



The New York Reentry Education Network Platform: Using the Power of Education to Transform the Lives of Justice-Involved New Yorkers

Education is Individual and Community Empowerment

Access to education is one of the most personally and financially empowering ways for people to escape the revolving doors of criminal justice system. Education provides individuals involved in the criminal justice system with the tools, resources, and opportunities to rebuild their lives, realize their full potential, and enter a meaningful and life-sustaining career path. It also creates leadership and role model development within families and communities. Offering high quality education in criminal justice and reentry settings is a powerful strategy for reinvesting in communities that have been negatively impacted by pervasive poverty, low-performing schools, and mass incarceration.

An Evidence-Based and Cost Savings Strategy for Increasing Public Safety

New York State and City rates of recidivism are 40%¹ and 42%², respectively, representing a significant public policy challenge. Research demonstrates that access to education in corrections settings lowers recidivism rates.³ Formerly incarcerated individuals pursuing higher education while being supported by community based organizations experience lower levels of re-arrest and re-incarceration.⁴ New York State college in prison programs have also proven effective, with only 7.7% of incarcerated people who attended college classes re-incarcerated compared to the 29.9% recidivism rate of those who did not attend any college classes.⁵ NYREN organizations supporting people with criminal justice system involvement to pursue education report that their students have a much greater chance of success if they have access to holistic wrap-around support services.

The Pew Center on the States estimates that corrections costs state governments close to \$52 billion and that lowering recidivism by just 10% would save a combined \$635 million in one year.⁶ These costs savings can be reinvested in education and other critical services needed in low-income communities most adversely impacted by the criminal justice system and educational failure. Education, far cheaper than re-incarceration, is a smart public safety and economic development strategy.

The Impacts of Education in Reentry & Corrections



What should be done to realize education's potential?

Based on research and practitioner experience, the members of NYREN have created a platform for vision and action. This platform identifies the major changes and developments that New York City and State government agencies and elected officials should pursue in policy, funding, and program development to fully realize the positive impact of education's role in reentry.

1. Make education a centerpiece of corrections and reentry strategy.

- a. Provide, fund and make accessible high-quality education programs (including academic, career development, vocational, and skills training programs) to all people with criminal justice-system involvement, inside correctional facilities and after their release into communities.
- b. Employ screening and assessment tools to evaluate the educational and employment needs and strengths of each individual involved in the justice system and use this to help guide their career planning.
- c. Embed education planning in all orientation, discharge planning, and reentry services offered within correctional facilities.
- d. Incentivize education in correctional and transitional settings.

2. Coordinate and align education planning and programs in corrections and reentry and facilitate cross-sector collaboration and tracking

- a. Undertake cross-system government planning and coordination of agencies, public programs, initiatives, and community organizations that impact and serve current and formerly incarcerated students and those considering pursuing education.
- b. Create systems to share and track the educational status, planning and progress of individuals involved in the justice system, in order to better align services, reduce duplication, and better support students accessing resources from many sources consecutively or concurrently.

- 3. Integrate academic and occupational opportunities in educational planning and programming in corrections and reentry.**
 - a. Promote a workforce development strategy that links workforce, traditional education and/or degree programs.
 - b. Implement blended education and workforce development program models that help justice-involved individuals balance the multiple demands they face upon release (e.g. supervision, drug treatment, family responsibilities, economic, etc.).
 - c. Revise supervision policies to encourage and enable individuals to jointly pursue and balance education and employment.
 - d. Expand wage subsidy and other government incentive programs that encourage employers to hire formerly incarcerated people and to actively support their continued educational attainments.

- 4. Strengthen and build multiple educational pathways from criminal justice settings into the community.**
 - a. Create interventions and supports designed to help justice-involved students successfully transition from inside correctional facilities into the community and between educational levels and programs.
 - b. Create a clear pathway between Rikers Island and CUNY.
 - c. Couple reentry education programs with the support services recognized by the criminal justice field as necessary for successful reintegration upon release. Those services should address the social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral, mental health, safe housing, and financial support services.
 - d. Ensure that the new High School Equivalency exam slated for 2014 is accessible to currently and formerly incarcerated individuals.
 - e. Share and track student data from inside correctional settings into communities and across agencies, organizations, and sectors to identify the needs of students and measure short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes.

