did not always fully understand the structure of the degree programs or the reasons they had to take certain courses.³⁴ This suggests that the strategies staff used when advising students may not have met everyone's needs.

Policy and practice recommendations

- First, programs must work creatively with policy and resource restrictions. For example, if policy barriers exist to offering credentials designed for transfer (such as in North Carolina, where students could only earn terminal career-technical education credentials), they should consider front-loading the transferable credits these credentials do require. Not all students will be able to finish a credential in prison. Front-loading the transferable credits they earn enables them to continue their education on release, regardless of the region where they study. If programs front-load nontransferable credits and students leave prison and move to a different region, they may complete several semesters' worth of work but have no credits to transfer, forcing them to start over.
- Second, in addition to study and research skills, students beginning higher education in prison need a broad overview of the basic requirements to obtain a degree or certificate, including specific coursework to complete the credential. The overview should also provide an orientation that guides students' understanding of the balance between obtaining marketable skills and acquiring the foundations of a higher education and the critical thinking and broader worldview that should entail.

Access to textbooks, library materials, and academic supports in prison

Every college campus has at least one central library—and perhaps specialized libraries—that all students have access to by dint of their enrollment. Campus bookstores sell commonly needed textbooks. Professors can require their students to read books and journal articles with confidence that they will have access to them. In prison, there is no academic library or bookstore. Programs must obtain books and journals needed for each course from outside the facility in sufficient quantity and on schedule, making timely access and provision major difficulties. Keeping a ready supply of common textbooks on hand for several courses—and for 75 to 150 students in one facility—is a challenge in often overcrowded institutions that may have already turned recreation and counseling space into housing units.

In Michigan, Jackson College developed a system for providing access to library materials from its main campus. Faculty who were teaching courses in prison assisted students in filling out research request forms and submitted them to the campus librarians. Within two weeks, librarians collected the materials and notified the faculty member, who brought the materials to students in the prison.

Because of its large enrollment, the management of textbooks was a major challenge for NJ-STEP. As courses offered at each facility rotated, getting books to students at the start of each semester was difficult. Prisons had limited space for storing textbook libraries that grew to include thousands of books during the project. Before Pathways concluded, Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC), the articulation partner, worked with supply-chain management students at the college campus to develop a distribution and retrieval model for the books. Counselors and students determined which courses they needed to take to complete their AA. NJ-STEP set a tentative course schedule for the upcoming semester and submitted book and material requirements to the education coordinator at NJDOC for clearance. Once students registered, NJ-STEP determined the number of books needed in each facility and RVCC delivered the books. NJ-STEP counselors walked them from the prison's front gate to the classroom. Once the semester ended, students returned their books and NJ-STEP academic counselors walked them to the front gate, where RVCC staff retrieved them.

Policy and practice recommendations

- Colleges and prisons need a plan for how they will acquire, provide, and store books and other materials required for students' coursework before classes begin—or risk delaying students' advancement.
- Prisons hosting college programs need to plan for spaces where students can study, away from the routine bustle and noise of facilities.

Access to computers and the Internet

Most jobs now require proficiency with computer software and basic Internet applications. Unfortunately, most prisons have few opportunities for incarcerated people to interact with technology or develop technical skills. These were challenges for the college programs, because higher education programs in the community often use digital tools in their teaching methods and a college degree often implies to employers a certain proficiency with computer applications, such as the Microsoft Office Suite.

In Michigan, students had access to a computer lab, although it was not connected to the Internet, and MDOC offered digital literacy training that awarded a Microsoft-issued certificate of completion. In New Jersey, students in all facilities had limited access to existing computer labs but, like students in Michigan, they had no access to the Internet.

Effective communication strategies were essential for project partners (colleges and corrections), students, and education and custody staff in prisons.

North Carolina made the decision to offer students monitored Internet access to approved websites. Pathways funding made possible the construction of computer labs in all seven pilot facilities, creating the first opportunity for NCDPS to experiment with providing filtered Internet access in prison. In addition to building firewalls, NCDPS installed

software that allowed all computer activity, including websites visited, to be monitored by log-in credentials from a central computer.

NCDPS ran into two major challenges in implementing live Internet service: connectivity issues and problems with the firewalls. First, in constructing the computer labs, NCDPS chose laptops for some prisons and connected them to the Internet using Wi-Fi. These prisons had significant connectivity issues and NCDPS information technology (IT) staff determined that the construction materials used in the prison hindered the Wi-Fi signal from reaching the laptops. To resolve the issue, NCDPS switched from Wi-Fi to wired Internet access. Second, NCDPS initially applied two firewall filters to limit access to websites not approved by NCDPS and/or related to the syllabi for the college courses. After students gained access to websites that were not on the approved list, NCDPS determined that applying two filters had the effect of canceling each other out. The IT staff revised its approach, selecting just one filter that allowed access to only approved sites. NCDPS continued implementation despite these setbacks, and students attested to the benefits of having Internet access while in prison, both for their academic performance after release and as a crucial life skill.

Policy and practice recommendations

In addition to the benefit to students and their employment prospects after release, Internet access, with appropriate security protocols, may solve problems described earlier in obtaining academic journals and other research materials.

North Carolina found a way to make this work safely and, if adopted elsewhere, this approach would enable more students to finish their coursework in prison faster and be better prepared for college work after their release.

Communication

The three Pathways states found that effective communication strategies were essential for project partners (colleges and corrections), students, and education and custody staff in prisons.

Institutional partners

In the second year of the project, all three states developed implementation teams that brought together college and corrections partners and held regular implementation meetings to address goals and challenges.

These ranged from the specific—such as the type of regalia faculty could wear during graduation ceremonies—to the big picture, such as when and how to bring new prisons into the project. Vera staff initially called these meetings after miscommunication and confusion led to tensions among the partners in each state. In New Jersey, the meetings began after Vera brought the college and corrections partners together to resolve ongoing difficulties and come to consensus on a set of common goals. When this seemed to reenergize the New Jersey project staff, Vera suggested similar meetings in North Carolina and Michigan. The partners in Michigan agreed to meet monthly. In North Carolina, NCDPS and the partner colleges had developed a working relationship before the Pathways project, and their staff and faculty members continued to meet when issues arose that needed their attention. Officials from NCDPS also met regularly with the three local reentry councils to address local issues and monitor student progress and problems post-release.

Policy and practice recommendations

As institutions, corrections and colleges have extremely different purposes and cultures. Even when all partners are committed to success, working together on a common goal requires careful, deliberate, organized channels of communication and formal agreements about their operation. A third-party facilitator—the role Vera played

during Pathways—can help identify and clarify issues and challenges, negotiate solutions to problems and obstacles, and develop an implementation plan. The more thoughtfully communication processes are devised and the earlier they are put in place, the more likely the program is to succeed.

Students

The experience of the Pathways sites highlights the importance of creating a formal mechanism for input from incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. All three states experienced initial difficulties in their communication with students in prison. North Carolina developed its Pathways model drawing on input from focus groups conducted inside the prisons the state hoped would host the college program. These conversations highlighted the need to provide some type of compensation to students who would have to give up their prison work assignments—and the modest wages they generated—to enroll in college full time. Without this small amount of money, prison life can be even

harder.³⁵ Based on this input, North Carolina developed an incentive pay structure for students.

In one prison in New Jersey, NJDOC housed students together in a single housing unit; they studied and traveled to class together, forming a learning community inside the prison. Students living in this unit raised concerns to NJ-STEP staff about one corrections officer who, they argued, made it difficult for them to arrive to class on time and made derogatory remarks about their studies. They eventually expressed their frustration through a sit-in, which escalated to an altercation between the officer and the students. The seriousness of the situation brought home to NJDOC education staff the cracks that can develop in a program if custody staff do not support the goals of the work. NJDOC worked with the custody management team and ultimately found a solution that allowed the program to continue.³⁶

In Michigan, communications problems were also resolved after MDOC established student advisory boards at both Pathways facilities. Misinformation had reached students in one facility about the future of the program and the ability of incarcerated students to complete their AAs while in prison. This caused great distress and anxiety among program participants. The program administrators held a series of town hall meetings in the prisons to speak with students directly and then created the advisory boards. The boards met monthly and regularly included the college's dean and/or the director of the Prison Education Initiative, the MDOC's director of education or her representative, and the warden or

Policy and practice recommendations

- Pathways and other college programs in prison are intended to be transformative for the students, their families, and their communities. Such transformation must be rooted in respect for people who are incarcerated as human beings: as parents, siblings, and children, and as contributors to society in the future—and in the past. Incarcerated students have intrinsic worth and dignity. People, their opinions, and their ideas deserve care and consideration. One way top corrections officials and administrators can reinforce that sense of respect is to convey to all department staff their commitment to higher education in prison.
- Devising formal and self-determined channels for incarcerated students (and others who are incarcerated) to speak with one another and to those in authority can help make them likelier to succeed after their release. Such avenues can increase people's sense of dignity and agency—crucial to leading a productive life after prison. These formal mechanisms can also help corrections staff to identify many kinds of problems early and help devise solutions that prevent disruption or violence.

deputy warden of the facility. Interested students were invited to join the advisory boards and this allowed natural leaders to emerge, increased the buy-in of other Pathways participants, and built more trust between students and the MDOC. The boards became extensions of the students' classroom education, as participants became skilled at listening to their peers, prioritizing their concerns, and advocating in a professional and productive manner. The boards reduced repeat complaints to the administration and the spread of misinformation.

Reentry planning in prison

“The collateral benefits kind of outweighed the main goal . . . adding structure and giving me a sense of purpose and self-efficacy that you know, I otherwise didn’t have.”

Much of the public believes that the main job of corrections is preparing people who are incarcerated for a productive life after prison.³⁷ Although this mission has been lost in some states and never cultivated in others, preparation for release is an integral part of the Pathways model. Prisons may not be able to prepare those they incarcerate for every aspect of 21st-century life, but as the Pathways states demonstrated, they can do a great deal.

Michigan

MDOC assigned an employment counselor to each of the two facilities to work with the Pathways students. The counselors had access to tools to help students understand the industries with the greatest growth and need in the communities to which they were returning.³⁸ Given the transferable nature of the credits students earned in prison, this information could help them select the credential they wanted to complete after their release.

