THE POSSIBILITY REPORT

From Prison to College Degrees in California



The Campaign for College Opportunity

February 2021



FROM THE AUTHOR

As a first-generation student, I attended the K-12 public schools in my South East Los Angeles neighborhood. My experience with the public schools I attended was punctuated with negative experiences due to my limited English proficiency and being the son of migrant parents from Mexico. I often experienced judgment and mockery by my teachers and school administrators for my language difficulties and ethnicity. These actions left me feeling unworthy of an education and unworthy of my teachers' time or investment. Simultaneous to having negative school experiences throughout my youth, I was experiencing violence at home and in my community. It was not surprising then that by the time I started high school, I was convinced I did not belong and had very little hopes for my own future. On the first day of 10th grade, I was expelled from high school after I never returned to school. These experiences inevitably put me, like so many other men of color like me, in the school-to-prison pipeline.

In 2005, the tenth anniversary of my incarceration, I arrived at the Security Housing Unit at Pelican Bay State Prison, where I would remain in isolation for the remainder of my sentence. My educational experience in prison consisted of Adult Basic Education and Pre-General Education Development courses. Access to postsecondary education was practically non-existent throughout California state prisons, but that was not the case at Pelican Bay, where Coastline College offered a correspondence program. When the people around me discovered I was getting released in five years, they encouraged me to enroll and take advantage of the limited educational resources available in solitary confinement. Little did I know that higher education would be the light at the end of a prison tunnel I was trapped in for fourteen years.

Before my release, I decided to continue my education on a college campus. I believed a college degree offered me the best possibility of creating a new life for myself and my family. My goal was to complete my Associate of Arts degree, and I planned to go to campus, take classes, and head home. But once on campus, things changed when I reconnected with a childhood friend who was formerly incarcerated and transferring to the University of California, Irvine.

My friend gave me his blueprint to succeed in higher education as a formerly incarcerated student. He emphasized the importance of seeing myself as part of the campus community and making connections with administrators, faculty, staff, and students. He encouraged me to get involved with student organizing and visit EOPS (Extend Opportunities and Programs Services), the math and writing center. He advised me to join an affinity group, Puente, and participate in academic and support programs, such as the Honor Scholars' program and the Transfer Center. Equipped with this new information, I dedicated my time and energy to my education and campus life. Cerritos College became my sanctuary; it gave my life structure and purpose. It was within this structured environment that I created my academic plan and long-term goals.

As a formerly incarcerated student, though, I still faced challenges. My English professor, who was aware of my conviction history, offered me a work-study position. Initially, I was denied by human resources. However, my professor, academic advisor, and mentor all advocated on my behalf, and eventually, I was hired. Considering I had never been employed, the work-study position was my opportunity to develop a resume. Utilizing the resources available at Cerritos College, I graduated and transferred to UC Berkeley in Fall 2012.

Upon my arrival at UC Berkeley, I found a supportive community. My EOP counselor (Educational Opportunity Program) helped me address parole and campus housing barriers. My academic counselor introduced me to faculty and lecturers, who would become my research advisors. Most importantly, I met students who were formerly incarcerated or who had family members incarcerated. We came together and established the Underground Scholars Initiative to support formerly incarcerated students and create a prison to university pipeline.

I graduated from UC Berkeley in the Spring of 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Ethnic Studies, but I knew that a postsecondary degree would not guarantee employment after graduation, so my mentors steered me toward fellowship opportunities. Fellowships can be a valuable resource for creating employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated people if an intentional effort is put into connecting students to fellowships.

I was awarded both the John W. Gardner Public Service and the Soros Justice Advocacy Fellowship. The Gardner fellowship opened the doors for me to work on a collaborative project between the Vera Institute of Justice and Rutgers University. As a Soros Fellow at the Opportunity Institute, I worked on the Renewing Communities Initiative, a five-year initiative designed to expand access to California's public colleges and universities for currently and formerly incarcerated students. At the conclusion of the Soros Fellowship, I was hired full-time to continue supporting this initiative. I am currently the Program Analyst at the Campaign for College Opportunity and a graduate student in the Social Cultural Analysis of Education program at Long Beach State University.