- 5. Reentry education, peer support, leadership development, and wraparound support services must be a funded mandate in order to be an effective public safety and community reinvestment strategy.**
 - a. Increase funding for adult education, high school, high school equivalency, and youth development programs in correctional agencies and reentry programs so that all people with criminal justice system involvement can access the educational programs that they need.
 - b. Reinststate Pell Grants and the Tuition Assistance Program eligibility to fund higher education in correctional settings.
 - c. Increase funding for the supports needed for educational success in the community: peer mentoring, leadership development, and wraparound support services, particularly for community-based organizations providing these services.

- 6. End the institutionalized discrimination in higher education admissions that prevents people with criminal justice system involvement from succeeding in educational programs.**

- a. Create a cross-sector, state-level taskforce to study and address the impact that requiring disclosure of criminal convictions on college admissions has on educational access for people with criminal justice involvement.
- b. Encourage leadership to take responsibility in shifting institutional culture in public and educational institutions (in particular, SUNY and CUNY) to create a welcoming environment for people with criminal justice system involvement.
- c. Train frontline staff in public and educational institutions about the facts and realities of educational participation as a strategy for improving the economic outlook and lowering recidivism rates of justice-involved people in order to dispel misinformation and to enable staff to be champions of educational access and success for people with criminal justice system involvement.

7. Create leaders and leadership opportunities through reentry education programs.

- a. Recognize the transformative role that peers play in reentry education outreach and mentoring programs as leaders and credible messengers for increasing educational engagement in correctional settings and reentry.
- b. Encourage reentry programs to hire people with criminal justice system involvement and mandate correctional facilities to have reasonable access policies towards staff with criminal histories.
- c. Expand and incentivize peer mentoring opportunities in education programs within reentry settings, recognizing that peer mentors and mentees face economic demands that might prevent them from otherwise participating in peer mentoring programs.
- d. Eliminate the association conditions placed on people under supervision that prevent them from contributing to their communities as mentors or from accessing support systems as mentees.

8. Serve the developmental, emotional, economic and educational needs of youth and young adult justice-involved populations.

- a. Raise the age at which young people are tried as adults in the New York State criminal justice system from 16 to 18 years old.
- b. Offer high quality youth education programming within young peoples' communities.
- c. Design and expand programs for young adults ages 18 to 26, taking into account that they are still developing cognitively and emotionally and require guidance for life preparation.
- d. Build a realistic timeframe into programs that enables youth to make educational gains and achieve their goals.
- e. Use a positive youth development framework in youth and young adult programs that emphasizes individual and personal strengths and assets of young people and empowers them to be drivers of their dreams and future goals.
- f. Facilitate family and community involvement in youth development and education programs.

Citations

¹ Vera Institute of Justice, "Price of Prisons | New York" [Fact Sheet], January 2012, accessed November 17, 2013, <http://www.vera.org/files/price-of-prisons-new-york-fact-sheet.pdf>

² NYC Independent Budget Office, "New York City by the Numbers - NYC's Jail Population: Who's There and Why?," 2012, accessed November 17, 2013, <http://ibo.nyc.ny.us/cgi-park2/?p=516>

³ RAND Corporation, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education," 2013, accessed November 17, 2013, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR200/RR266/RAND_RR266.pdf

⁴ College Initiative (www.collegeinitiative.org) and College and Community Fellowship (www.collegeandcommunity.org), organizations that support people with criminal justice system involvement in pursuing higher education, report that their students have recidivism rates of 3.2% and less than 2%, respectively

⁵ Knewton, "Breaking the Prison Cycle Through Education" [Infographic], accessed November 11, 2013, <http://www.knewton.com/prison-education/>

⁶ Pew Center on the States, "State of Recidivism: The Revolving Door of America's Prisons," April 2011, accessed November 17 2013, http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/sentencing_and_corrections/State_Recidivism_Revolving_Door_America_Prisons%20.pdf