Incarcerated students approaching release in Michigan were also able to take advantage of the well-established reentry system that the state government funds and MDOC runs. (See “Pathways development in each state” at page 12.) One of the foundations of this system is the reentry planning team, which may include the community reentry coordinator, the reentry navigator, the prison reentry coordinator, the community parole agent and the institutional parole agent, the warden, the police chief or representative, potential employers, a college representative and other community stakeholders, as well as employment counselors, who attended to support the

student in communicating about the Pathways program and their educational and career goals. This team develops a concrete plan in collaboration with the incarcerated person, including establishing clear points of contact in the community at reentry agencies and organizations.

Before students' release, MDOC staff offered programs to prepare them for reentry and life outside prison. These included cognitive-behavioral therapy, life skills, financial literacy, soft-skills training, substance use treatment, and strategies for family reintegration. Whenever possible prior to

Prisons may not be able to prepare those they incarcerate for every aspect of 21st-century life, but as the Pathways states demonstrated, they can do a great deal.

release, MDOC staff also helped them set up appointments with community agencies such as MiWorks and the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA), whose staff could assist them with securing many basic needs, such as housing, health insurance, bus passes, and clothing. MDOC staff also assisted them in signing up for government support programs, such as state health insurance, Social Security Disability Insurance, and SNAP food assistance. Jackson College contributed by helping students complete the FAFSA as their release date approached.

New Jersey

As people near their release date, NJDOC assigns them to a pre-release unit, provides intensive reentry planning, and assists them in completing any outstanding treatment required as a condition of their sentencing. During this intensive period of treatment and programming, NJ-STEP has limited contact with students because their time is devoted to these other pre-release priorities.

Some incarcerated people leave this unit and go to the Residential Community Release Program (RCRP), which requires residence in halfway houses run by NJDOC contractors. Although residents remain in NJDOC custody and contractors must meet certain requirements, each RCRP house sets its own policies and rules for residents. Even though some of the RCRPs permit residents to attend college, the contracts renewed by NJDOC just before the start of Pathways did not prioritize postsecondary education. This left the decision up to each house whether to allow college enrollment and attendance.

To encourage permission for enrollment, NJ-STEP and NJDOC cultivated relationships and informal agreements with RCRP house staff, holding individual meetings with RCRP administrators and scheduling presentations from NJ-STEP at statewide meetings, with the goal of enabling residents to leave their halfway house to attend college. These approaches were not always successful, and Pathways students' access to college while living in an RCRP varied. Once in a halfway house, students were eligible for state and federal financial aid programs and could pay for their education directly.

North Carolina

As students approached release, college personnel assisted them in filling out the FAFSA. Staff of the NCDPS collected their transcripts and filed them with the other papers provided to people at release, including identification (such as state-issued documents and Social Security numbers) and evidence of high school completion and any other accomplishments achieved during prison.

North Carolina also drew on Michigan's example and developed community-based "success teams" made up of relevant community- and prison-based staff who help each incarcerated person develop a reentry plan. In the case of Pathways students, these teams included a dedicated case manager, prison education staff, a staff member from the community supervision agency, and college instructors. Students met with the team prior to release, either in person or through teleconference, to prepare an individual release plan that addressed housing, employment, family reunification, health insurance, public benefits, clothing, and any needed mental health or substance use treatment.

Two additional resources were added to the success teams for Pathways students. The North Carolina Employment and Training Project

trained success coaches from the community colleges on human resource development, continuing education, and support services to help them aid students in their transition planning.³⁹ To build stronger connections between the program in prison and the NCDPS supervision staff in the community, NCDPS also added two staff liaisons to Pathways who had backgrounds in community supervision.

Policy and practice recommendations

Incarcerated people may have little or no previous experience with higher education. The navigators, coaches, and counselors who were part of Pathways programs performed essential services for their students. These positions cost money. Although these costs were paid with private funds from the five foundations that supported Pathways, public funds for these roles are essential to help

students continue their education after prison. Officials who oversee state budgets should consider that the likely payoff from intensive assistance before release in terms of public safety, economic development, and other benefits is extraordinarily valuable—and should create and staff the necessary positions within their own jurisdictions.

Reentry and life after prison

“I’ve seen people get out of prison and do good, but I’ve seen everybody that’s gotten out of prison that’s been in this program—a lot of them are doing really great. Because they had a chance, you know? They had a second chance to do something.”

“My biggest success is that I got out and I continued my education.”

The staff working with Pathways students who were leaving prison assisted them in reaching their educational goals and returning to normal life in the community.

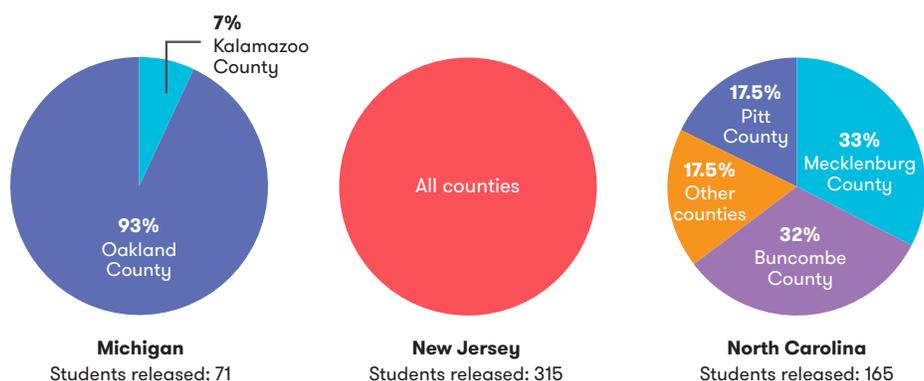
In many ways, supporting college enrollment immediately after release from prison is more complex than making it available in prison. As implementation progressed, it became clear that completion of a credential within two years of release was not just challenging, but possibly an unrealistic goal. Like other nontraditional students, people recently released from prison have many demands on their time and face competing financial, familial, and other pressures. They may not be able to attend college full time, which makes completing most credentials out of reach in a two-year time frame (other than certificates, which typically require fewer than 25 credits).

Even in states that helped students find housing and identify transitional jobs—and provided cash support in the first months after their release—participants had to learn to juggle their time between work and school; reconnect with family, especially children; comply with supervision conditions; and secure an income to meet their basic needs.

The psychosocial impact of release from prison is an additional challenge to these students. In the period immediately after prison, people who were recently released may suffer from anxiety in crowds and during everyday interactions such as paying for items in a store. They may struggle to learn or relearn how to use rapidly advancing consumer technology in

Figure 5

Students released to Pathways reentry communities



order to navigate transit systems, smart phones, and online banking, and often suffer a profound destabilization in their sense of self as they move abruptly from the structured environment in prison to an entirely new social experience outside.⁴⁰

In Michigan and North Carolina, some attrition occurred as returning students found it necessary to prioritize family and delay or abandon their plans for college. Despite this, maintaining contact with students in both states was relatively easy for the project managers who worked in corrections agencies, because their reentry plans incorporated community supervision agencies and established connections with reentry service providers. Even if students did not continue college after release, they did complete their supervision terms. But in New Jersey, it was challenging to find and reconnect with students after they had completed their six- to 12-month stay in NJDOC's prerelease unit and were living throughout the state in halfway houses, other transitional housing, or with family.

Michigan: Continuing studies in two communities

Michigan selected Kalamazoo and Pontiac (Oakland County) as reentry communities for two reasons. First, the prisons where Pathways operated were already designated as reentry facilities for people returning to these locations. Second, both are among the 10 cities statewide with the greatest number of people returning from prison and both already had networks of community organizations and state agencies that support reentry. As part

of the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative, the providers were receiving funds from the state to provide related services.

Of the 130 students who enrolled in Pathways, 66 left prison for Pontiac and five left for Kalamazoo. At the close of the project, 59 participants were still in prison awaiting release. In the Pontiac area, students enrolled in community colleges in Oakland County and Wayne County, where they had access to free tutoring and study skills workshops. Nearly all of them paid for college through the state and federal financial aid programs for which they were eligible. In Kalamazoo, students received employment assistance through the Michigan Works! Association, but none reenrolled in college during the project period.

In many ways, supporting college enrollment immediately after release from prison is more complex than making it available in prison.

Academic supports. Students in Pontiac also had access to academic supports through the multiservice provider OLHSA. The agency offered mentoring and classes focused on information and skills that could aid successful reentry and gave support to clients seeking family reunification and housing. OLHSA also hired system navigators to help students learn how to access services on the college campus. The navigators assisted with enrollment and attended admissions and financial aid meetings with students to help them gain and understand critical information for continuing college. They also set up study groups for Pathways participants to connect with formerly incarcerated peers. The groups held their meetings away from the main campus, allowing a welcome space for people to discuss their experiences as formerly incarcerated students in a place where they wouldn't face stigma for disclosing that history.

Parole practices. To facilitate supportive supervision practices, MDOC assigned Pathways students to the caseloads of two designated parole officers in Pontiac who were trained on the program's goals. In Kalamazoo, several parole officers supervised students, and MDOC encouraged them to make reasonable accommodations in setting meeting times, curfews, and mandatory employment requirements.

New Jersey: Studying at Rutgers and beyond

As it came together as a consortium in 2012, NJ-STEP had incorporated a small program, the Mountainview Program (later, the Mountainview Communities, or MVC), into its model. Prior to its involvement with NJ-STEP and Pathways, MVC operated on Rutgers University's New Brunswick campus and encouraged people leaving Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility in New Jersey to apply for admission to Rutgers. MVC had developed strong partnerships with the university's admissions staff and other gatekeepers, such as the financial aid office.

Academic supports. As a part of Pathways, MVC began a concerted effort to engage students who had completed or nearly completed an AA degree in prison, encouraging them to continue their educations at Rutgers after release. MVC then expanded, first to the Rutgers Newark campus and then to its Camden campus, and later extended its services to support students attending community colleges throughout the state.