My life's work is to ensure incarcerated, and formerly incarcerated people have the opportunity to turn their lives around through education. My most significant accomplishment was breaking the cycles of incarceration in my family and helping my brother and nephew create their path towards success. You see, while I was at UC Berkeley, my brother and nephew were caught in the school-to-prison pipeline, but I helped them keep their focus on their education, and today, my brother is an undergraduate student and co-founder of the Underground Scholars Initiative at UC Santa Barbara. My nephew is pursuing an Associate Degree for Transfer in Culinary Arts at Laney College.

In this report, we uplift the voices of formerly incarcerated students in California's public colleges and universities who candidly and vulnerably discuss the real challenges they have encountered in their transition from incarceration to a college or university campus. I am in awe and inspired by the real opportunity we have as a state to create change for generations of Californians caught in an unjust criminal "justice" system. For far too long, California has overinvested in prisons to solve our social issues, but has provided minimal resources or funding to colleges and universities to provide an alternative to incarceration. It is time to change that, and I am living proof that the investment works!

Sincerely,

Danny Murillo
Report Author
Founder, Underground Scholars Initiative

With the philanthropic support of the Art for Justice Fund and Michelson 20MM Foundation, the Campaign for College Opportunity produced this research brief that provides an overview of the current state of higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated students.

This brief provides descriptive demographics on California's incarcerated and paroled populations, a policy landscape analysis detailing the environment in which higher education is made accessible to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, and the voices of formerly incarcerated students from all three segments of California's public higher education system describing the barriers and opportunities they encounter in California's public colleges and universities. Finally, the brief includes a series of recommendations for campuses and California to dismantle post-incarceration barriers and create more opportunities for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students to improve their lives and the economic health of California.



INTRODUCTION

Nearly a quarter million people were incarcerated in California's state and federal prisons, jails, detention centers, and youth facilities in 2018 and nearly half a million people were on parole and probation—the vast majority being young, Black and Latinx males.[1] California's over-reliance on jails and prisons as the solution to poverty, unstable housing, public health and safety issues, and crime has devastated generations of Black and Latinx families, perpetuating cycles of poverty, segregation, and inequity.[2] But it doesn't have to be this way.

At least 95 percent of people in prison will eventually be released, and their ability to access and complete some form of a college degree or credential will increase their chances of overcoming post-incarceration barriers.[3] Going from prison to earning a college degree or credential opens the doors to new possibilities of careers, economic mobility, housing, health care, civic engagement, and the uplifting of entire families and communities.[4]

Today, a series of public policies and public investments, which can be found in Appendix A, provide incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people with options for pursuing a higher education, but too few incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people earn their college degrees, questioning California's sincere commitment to their college opportunity.

As of June 2020, there were 11,472 students enrolled in a face-to-face or correspondence program in California state prisons and, although no formal numbers exist, it is estimated that over 1,000 formerly incarcerated students are enrolled in the California Community Colleges (CCC), California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) campuses.[5] Combining the total number of incarcerated people and people on parole and probation in California (approximately 650,000), **the total number accessing higher education is under 20,000, or 3 percent.**[6] California can and must do more with this tremendous opportunity for public colleges and universities to address the unique challenges and build on the opportunities formerly incarcerated students encounter as they transition from incarceration to higher education. It is both an economic and justice imperative to promote college access and degree attainment!

