

Item 9

(Information Item)

Presentation on incarcerated students and dependents

SUMMARY:

This item provides a presentation on the population of students who are currently or formerly incarcerated and the barriers they face in pursuit of postsecondary education. Representatives from the Campaign for College Opportunity, including the author of “The Possibility Report: From Prison to College Degrees in California” published in February 2021, have been invited to share key findings from the report and recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information item; no action is required.

BACKGROUND:

In 2018, nearly 250,000 individuals were incarcerated in state or federal prisons, jails, detention centers, and youth facilities across California, with a large majority being young, Black, and Latino males. At least 95 percent of individuals in prison will eventually be released and their ability to complete a college credential or degree significantly increases their likelihood of overcoming post-incarceration recidivism challenges.

In June 2020, 11,462 students were enrolled in a face-to-face correspondence program in California state prisons, while more than 1,000 formerly incarcerated students are estimated to be enrolled at the California Community Colleges, California State University, and University of California. Approximately 650,000 individuals are incarcerated or on parole and probation in California, suggesting that only 3 percent currently have access to postsecondary education.

Students that are currently or formerly incarcerated encounter additional and unique challenges relative to their peers. Focus group conversations facilitated by the Campaign for College Opportunity in developing “The Possibility Report” suggested several consistent themes, including:

- Parole and probation systems in California often presenting barriers that hinder formerly incarcerated students from accessing postsecondary education
- Housing situations are often unstable or detrimental to their student success due to parole requirements and barriers to accessing transitional or affordable housing opportunities

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- Employment opportunities are often limited for those with a conviction history, in addition to the challenge of balancing work and academic responsibilities
- Student support services are inconsistent across campuses, usually without any dedicated staff or center that are knowledgeable and responsive to the needs of students that were formerly incarcerated
- Career transitions after graduation are more challenging as campus advisors often lack the understanding for how to advise students with criminal records on their professional pursuits

As noted above, several of the identified themes reflect challenges faced by students that were formerly incarcerated in affording the total costs associated with college attendance. While students can access the federal Pell Grant or Cal Grant upon release, they are ineligible to receive an award while incarcerated. Since 1994, the Pell Grant has not been available to incarcerated students. However, in 2015, the U.S. Department of Education established the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative as a pilot program at 63 colleges in 26 states, including several in California (California State University, Los Angeles; Chaffey Community College; Columbia College; Cuesta College; and Southwestern Community College District). In the first three years of the program, over 17,000 students participated and approximately 4,500 credentials were awarded. More recently in 2020, the Department announced an expansion of 67 new sites across 42 states, again including California (California State University, Sacramento; Imperial Community College District). Despite this progress, the lack of availability of the federal Pell Grant for incarcerated students had limited the ability for universities to offer baccalaureate degree programs. In the COVID-19 relief legislation enacted in December 2020, a provision was included to lift the ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated students. Estimates suggest that approximately 500,000 individuals (64 percent of population in state and federal prison) will now be eligible for federal student aid.

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):

Jake Brymner, Director
Government & External Relations

Danny Murillo, Author
"The Possibility Report: From Prison to College Degrees in California"
Founder, Underground Scholars Initiative

Sara Arce, Vice President of Policy & Advocacy
The Campaign for College Opportunity

ATTACHMENT(S):

"The Possibility Report: From Prison to College Degrees in California" (February 2021)
published by the Campaign for College Opportunity