At the Rutgers campuses, MVC coached applicants through the admissions process, including responding to questions about criminal history. MVC staff led application review meetings that included key admissions staff, MVC, and Rutgers public safety staff, with the goal of presenting a well-rounded picture that included but did not overly emphasize an applicant's criminal history. Once admitted, MVC students attended an orientation to familiarize them with the campus and connect them with other students.

Throughout their studies at Rutgers, students had access to two MVC staff members who provided academic advising, assistance in finding and applying for campus jobs, and support identifying and connecting to

campus-based services such as mental health and substance use treatment, mentoring, tutoring, and legal assistance. These staff were invited to regular meetings of MVC students to facilitate peer networking and support.

Graduation ceremonies and academic counseling. Before the campus held its commencement every year, MVC held a graduation ceremony at which students were called up individually, invited to speak, and given stoles embroidered with their names, the date, and the letters MVC to wear during the event. Faculty who had taught in prison, those from the main campus, and family and other loved ones were invited to attend the ceremony, which often included high-ranking college administrators, such as provosts and deans.

Not all New Jersey Pathways students enrolled at Rutgers University. In serving seven prisons across the state, NJ-STEP's biggest hurdle was following students to the many community colleges where they might enroll and offering services that included at least some of the features of its robust university support program. NJ-STEP facilitated this by reorienting the roles of the academic counselors to focus more broadly on reentry and developing a new staff position geared toward assisting students in completing their degrees at community colleges. The program's five academic counselors traveled to prisons nearly every day, sometimes covering hundreds of miles in a week to meet with students.

North Carolina: Coordinating services and navigating college

In North Carolina, Pathways began at a time when the state was implementing new policies related to reentry, having passed sentencing reform legislation in the year before Pathways began. In its implementation of Pathways, NCDPS took advantage of two parts of the 2011 Justice Reinvestment Act: the department's newly reinvigorated community supervision function and the newly established local reentry councils (LRCs).⁴¹ The LRCs were charged with providing coordination and oversight of existing services in local communities, using state funds to support reentry needs identified at the local level.⁴² In order to receive reentry supports, North Carolina required Pathways participants, upon release, to select

from one of the designated reentry communities, each of which had an LRC. Fifty-three people selected Buncombe County, 54 chose Mecklenburg County, and 29 opted for Pitt County. Another 29 people elected to leave the project and return to their home communities or to other locations when they were released.

Organizational supports. Although the state's new LRC structure was based on a model similar to Michigan's approach, the LRCs were just beginning to form partnerships and identify reentry services when Pathways began. For this reason, the NCDPS's director of Rehabilitation Programs and Services and the Pathways liaisons provided significant support to the LRCs, helping build relationships between coordinators and potential partners, troubleshooting Pathways implementation, and facilitating communication among the LRCs and other Pathways partners. With this collaboration, a part- or full-time coordinator staffed each council and was responsible for locating transitional housing and identifying public benefits, education programs, and job training for which recently released people could be eligible, as well as seeking affordable mental health and substance use treatment and encouraging local employers to hire formerly incarcerated workers.

Many of these supports from LRCs were also available to other formerly incarcerated people, including clothing, food, transitional housing (and rent assistance), bus passes, and help finding jobs. For Pathways students, NCDPS also provided cash supports and materials to be available through the LRCs, including a laptop and backpacks with school supplies. When filing for financial aid, some students found they had outstanding federal student loans that had fallen into default and that they were therefore ineligible for state and federal aid. NCDPS used Pathways funds to cover the enrollment costs of these students while they rehabilitated their loans.⁴³

Additional staffing. North Carolina also provided funds to hire a Pathways navigator at each LRC.⁴⁴ The navigators formed relationships with gatekeeping staff (for example, at the financial aid, registrar's, and bursar's offices) at local community colleges. They introduced Pathways students to key staff in those offices and coached them through the interactions needed to enroll. Navigators also introduced Pathways students

to additional on-campus supports, such as access to food pantries, free assistance with filing taxes, programs that provided additional tutoring, computer skills classes, and jobs through Federal Work-Study. Pathways navigators played an important role in organizing social gatherings for the students and their families, such as basketball teams, lunches, and other activities. NCDPS and the LRCs prioritized hiring formerly incarcerated people for these positions—or those who had experience working with incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people.⁴⁵

Challenges and innovations in the community

As the Pathways sites sought to connect students with colleges in the community and assist them in reestablishing their lives after prison, colleges and corrections agencies encountered considerable challenges. As was true when implementing the prison portion of the program, in many instances these challenges spurred innovative solutions.

Parole supervision

“That can be a tough element. I know a lot of people draw a lot of support from that [student] community during the incarceration part of the college program and it can be hard to deal with that drop-off afterward and feel very isolated.”

“It meant a lot to me. . . . You think people don’t see what you’re doing and how you’re progressing, but when [my parole officer] wrote that [recommendation] letter, that let me know that I’ve done something in this man’s eyes.”

Parole supervision is intended to help prevent people released from prison from committing new crimes, and therefore the terms and practices often focus on surveillance and multiple requirements for things like behavior, living arrangements, and completing programming.⁴⁶ Although conditions of supervision vary, common ones like curfews, mandatory treatment programming, and rigid reporting schedules can limit students’ ability to

take college courses, especially if they are also required to work full time. Some conditions last for many years, affecting the remainder of a student's postsecondary education.

In some instances, parole officers were supportive of Pathways students' education goals. One officer reduced the frequency of reporting and drug testing for members of the reentry support group; another approved of the student's internship application to an organization that worked with formerly incarcerated people.⁴⁷ In New Jersey, students under parole supervision usually had to meet mental health and substance use treatment requirements. They often struggled to find affordable, quality community-based services. NJ-STEP found that campus-based services often met the standards that parole required and were easier to fit into a student's schedule than services offered in the broader community.

But in general, parole requirements hindered connections among peers after prison. A common parole requirement prohibits contact with other people on parole supervision or with felony convictions.⁴⁸ Other programs working with formerly incarcerated students had learned that fostering these peer connections helped keep students engaged in school despite the many stresses of reentry.⁴⁹ In Michigan, this prohibition posed a challenge to implementing peer support programs. Parole officers sought to overcome this barrier by hosting study sessions at the parole office and by approving similar sessions held at the office of the multiservice provider OLHSA.

Policy and practice recommendations

Supervision agencies can support successful completion of parole by examining and making changes to conditions of supervision to allow for returning students' needs. For example, college enrollment may mean that students' schedules change every term. This may require that meeting times with parole officers change many times a year. Similarly, because some students may need to take courses at night to make progress toward a degree, officers may need to rethink standard curfew times and make exceptions for engagement in pro-social school-

related activities that conflict with these requirements. Finally, some supervision conditions mandate seeking and obtaining full-time employment. Parole officers could consider participation in postsecondary education a comparable requirement. With regard to these issues and others, supervision agencies should assess whether specific parole mandates are helping them reach their goals of lowered recidivism and reentry success. If they aren't, agency leaders and parole officers should consider making adjustments as necessary.

Enrolling in college

“It was cool, at [my new college]. . . . It wasn’t really too big of a difference outside of the obvious, but the classes were pretty much the same.”

Vera staff anticipated the changes that institutional and community corrections might need to make to encourage the enrollment and educational persistence of formerly incarcerated people. But some of the changes colleges might need to make on their campuses were unexpected. Vera and the Pathways sites quickly learned that administrative staff on campus play an important role when a student tries to enroll after release. Common institutional practices—such as questions about criminal history on college applications or misinterpretation of the implications of conviction histories for financial aid eligibility—can become significant obstacles. In addition, personal interactions may become challenging and even intimidating if gatekeepers like staff from admissions, financial aid, or the bursar’s office react poorly to a disclosure of criminal history.

Students leaving prison after several years may also struggle to use the technology required to even begin the enrollment process: some colleges ask students to enroll online with minimal assistance from admissions staff. People who have not had access to computers or the Internet while in prison may find this barrier insurmountable and drop their plans to continue college.

These difficulties meant that peer supports and guides were in great demand among students in the community. All three states hired staff to work as peer navigators to walk students through the minutiae of enrolling in college after prison. In North Carolina, the Pathways navigators were soon inundated with requests for support at a pace that outstripped their ability to work with each student one-on-one.

In New Jersey, NJ-STEP wrestled with the challenge of supporting students who leave prison for communities throughout the state, eventually settling on creating a staff position that would work with students seeking to complete their AA degrees at community colleges. But with that staff person’s responsibilities stretching across a wide geographic region, the counselor could not provide the deep knowledge of each campus that students who enrolled at Rutgers received from NJ-STEP.

Policy and practice recommendations

As people in prison approach release and seek to enroll in college in the community, colleges can support students' persistence by training their administrative staff on responding to the specific challenges of those who are formerly incarcerated in applying for admission and financial aid. Such training may include identifying and adapting services on campus designed for nontraditional students so that these services meet the needs of formerly

incarcerated people. Many colleges have student support services for parents, older adults, and other people who need assistance with the admissions process and paperwork and to stay engaged in postsecondary study. Colleges should find ways to connect students with people who can help them enroll, navigate the campus, and successfully complete their coursework.

Income and housing

"I didn't want to leave prison not knowing where I was going . . . [Without] some kind of plan . . . it's hard not to fail."

"You know, to a lot of people, they might see [the reentry assistance] as a free ride. Well, I took it as a whole different thing. I was very grateful that I had a place to go, that I had people who wanted to help me and see me succeed."

Even after they successfully enroll in college, students may face obstacles to obtaining a desired degree or certification. Their needs typically include finding and keeping a source of income to support themselves and their families, housing, meeting the requirements of parole, and making time to spend with loved ones—especially children—from whom they were separated for years. Many Pathways participants in New Jersey and North Carolina had challenges securing flexible, well-paying jobs and housing that met the requirements of parole supervision. NJ-STEP found that campus-based Federal Work-Study jobs provided better hours and pay for students than community-based transitional jobs did. These jobs were also more likely to include relevant experience for professional careers (for example, at office jobs rather than service jobs) and could help students build employment histories and references for future career opportunities.