The California Legislature found that every one dollar spent on correctional education has a **return of more than two dollars** in reduced prison costs, which can then be returned to the state's general fund.[7] Another study estimated that if 50 percent of college-eligible incarcerated Californians participated in a postsecondary prison education program, **the state could potentially save $66.6 million per year.**[8] We also know that a person with a college degree will earn one million dollars more over their lifetime than a person with only a high school education, will be more likely to weather unemployment and poverty, and will contribute to the state's economic health by paying higher taxes and being more likely to own a home, own a business, and engage civically.[9]

Ensuring college opportunity for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students goes beyond economic benefits—**it is part of our state's obligation to racial justice.** California's history of "tough on crime" policies, which can be found in Appendix A of this report, created an environment that accelerated the mass incarceration of Black and Latinx men and built a school-to-prison-pipeline for young Black and Latinx boys.[10] High rates of incarceration for Black and Latinx males is the result of draconian laws at the state to federal levels, such as mandatory minimum sentences, long-term sentencing, and three strikes laws; bail policies that criminalize poverty; bloated law enforcement budgets; disinvestment in public schools; lack of economic opportunity; and employment discrimination against people who have been incarcerated.[11] While we work to dismantle a racist criminal "justice" system, we must simultaneously work to create anti-racist policies that facilitate educational opportunity and college degree attainment for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Californians.

Although incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Californians have the opportunity to go to postsecondary education, there are systemic barriers preventing many of them from accessing a college education and from completing degrees. Through a series of focus groups with formerly incarcerated individuals who are attending or have attended a public college or university in California, the Campaign for College Opportunity learned that inconsistent services, messages, and policies work against the success of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Californians who are working hard to improve their lives and contribute to the state. The focus group findings revealed:

1. The **parole and probation** systems in California do not prioritize higher education and often prevent formerly incarcerated Californians from achieving their educational goals.

2. Requirements to access **housing** leave formerly incarcerated Californians with unstable living situations, creating an environment inconducive to going to or staying in college.

3. Formerly incarcerated students straddle **two employment problems:** Finding work and balancing the need to work with attending school.

4. **Targeted student support services** are key to college retention but are inconsistent across campuses, and in some instances, the responsibility to create relevant support services falls on formerly incarcerated students themselves.

5. Campus **advisors** lack the specific knowledge and understanding to properly advise students with criminal records on career opportunities.



CALIFORNIA HAS NEARLY ONE-QUARTER MILLION INCARCERATED PEOPLE IN ITS PRISONS AND JAILS AND NEARLY HALF A MILLION ON PROBATION OR PAROLE

The total number of people incarcerated in California, including state and federal prisons, jails, youth facilities, and involuntary commitment is approximately 241,000.[12] Compared to the rest of the country, California ranks 34th amongst states with the highest rates of incarceration.

This research brief focuses primarily on California state prisons, which represent approximately half of the total incarcerated population in the state and incarcerated youth in the Division of Juvenile Justice. Disaggregated data by race, ethnicity, gender, and age for incarcerated people and people released from prison is readily available via the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). In addition, they also publish data on the Division of Juvenile Justice, with descriptive demographics on the population of incarcerated youth.[13]

Unfortunately, limited descriptive demographic data exist for California's federal prison and county jail populations and are therefore not included in the body of this report.