In North Carolina, some students who were devoted to their studies while in prison waived in their commitment as they drew near to their release dates. Students left the program because they felt compelled to reconnect with and support family from whom they had been separated.

For those who did continue with college, difficulties restarting their lives after a long period in prison slowed their progress toward a degree.

Students had particular difficulty with housing. In New Jersey, students who enrolled at Rutgers after prison had trouble finding affordable housing that was near the college and met parole requirements. Like Michigan, New Jersey has a standard prohibition on communication with other people on parole or with felony convictions, although the agency would make exceptions to this rule in some cases. NJ-STEP worked with the parole board to bring awareness to this issue, and some Pathways students were granted an exception and lived together while in school. NJ-STEP then developed a partnership with a nonprofit housing agency in the city of New Brunswick to place a few students in a large house it operated that was close to the Rutgers campus.

Even in North Carolina, where Pathways administrators actively participated in the efforts to secure housing—providing funding and working with LRCs to build partnerships with local landlords—housing was a significant hurdle for students. In Buncombe County, the LRC initially provided unsupervised group housing to students, but soon transitioned to a more structured halfway-house model. When students were asked to move into a more restrictive setting, some dropped out of the program rather than live under increased surveillance. North Carolina also struggled to find appropriate housing for students with special requirements: those who regained custody of children, people with substance use needs, and others with supervision requirements that mandated specific treatment, programs, or activities, such as volunteering.

Policy and practice recommendations

- The three Pathways states found that meeting the financial needs of returning students—particularly right after their release—is vital to ensuring their success. Efforts to assist them in their pursuit of postsecondary education must first address the level of financial need that most students will have when they are released. These students face heavy financial pressure, including paying for food, housing, and their educational expenses; unmet debt and loan defaults; or child support arrears and criminal justice fines, fees, and restitution.
- Staff should recognize that many returning students will focus on their families and that they can support students' persistence by concentrating on what will be required of them for reunification while also meeting supervision and education requirements.

Building momentum for scaling and policy change

“What it did was teach me that there are people out there . . . that care about my success.”

As a demonstration project, one of Pathways’ goals was to make a case for taking these types of programs to scale through state or federal investment. Throughout the project, staff at Vera and the Pathways sites spoke with state and federal policymakers about the work underway and sought to share lessons learned through implementation with other postsecondary education programs operating in prisons throughout the country.

Federal policy

In 2012 and 2013, Vera coordinated national listening sessions on postsecondary education in prison on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Representatives from the three Pathways states participated in these events, sharing insights from the planning and early implementation of their projects. These sessions were intended to help ED and key federal partners, such as the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Labor, determine the ways they could improve the quality of and access to educational opportunities within correctional institutions, including postsecondary education and, for those leaving prison, how they could help improve their access to educational opportunities in the community.

A focus on increasing graduation rates. The listening sessions were in support of President Barack Obama’s goal to raise U.S. college graduation rates to be the highest in the world by 2020. Given the size of the U.S. prison population and the fact that almost all incarcerated people will return to the community, ED targeted college attainment in prison as a key area of its focus.⁵⁰ More than 80 people participated in the sessions,

including representatives from more than 25 states and several federal agencies, as well as formerly incarcerated college students and graduates.⁵¹ Vera made 32 recommendations to ED that grew out of the sessions. They included a recommendation to authorize a demonstration project making Pell grants available to incarcerated people, a project that was realized in 2015. (See “Historical context” at page 2.)

The Second Chance Pell initiative. In 2015, President Barack Obama, U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Newark Mayor Ras Baraka invited NJ-STEP students to participate in a roundtable discussion at the Rutgers University–Newark campus. Later that year, ED launched the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative, a demonstration project that opened Pell eligibility to those incarcerated in state and federal prisons for the first time since 1994. Shortly after ED released the invitation to apply to be part of Second Chance Pell, Vera and representatives from the Pathways states, as well as other providers of college prison programs, participated in a meeting with then-Secretary Arne Duncan, Under Secretary Ted Mitchell, and other senior leaders at ED who were interested in better understanding the advantages and challenges associated with offering postsecondary education in correctional facilities and the elements needed for quality and success.

In June 2016, ED announced the colleges selected to participate in the Second Chance Pell initiative and included three colleges from the Pathways Project: Jackson College in Michigan (as many as 1,305 Pell eligible students to be served in 2016–2017), and Raritan Valley Community College (up to 500 students to be served in 2016–2017) and Rutgers University–Newark in New Jersey (as many as 100 students to be served in 2016–2017).⁵² In the fall 2016 semester, the three schools began enrolling students who could, for the first time, pay for their education using federal financial aid. More than 200 colleges applied, but ED selected just 69 to participate in the initiative. The North Carolina Pathways colleges were not among those selected.

State policy

The Pathways sites had various levels of engagement with representatives of their state executive and legislative branches. NJ-STEP held a roundtable with then-Governor Chris Christie and formerly incarcerated students in 2013, followed by a press conference in which the governor shared his

support for privately funded college programs in prison.⁵³ In Michigan in 2016, MDOC leadership built on their experiences with the Pathways project to develop education-focused facilities called Vocational Villages, where incarcerated students live and study together in accredited career and technical programs as they prepare for release.⁵⁴ Also in 2017, the Michigan legislature allocated funds to support the Second Chance Pell program at the state's prison for women.⁵⁵

North Carolina's Reentry Council. In North Carolina, Governor Roy Cooper established a state Reentry Council in 2017 that includes representatives from the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS), the Attorney General's Office, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Division of Motor Vehicles, the Administrative Office of the Courts, the North Carolina community college system, nonprofits, the faith community, and formerly incarcerated people. The council meets quarterly and has developed subcommittees to assist local reentry councils as they develop support services for people leaving prison and reentering their communities. To keep a focus on postsecondary education in prison, NCDPS has established a standing Postsecondary Education Committee through which colleges and NCDPS meet to discuss operations and plans for offering college programs inside prison.

Pell grants and other financial aid. In 2018 and 2019, Vera launched state and federal policy campaigns in Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina focusing on the reinstatement of federal Pell grants eligibility to people in state and federal prison and on legislation that creates barriers to postsecondary education in prison at the state level, with an aim to repeal bans on state financial aid for people in prison. The outlook on the reinstatement of Pell eligibility is more promising now than at any time since the ban was put in place in 1994. In February 2019, Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chair of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, announced that he would seek reauthorization of the Higher Education Act by the year's end and included among several named priorities for that legislation the reinstatement of Pell eligibility for people in state and federal prisons.⁵⁶

To date, the policy campaign in New Jersey, which started earlier than the Michigan or North Carolina efforts, has seen some success. The state senate passed a bill repealing the ban in June 2018; it passed out of

committee and awaits a full vote in the New Jersey General Assembly in early 2019.⁵⁷ At the same time, Rutgers University–Newark received a \$1.25 million allocation in the state budget to support the administrative costs of the program that are borne by the university.⁵⁸ These include the academic counselors that serve AA and BA students and assist in their transition out of prison and into colleges in the community.

College and corrections efforts after Pathways

“The whole prison wants to go to school. Everybody who didn’t get a chance, especially if you came from a community where college wasn’t an option. That’s a big deal.”

At the corrections agency and college level, Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina continued to seek opportunities to enhance their educational offerings during and after the Pathways project.

Seeking to take the lessons learned from Pathways to the larger population under community supervision, North Carolina applied for assistance from a college success program for formerly incarcerated people based in New York City: College and Community Fellowship (CCF). NCDPS sought guidance on implementing community supervision policies and practices that would support college enrollment among those on supervision. With CCF’s assistance, NCDPS hopes to expand its support for enrollment beyond the three reentry communities from the Pathways project and into communities across the state. Because the North Carolina community college system is already funded to teach postsecondary courses inside state prisons, North Carolina may be able to take a version of Pathways to scale.

In Michigan, MDOC and Jackson College have continued their partnership through the Second Chance Pell Initiative, which also includes Delta College and Mott Community College. The colleges offer eight credentials in seven prisons to 583 students. In addition, MDOC received a federal grant that allowed Jackson College to train 120 students in prison in computer repair.

In New Jersey, the Second Chance Pell Initiative selected NJ-STEP’s anchor institutions—Rutgers University–Newark and Raritan Valley

Community College—to participate. For these colleges, Second Chance Pell offers a different funding model than Pathways did. Students now pay for their own courses using financial aid, rather than colleges teaching on a contractual basis. In the final year of the Pathways project, as this tuition model began to take shape, the NJ-STEP lead partners (Rutgers, Raritan Valley, and Princeton University) began to reshape their MOU to take into account the new structure the funding would bring to the program. Rutgers University–Newark has also engaged NJ-STEP to assist in developing fair chance hiring and admissions policies. And Raritan Valley Community College students successfully petitioned the international two-year honors society Phi Theta Kappa to repeal its policy denying incarcerated students’ eligibility for membership.⁵⁹

Transformation

“It works as far as transforming people . . . people that make bad choices can better see what the choices do by getting better educated . . . and that’s why the recidivism rate goes down so drastically when people get educated.”

“It changes your outlook on the world. You can see the roadblock and the way around it; you couldn’t always see that before.”

“I’d had so much support and such a good network of people that have been there for me and helped me through, you know, my transition, and . . . I just feel like I need to give back to someone.”

Postsecondary education in prison is transformative. The simple presence of postsecondary education in prisons has the potential to reshape the ways in which incarcerated people—and their future potential—are viewed, by shifting the perspectives of corrections education and custody staff, faculty, college administrators, families, and students in prison and on campus. Enrolling in college is an exercise in planning for the future. When colleges and corrections agencies reinforce students’ efforts by finding ways to continue or enhance programs, strengthen partnerships, clear hurdles, and celebrate successes, they support students in building this future.

This is no small feat. As described earlier, corrections policies and practices over the past 40 years made few promises for the futures of the 2.2 million people behind bars in the United States. These policies and practices neglected to focus on the future—for incarcerated individuals, their families, and their communities—because of a pervasive belief that incarcerated people are fundamentally different from those who do not go to prison, and are therefore not worthy of investment.⁶⁰ These attitudes and values reinforce public fears and contribute to beliefs that, at best, prison can only deter incarcerated people from future criminal activity and,

at worst, can simply incapacitate them, merely pausing the cycle of crime until they are released from prison.⁶¹

But change has begun to take root within these systems. In the past 20 years, corrections practitioners have begun to turn away from this set of beliefs and to implement practices that research has shown allow incarcerated people—and therefore, their families and communities—to create a different path for the future. These evidence-based practices emphasize the strengths, abilities, and internal motivations of each individual and can sow the seeds for larger changes in corrections. When the Pathways project

The simple presence of postsecondary education in prisons has the potential to reshape the ways in which incarcerated people—and their future potential—are viewed. Enrolling in college is an exercise in planning for the future.

began, the RAND Corporation had not yet released its meta-analysis that confirmed the effect of postsecondary education on recidivism, firmly placing postsecondary education on the list of evidence-based corrections practices. Michigan, New Jersey, and North Carolina signed on in part to test this connection in a structured, controlled setting.

But measures of recidivism do not capture the full range of effects that postsecondary education can have on people in prison and the institutions that work with them. Corrections professionals rarely see the effects of the good work they do; policymakers, the media, and the public mostly focus on high-profile crimes and the frustrating cycle of recidivism. The Pathways project, with its partnerships between colleges and corrections agencies, brought with it not just transformational opportunities for students, but also an opportunity for corrections staff and leaders to see

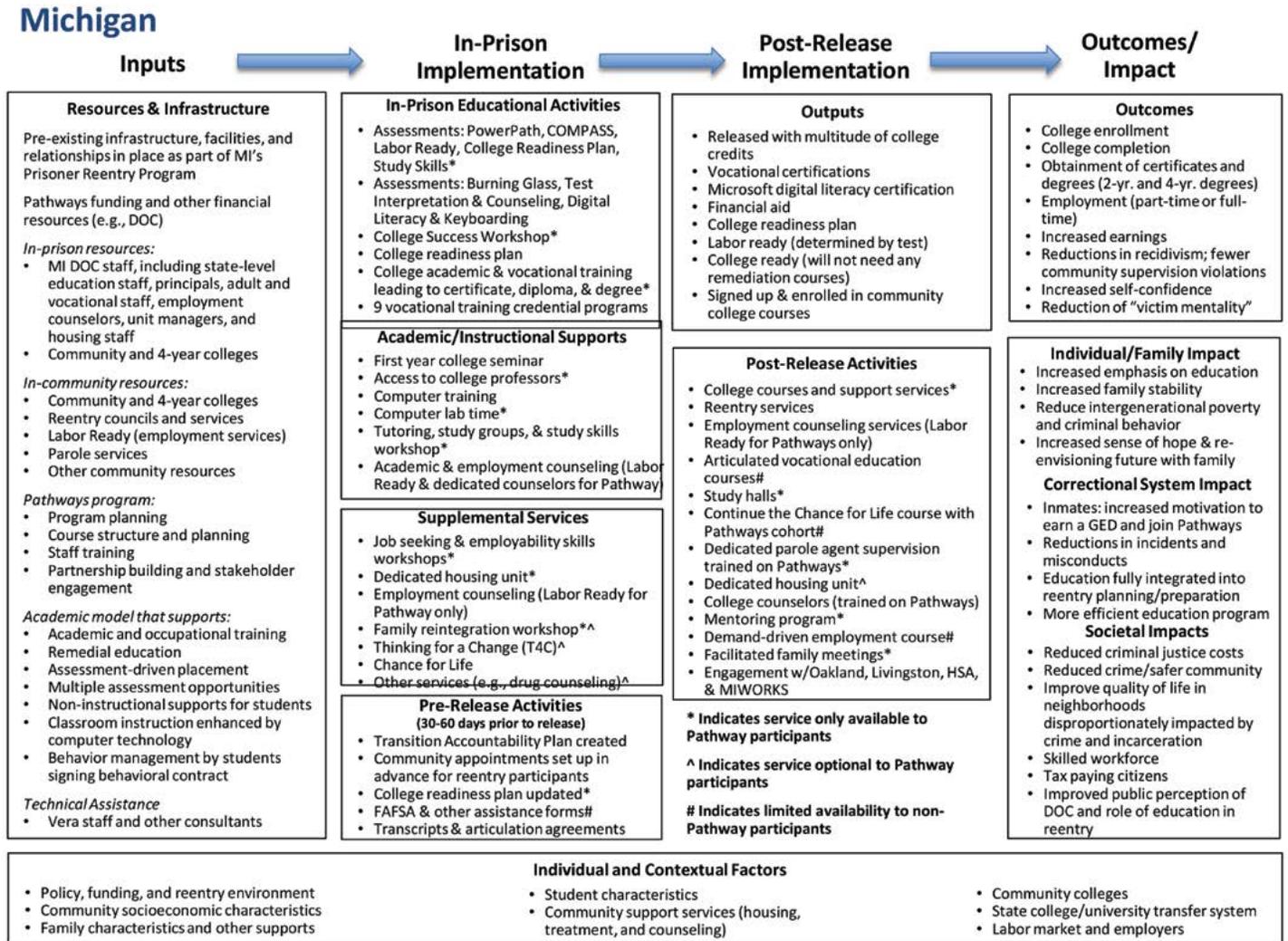
and hear about the remarkable successes of the people who have moved through their institutions and participated in the programs they have fought hard to sustain. College in prison communicates this simple, transformational idea: people leaving prison have futures we can and should value, and great potential we should encourage and tap.

These programs also change colleges. Postsecondary institutions that work in prisons work with students who face multiple overlapping barriers to enrollment and persistence in college. As the Pathways project demonstrated, even for those who worked hard while incarcerated and were motivated to continue their education after their release, enrolling after prison and working toward a degree was extremely challenging. The students who enroll while in prison may never make it past the front door of the college in the community. In thinking through how to reach these students, how to provide them with the essentials of a college education and experience while they are still behind bars, and how to meet them on the other side to continue their education, colleges are reshaping their understanding of the communities they serve and their obligations to their students.

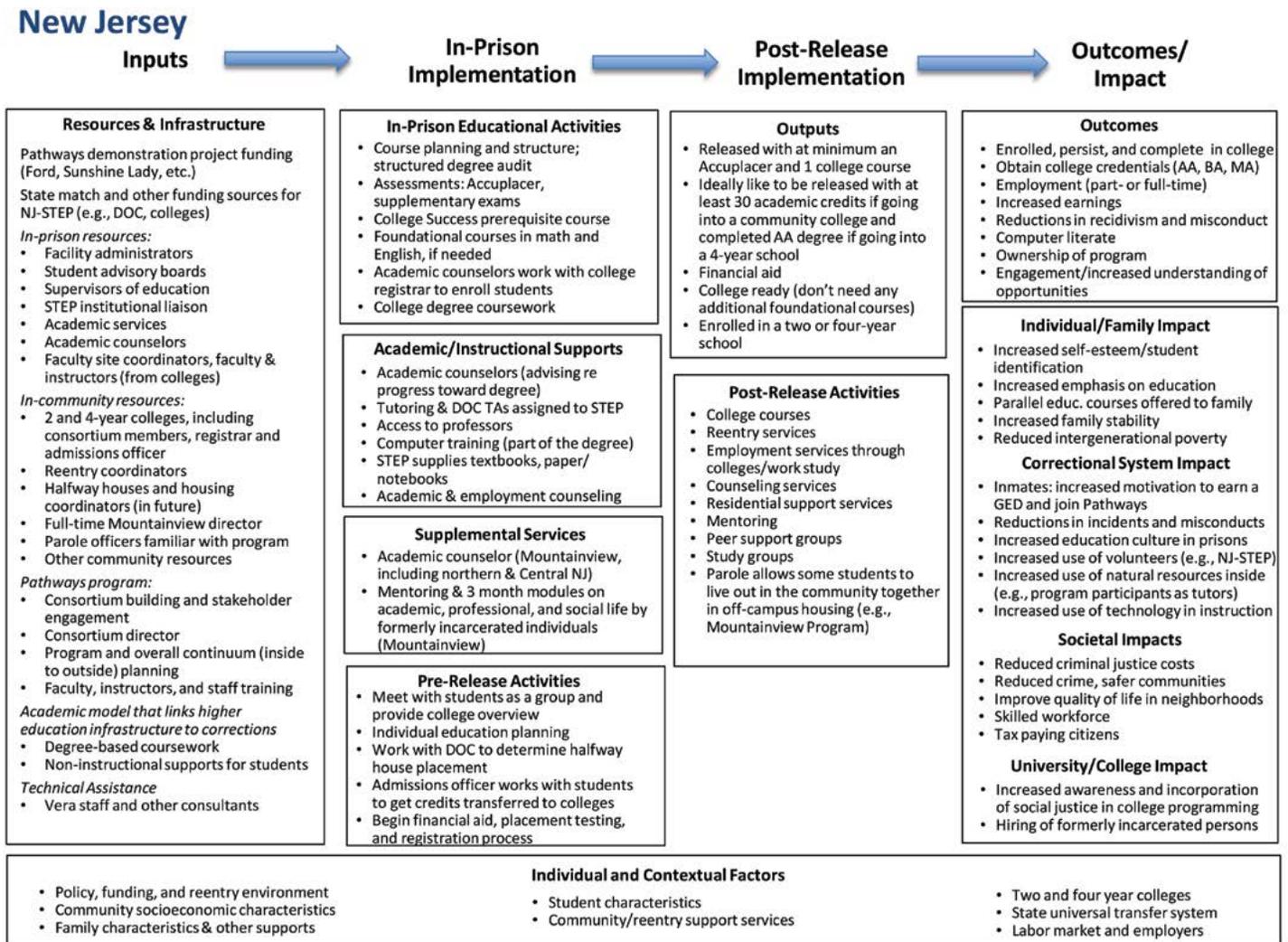
Finally, this project also changed Vera. When it began, this project was on the periphery of the work that Vera regularly did. It fit into a handful of projects that sought to ease the punitive and painful experience of incarceration.⁶² As the project progressed, however, Vera invested more time and resources in initiatives aimed at recognizing and respecting human dignity behind bars. Vera's leaders, staff, and board members came to see recognizing the dignity of people in prison as a core strategy to ending mass incarceration and transforming conditions of confinement.⁶³ Pathways exemplified the possibilities of such an approach.

The collective impact of these programs is a recognition of the humanity and the enormous potential of the people in our nation's prisons. This has implications far beyond the effect on recidivism. Second Chance Pell and the possible reinstatement of state and federal financial aid programs for people in prison will bring this impact to a much wider set of partners, students, and communities. Pathways offered an opportunity to innovate, pilot, and practice new ways of working together, of doing. In the end, it also produced new ways of seeing.

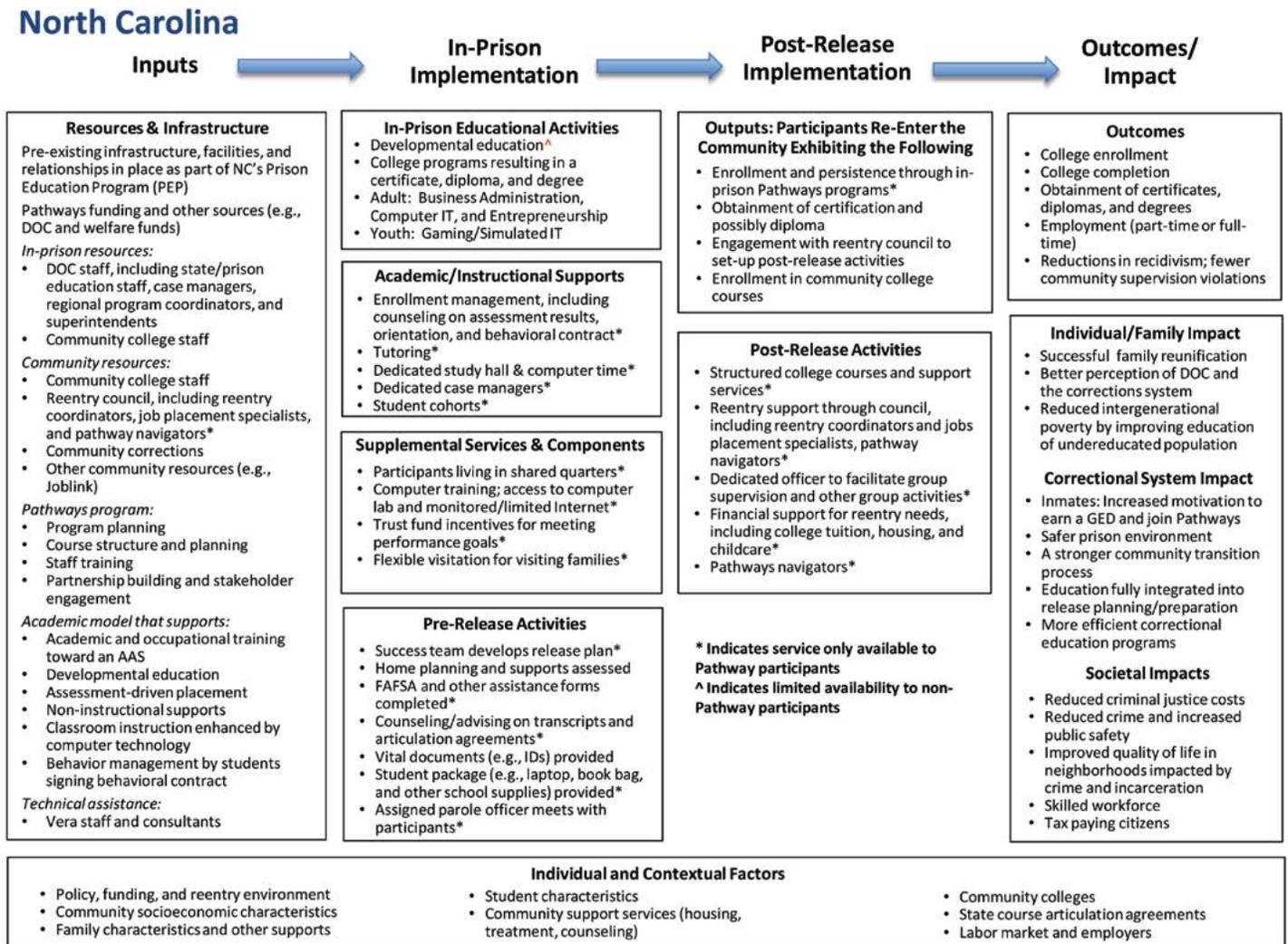
Site-Specific Logic Models: Michigan



Site-Specific Logic Models: New Jersey



Site-Specific Logic Models: North Carolina



The RAND/RTI Process Evaluation

The process evaluation included the following recommendations:

For Pathways administrators:

- › the importance of educating staff and students on the program;
- › the need to adapt the approach for each facility;
- › the need to contain student expectations of the program;
- › the need to get the right mix of colleges and commitment from the colleges; and
- › the need to deal with unexpected events (such as the need to make up snow days).

For corrections leadership, officers, and education staff:

- › despite the support from all states' central leaderships, the need for senior leadership to continually show their support for the program to ensure it is taken seriously by custody staff;
- › the need for facility warden/administrator staff to hold custody staff accountable for making the program work; and
- › the need to get the facility-based education staff on board, from the principal to the counselor, because the time required of them is considerable.

For college faculty:

- › the need to deal with students who struggle with learning disabilities and who can be manipulative;
- › the need to deal with the learning curve of working in corrections; and
- › the need to deal with administrators who oversee their work and training and who vary from facility to facility.

For Pathways students:

- › the need for better communication and transparency about the program;
- › the difficulty of studying within the prison environment;
- › the need to develop a cohesive cohort with a good support system;
- › the potential misalignment between education and career goals; and
- › the need to deal with student concerns about reentry, including housing.

The National Advisory Board

Vera would like to thank the members of the Pathways National Advisory Board for their time and willingness to share their expertise with the staff at Vera and with the Pathways sites.

Although some people have moved on to new opportunities, the titles and affiliations of the members are captured here as they were during the project, to offer a clear picture of the experience, skills, and perspectives they contributed to the project.

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Unlocking Potential: Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education

National Leadership Group Meeting

Renaissance Asheville

April 27–April 28, 2015

Agenda

Monday, April 27 – Focus on Reentry and North Carolina Pathways Facilities Visit

- 8:30 am Breakfast & Sign-in
- 8:50 am Call to Order, Fred Patrick, Vera Institute of Justice
- 9:00 am Welcome, David Guice, Commissioner, Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, North Carolina Department of Public Safety
- 9:10 am Introductions, Fred Patrick, Vera Institute of Justice
- 9:45 am Meeting Preview, Fred Patrick, Vera Institute of Justice; Dr. Doug Wood, Program Officer and Acting Director, Global Higher Education for Social Justice Initiative, Ford Foundation
- 10:00 am A Breakthrough Moment: Postsecondary Education and Criminal Justice Reform Efforts, and the Pathways Project, Ruth Delaney, Vera Institute of Justice
- 10:30 am State Updates: Key Accomplishments and Challenges, Heather Gay, Michigan Department of Corrections; Nicole Sullivan, North Carolina Department of Public Safety; Margaret Quern Atkins, NJ-STEP
- 11:15 am Break
- 11:30 am Learning from our Students: A Conversation with Current Pathways Participants, Hope and Jessica, Pathways Participants; Stanley Richards, Senior Vice President of Programs, The Fortune Society
- Noon Critical Reentry Needs: A Panel Discussion
- > Pre-Release Planning, Rick Fairley and Janella Robinson, Michigan Department of Corrections
 - > Post-Release Support, Doug Pardue and Allison Jourdan, North Carolina Department of Public Safety
 - > Role of the Educational Institution, Haja Kamara, NJ-STEP
- 1:00 pm Working Lunch
- 1:15 pm Topical Breakout Groups: Critical Reentry Needs
- 2:00 pm Break and Preparation for Prison Tours
- 2:30 pm Depart for Prison Tours
- 5:00–5:30pm Depart Prisons and Return to Hotel

Tuesday, April 28 – Focus on Sustainability

- 9:00 am Breakfast
- 9:30 am Call to Order & Preview of Agenda, Fred Patrick, Vera Institute of Justice
- 9:35 am Reentry Breakout Groups: Reflections, Fred Patrick, Vera Institute of Justice
- 10:30 am Evaluation Update: Results of the Implementation Study, Lois Davis, RAND Corporation, and Michelle Tolbert, RTI International
- 11:15 am Break
- 11:30 am Situating Pathways in a Broader Context
- > Where does Pathways fit within a broader program of correctional education? Heather Gay, Michigan Department of Corrections, Jecrois Jean-Baptiste, New Jersey Department of Corrections
 - > Where does Pathways fit within a broader program of rehabilitative services? Nicole Sullivan, North Carolina Department of Public Safety
 - > Where does Pathways fit within a postsecondary institutions' broader programs? Margaret Quern Atkins, NJ-STEP
- 12:30 pm Lunch
- 1:15 pm State Breakout Groups: Situating Pathways in a Broader Context
- 2:00 pm Strategies for Sustainability
- > Is Pathways suitable for Pay for Success model, Dr. John Roman, Senior Fellow, Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute
 - > Sustainability and The Role of Private Funders, Alison Shames
 - > Tuition-based Sustainability Strategies, Todd Clear, Provost, Rutgers University-Newark
- 2:45 pm Break
- 3:00 pm State Breakout Groups: Strategies for Sustainability
- 3:45 pm Correctional Education Updates: White Paper on Technology in Corrections, John Linton, Office of Correctional Education, US Department of Education, and Michelle Tolbert, RTI International
- 4:00 pm Reflections and Looking Ahead, John Linton, Office of Correctional Education, US Department of Education
- 4:15 pm State Updates: The Next 12 Months, Heather Gay, Michigan Department of Corrections; Nicole Sullivan, North Carolina Department of Public Safety; Margaret Quern Atkins, NJ-STEP
- 5:00 pm Vera update: The Next 12 months, Fred Patrick, Vera Institute of Justice
- 5:15 pm Closing Remarks, Dr. Doug Wood, Program Officer and Acting Director, Global Higher Education for Social Justice Initiative, Ford Foundation
- 6:00 pm Group Dinner

North Carolina's Standard Operating Procedure for Pathways

The purpose of this standard operating procedure (SOP) is to establish the basic guidelines of program operation to be implemented statewide at each prison facility. It is expected that Pathways facilities will use these guidelines to establish a facility-level SOP to govern the program's operation. Since the Pathways Program is a four-year project that will be evaluated during the fifth year by the RAND Corporation and RTI, it is imperative that facility-level implementation and operation remain consistent throughout the duration of the project. Any changes to the operating procedures need to be approved through the Rehabilitative Programs and Services Section in conjunction with Prison Education Services to ensure that all facilities operate the same way during the life of the project.

This SOP will cover the following areas:

Recruitment and Orientation

- › Eligibility criteria
- › Recruitment session

Admissions Process

- › Application screening and review
- › Behavioral contract

Referral and Approval Process

- › Transfer to Pathways facilities
- › Program assignment

Program Operations

- › Roles and responsibilities
- › Pathways classes (certificates/diplomas)

- › Class schedule (study hall, computer lab, flexible visitation)
- › Performance goals and incentives
- › Program removal review procedure

Prerelease planning and preparation

- › Case management contact and documentation
- › Success Team meetings
- › Transition to the community

Transition Documents Envelope

- › Pathways Transition Plan
- › Local Reentry Council
- › Pathways Navigator

Endnotes

- 1 Previously, state and federal prisons had offered therapeutic programs, furloughs to visit family, work and education release programs, and other programs meant to improve the quality of life for people while they were incarcerated. Many of these programs have been shown to help prevent future criminal behavior and have been adopted as the field has increasingly embraced evidence-based practices. See Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn, eds., *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2014), 157-201, <https://perma.cc/TUP2-AY7T>. For a listing of evidence-based practices in corrections, see National Institute of Justice, “Programs and Practices—What Works in Criminal Justice,” <https://perma.cc/98LZ-S2XA>.
- 2 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, P.L. 103-322 (1994), <https://perma.cc/P7K3-4QL6>.
- 3 For a discussion of the history of U.S. corrections policy and race, see Ruth Delaney, Ram Subramanian, Alison Shames, and Nicholas Turner, *Reimagining Prison* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2018), 13-46, <https://perma.cc/7NHZ-BFEZ>; and Travis, Western, and Redburn, *The Growth of Incarceration*, 2014, 323.
- 4 Travis, Western, and Redburn, *The Growth of Incarceration*, 2014, 323.
- 5 Pew Charitable Trusts, *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008* (Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2008), 3, <https://perma.cc/L6C4-5VC4>.
- 6 At least 33 states were forced to use funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to pay for their corrections systems. Alison Shames, Michael Woodruff, Alissa Cambier, et al., *The Continuing Fiscal Crisis in Corrections: Setting a New Course* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2010), <https://perma.cc/FUE4-AAHJ>.
- 7 Travis, Western, and Redburn, *The Growth of Incarceration*, 2014, 150-152.
- 8 For a discussion of prison conditions, see Delaney, Subramanian, Shames, and Turner, *Reimagining Prison*, 2018, 18-31; and Travis, Western, and Redburn, *The Growth of Incarceration*, 2014, 157-200.
- 9 Pew Charitable Trusts, *35 States Reform Criminal Justice Policies Through Justice Reinvestment* (Washington, DC: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018), 1-3, <https://perma.cc/25H3-GVYK>.
- 10 For useful literature reviews, see Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, et al., *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs that Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), 32, <https://perma.cc/AVZ9-JZSG>; Lois M. Davis, Jennifer L. Steele, Robert Bozick, et al., *How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here? The Results of a Comprehensive Evaluation* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2014), <https://perma.cc/Q4RQ-DMZW>; Robert Bozick, Jennifer Steele, Lois Davis, and Susan Turner, “Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Postrelease Outcomes? A Meta-Analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States.” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 14, no. 3 (2018), 389-428, <https://perma.cc/7EET-C2ZW>; Lindsey Livingston and Jody Miller, “Inequalities of Race, Class, and Place and Their Impact on Postincarceration Higher Education,” *Race and Justice* 4, no. 3 (2014), 212-245; Correctional Association of New York, *Education from the Inside, Out: The Multiple Benefits of College Programs in Prison* (New York: Correctional Association of New York, 2009), <https://perma.cc/678G-979E>; Michelle Fine, Maria Elena Torre, Kathy Boudin, et al., *Changing Minds: The Impact of College in a Maximum-Security Prison* (New York: Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001), <https://perma.cc/5LX2-MQEG>; Laura Winterfield, Mark Coggeshall, Michelle Burke-Storer, et al., *The Effects of Postsecondary Correctional Education* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2009), <https://perma.cc/H4ZJ-7KTG>; and Alexis Halkovic, Michelle Fine, John Bae, et al., *Higher Education and Reentry: The Gifts They Bring* (New York: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2013), <https://perma.cc/XS7K-2MW9>.
- 11 Davis, Bozick, Steele, et al., *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education*, 2013, 32; Linda G. Morra, *Pell Grants for Prison Inmates* (Washington, DC: Government Accounting Office, Health, Education and Human Services Division, 1994), <https://perma.cc/4ZNF-6JKW>; and Erin L. Castro, Rebecca K. Hunter, Tara Hardison, and Vanessa Johnson-Ojeda, “The Landscape of Postsecondary Education in Prison and the Influence of Second Chance Pell: An Analysis of Transferability, Credit-Bearing Status, and Accreditation,” *Prison Journal* 98, no. 4, (2018), 1-22.
- 12 Alex Boldin, *Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative Update* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2018), <https://perma.cc/B58C-Q6AL>.
- 13 Figures about the student population are from the U.S. Department of Education; figures on credentials completed are drawn from Vera’s publication on Second Chance Pell and ongoing program data Vera has collected in its work with the Second Chance Pell sites. See Boldin, *Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative Update*, 2018; and Kimberly Hefling, “Pilot Program Allowing Pell Grants for Prisoners Re-Upped for a 4th Year,” PoliticoPro.Com, February 13, 2018.
- 14 When the Pathways project launched, the RAND Corporation had not yet released its meta-analysis about the impact of education on recidivism. This publication was released in 2013 and continues to be cited as the primary evidence for supporting postsecondary

- education in prison. But in 2011, there was adequate evidence in the literature demonstrating that postsecondary education could reduce recidivism and increase earnings. See Steve Aos, Marna Miller, and Elizabeth Drake, *Evidence-Based Adult Corrections Programs: What Works and What Does Not* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2006); Davis, Bozick, Steele, et al., *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education*, 2013; Doris Layton MacKenzie, *What Works in Corrections: Reducing the Criminal Activities of Offenders and Delinquents* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Wilson, Catherine Gallagher, and Doris MacKenzie, “A Meta-Analysis of Corrections-Based Education, Vocation, and Work Programs for Adult Offenders,” *Journal of Research in Crime & Delinquency*, 37, no. 4 (2000), 347-68; Laura E. Gorgol and Brian A. Sponsler, *Unlocking Potential: Results of a National Survey of Postsecondary Education in State Prisons* (Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2011), <https://perma.cc/CL7Y-CZHA>; and Wendy Erisman and Jeanne Contardo, *Learning to Reduce Recidivism: A 50-State Analysis of Postsecondary Correctional Educational Policy* (Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2005), <https://perma.cc/6XKR-FNC9>.
- 15 For a discussion of communities with high incarceration rates, see Todd R. Clear, *Imprisoning Communities: How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Worse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- 16 For a discussion of the economic impacts of higher education implemented at scale, see Patrick Oakford, Cara Brumfield, Casey Goldvale, et al., *Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice and Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2019), <https://perma.cc/4GGY-9GFY>.
- 17 By 2020, it is estimated that 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education and training beyond high school. See Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2013), 15, <https://perma.cc/2RPN-8K6Q>. When parents—including those who are incarcerated—complete college, their children are more likely to do so, which can disrupt cycles of poverty and incarceration. See Correctional Association of New York, *Education from the Inside, Out*, 2009, 3; and James M. Conway and Edward T. Jones, *Seven Out of Ten? Not Even Close: A Review of Research on the Likelihood of Children with Incarcerated Parents Becoming Justice-Involved* (New Britain, CT: Central Connecticut State University, 2015), 10-14, <https://perma.cc/6C63-DRTS>.
- 18 Corrections agencies typically require that program participants maintain certain behavioral track records and avoid conflict within their facilities. All three Pathways sites had these requirements for participation.
- 19 At the start of the project, the Pathways funders had committed to raising \$1 million for an outcome evaluation. Vera released a request for proposals for this evaluation in 2013 and selected the RAND Corporation and RTI International to complete it. The evaluation would be completed in two phases. The first phase would include preparing the sites for the outcome evaluation (primarily through the design of data collection instruments and advising the sites on their use) and completing a process evaluation. The second phase would include the outcome evaluation and a cost-benefit analysis and would begin at least three years after the last Pathways students had left prison. RAND and RTI undertook the process evaluation in 2013-2014, including site visits, interviews with administrators and students, and document reviews. The researchers produced logic models and a final report, presenting them at the Pathways Advisory Board meeting in 2014. See Appendix A at page 57.
- 20 People in prisons are often moved among the various facilities within a state for a number of reasons. A transfer hold would enable the student to stay in a given facility until the end of a semester or academic program.
- 21 Each site created an implementation team with officials from the corrections systems and colleges who were responsible for overseeing project operations within their respective institutions.
- 22 See “State selection and funding” at page 12 for a description of the state selection process.
- 23 Housed at Rutgers University–Newark, the consortium included seven members when the Pathways project started: Drew University, Essex County College, Mercer County Community College, Princeton University, Raritan Valley Community College, Rutgers University, and the College of New Jersey. By the close of the project, it had added Cumberland Community College.
- 24 Prior to 2010, students enrolled in college in North Carolina prisons could earn up to an AA degree and transferable credits. A policy change in 2010 limited programs offered in prison to career-technical certificates and applied associate’s degrees that offer few, if any, transferable credits. See North Carolina SB 897 (2009), § 8.3, <https://perma.cc/CW4Q-JA9J>.
- 25 Statewide, 29 colleges have signed on to the Michigan Transfer Agreement, which is governed by the Michigan Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (MACRAO). For more information, see the MACRAO website at <https://perma.cc/G9QL-DUYD>.
- 26 The writing fellows program is part of an advanced composition course offered through Jackson College: students receive scholarships to enroll in the course and are required to provide tutoring or assist other students with a writing project. Fellows use their own class time to discuss composition, the role of a peer tutor, and effective strategies in coaching people to write.

The fellows offered support to incarcerated students enrolled in a range of courses, including composition, history, political science, art history, geology, and accounting.

- 27 During the project period, two community colleges served successively as the articulating partner (first Mercer County Community College, then Raritan Valley Community College), evaluating syllabi, articulating transfer credits, and hiring faculty from partner schools to each as adjuncts in prison. This articulation strategy enabled students to take courses from multiple colleges while still progressing toward a degree. Pathways students could take courses from eight colleges: Rutgers University (the New Brunswick and Newark campuses), Princeton University, Drew University, and The College of New Jersey, as well as Mercer County, Essex County, and Raritan Valley community colleges.
- 28 The BA program was added to the NJ-STEP program late in the Pathways project, taking effect during the final semester of Pathways-funded operations.
- 29 During the Pathways project, NJDOC revised a policy that had prohibited formerly incarcerated people from entering prison facilities, creating an exception that allowed NJ-STEP to hire formerly incarcerated people to enter facilities to mentor incarcerated students. This enabled NJ-STEP to hire graduates from its program to serve as academic counselors.
- 30 As the Pathways project ended, Rutgers University faculty were exploring opportunities to install an index of academic journal articles from the JSTOR database on networked computers.
- 31 These included Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women, Buncombe Correctional Center (which was renamed Craggy Correctional Institution), Avery Mitchell Correctional Institution, Mountain View Correctional Institution, Albemarle Correctional Institution, and Pamlico Correctional Institution.
- 32 Attendance payments were set at \$1 a day or \$5 per week for regular attendance, with an end-of-semester incentive payment of \$15 for a GPA of 3.75 to 4.00; \$7.50 for a GPA of 2.51 to 3.74; and \$3.50 for a GPA of 2.00 to 2.50.
- 33 In 2018, Vera spoke with Pathways students who had returned to the community. As described in note 1 above, their interviews reveal nuances and personal reflections on the program experience. But because the programs selected these students for interviews, they do not necessarily cover or reflect the full range of participants' perspectives.
- 34 This finding regarding confusion about academic programs and courses among students is drawn from the process evaluation completed by RAND and RTI, as described in Appendix B at page 60.
- 35 In the United States, the vast majority of in-prison work opportunities fall into two categories: regular prison jobs that support the prison facility and jobs with state-owned businesses that produce goods sold to government agencies (often known as correctional industries). Data on average wages paid to people in prison are difficult to obtain, but one source found that the average hourly rate for regular prison jobs ranged from 14 to 63 cents, and the average hourly rate for correctional industries jobs ranged from 33 cents to \$1.41. See Wendy Sawyer, "How Much Do Incarcerated People Earn in Each State?," Prison Policy Initiative, April 10, 2017, <https://perma.cc/M2TZ-7VF8>. Also see Travis, Western, and Redburn, *The Growth of Incarceration*, 2014, 192.
- 36 The resolution of this conflict was an extraordinary expression of NJDOC's commitment to higher education in prison. In many places, any kind of action like a sit-in or altercation with custody staff by those who are incarcerated would provoke a punitive response from corrections officials rather than a negotiated solution and the continuation of the program.
- 37 Delaney, Subramanian, Shames, and Turner, *Reimagining Prison*, 2018, 4.
- 38 These tools were WorkKeys and Burning Glass. WorkKeys is an assessment suite that measures skills required for success in the workplace. These include broad skills areas such as applied math, reading comprehension for specific applications and technical documents, writing for business purposes, ability to read charts and graphs; as well as specific skill areas such as applied technology (electricity, mechanics, fluid dynamics, and thermodynamics). Burning Glass is an analysis tool designed for those offering education and training opportunities to gear offerings toward current and projected labor market needs. See ACT, "WorkKeys Assessments," <https://perma.cc/FB8V-UQQX>; and Burning Glass Technologies, "Labor Insight," www.burning-glass.com.
- 39 The project is part of the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions, North Carolina Department of Commerce.
- 40 For discussion of the psychosocial challenges to reentry, see John Irwin, *The Felon* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970); Shadd Maruna, *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001); and Bruce Western, *Homeward: Life in the Year After Prison* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2018).
- 41 The LRCs were influenced by the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative, described on page 40.
- 42 In Buncombe and Mecklenburg counties, the LRC coordinating body was a government agency (the Buncombe County Health and Human Services, and the Re-Entry Services Division, Criminal Justice Services Department, Mecklenburg County, respectively). In Pitt County, the coordinating body was a community-based organization (STRIVE).
- 43 Rehabilitation is a process that takes nine months of consecutive payments to the federal student loan servicer. Students with

- little to no income—like most incarcerated and recently released students—can apply for a reduced payment, sometimes as low as \$5 a month, to move their loan out of default. Private loans are subject to the terms of the original lending agreement. See Federal Interagency Reentry Council, *Reentry Myth Buster: On Repaying Federal Student Loans While Incarcerated* (New York: Council of State Governments, 2016), <https://perma.cc/M4SZ-HSBA>.
- 44 NCDPS and the LRCs designed this role with input from the College Initiative, a college success program for formerly incarcerated students based in New York City, the leadership and staff of which generously shared their time and expertise with Pathways sites. North Carolina’s focus on the college campus walk-through and introductions was influenced by their conversations with staff from the College Initiative. This model has been adopted by other states as well, most recently Washington State, where the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges funded these positions on several community college campuses.
- 45 In Buncombe County, a faculty member who had taught in prison through Pathways initially filled this role. In Mecklenburg County, the LRC hired a formerly incarcerated college graduate. In Pitt County, the navigator hired had experience as a mentor and working with formerly incarcerated people.
- 46 Peggy McGarry, Alison Shames, Allon Yaroni, et al., *The Potential of Community Corrections to Improve Safety and Reduce Incarceration* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2013), 9-14, <https://perma.cc/B7WH-UA7E>.
- 47 Based on interviews in 2018 by Vera staff of Pathways students living in the community. See note 1 above.
- 48 This restriction is common among parole agencies. See McGarry, Shames, Yaroni, et al., *Potential of Community Corrections*, 2013, 11-12.
- 49 This information emerged as the result of an unpublished process evaluation Vera conducted in 2011 for the College Initiative, a college success program for people with individual or familial histories of justice involvement. Allon Yaroni and Léon Digard, *College Initiative Process Evaluation* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2011).
- 50 Jeremy Travis, Amy Solomon, and Michelle Waul, *From Prison to Home: The Dimensions and Consequences of Prisoner Reentry* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2001), 9, <http://perma.cc/KY7V-GEYF>. Also see Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). For eventual release figures, see E. Ann Carson and Daniela Golinelli, *Prisoners in 2012: Trends in Admissions and Releases, 1991-2012* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013), 4 & table 2, <http://perma.cc/32TN-9ED3>.
- 51 This series of discussions included formerly incarcerated people and congressional staff, as well as representatives from the U.S. Department of Education; the Federal Bureau of Prisons; the U.S. Department of Justice; colleges and educational institutions; local and state departments of corrections, labor, and education; and justice policy, direct service, advocacy, and research organizations.
- 52 U.S. Department of Education, “Institutions Selected for Participation in the Second Chance Pell Experiment in the 2016–2017 Award Year,” press release (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2016), <https://perma.cc/F24A-DPH6>.
- 53 Mercer County Community College, “Gov. Chris Christie Visits Mercer to Voice Support for Prison Education,” *MCCC News*, May 27, 2014, <https://perma.cc/LEC4-JYP6>.
- 54 Michigan Department of Corrections, “The Vocational Village,” <https://perma.cc/FK97-AQAX>.
- 55 Huron Correctional Facility, the state’s only women’s prison, fell outside of the service areas of all three Michigan colleges selected for Second Chance Pell. As a result, incarcerated women, but not men, were charged out-of-county tuition and fee rates according to the policies governing community colleges in the state. This allocation was made to ensure equitable access to those housed at Huron. Michigan HB 4320 (2017), <https://perma.cc/Q2VF-UJJE>.
- 56 “An Agenda for Higher Education Reform: Remarks by Senate HELP Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN),” keynote speech (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, February 4, 2019), <https://perma.cc/Y8XF-2UHP>.
- 57 New Jersey SB 2055/AB 3722 (2018), <https://perma.cc/8857-PFMU>.
- 58 Christopher Agans, director of NJ-STEP, August 9, 2018, personal e-mail.
- 59 Vera confirmed this by telephone with Phi Theta Kappa in early 2018.
- 60 See Travis, Western, and Redburn, *The Growth of Incarceration*, 2014, 104-130; and Delaney, Subramanian, Shames, and Turner, *Reimagining Prison*, 2018, 13-77.
- 61 See Travis, Western, and Redburn, *The Growth of Incarceration*, 2014, 130-156.
- 62 Other projects with this focus included implementation assistance for the Prison Rape Elimination Act and reducing the use of segregated housing or solitary confinement. See Alison Shames, Jessa Wilcox, and Ram Subramanian, *Solitary Confinement: Common Misconceptions and Emerging Safe Alternatives* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2015), <https://perma.cc/DH5W-GYP7>; and Allison Hastings, Ram Subramanian, and Kristin Littell, *Partnering with Community Sexual Assault Response Teams: A Guide for Local Community Confinement and Juvenile Detention Facilities* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2015), <https://perma.cc/JPY4-7HHE>.
- 63 Delaney, Subramanian, Shames, and Turner, *Reimagining Prison*, 2018.

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About citations

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Credits

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