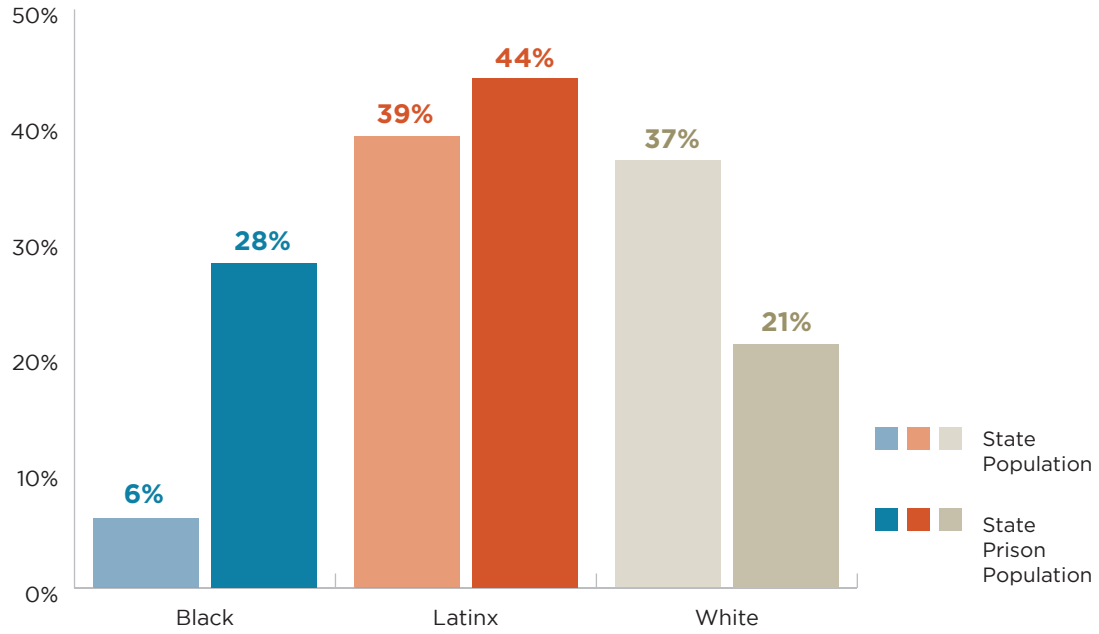
We recommend that a new state entity be tasked with the collection of demographic data that creates a clear picture of the composition of California's total incarcerated and paroled population. The availability of this consolidated data can support efforts to improve postsecondary education, physical and mental health services, and a host of other social services for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.

The State Prison Population

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) reported that in 2020, the average daily population of people incarcerated in state prison was 127,709.[14] This does not include those incarcerated in federal prisons, local jails, detention centers, and youth facilities.

Black and Latinx Californians represent 45 percent of the state population but 72 percent of California's state prison population.

Figure 1. 2020 State and 2019 State Prison Population by Race/Ethnicity

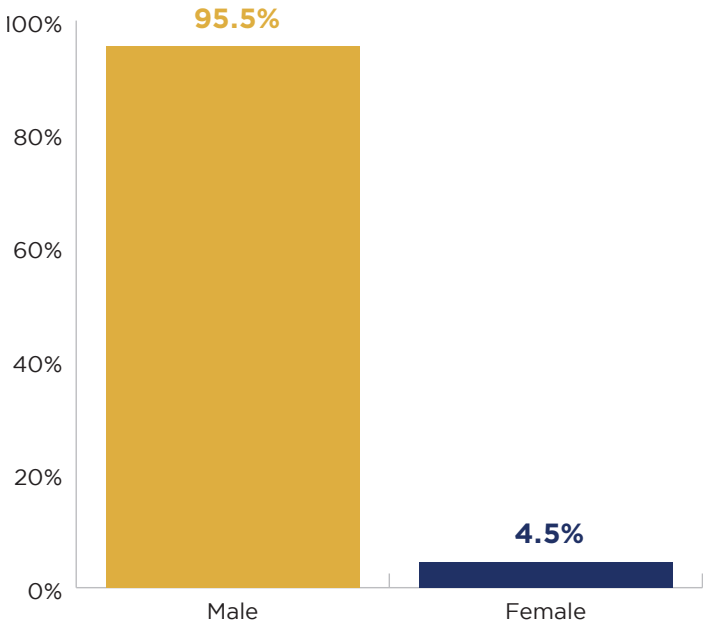


Note: Ethnicity is self-reported by offenders who choose from a list of 28 ethnicity types.
Source: Johnson, H., McGhee, E., & Mejia, M. C. (2020). *Just the Facts, California's Population*. San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California Retrieved from https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-population/; California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2020). *Offender Data Points.* [Report] Sacramento, CA.: Author. Retrieved from https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/offender-outcomes-characteristics/offender-data-points/

The state prison population is relatively young. Most state prisoners are men under the age of 40 who would have a long life ahead of them to contribute to their families and communities.

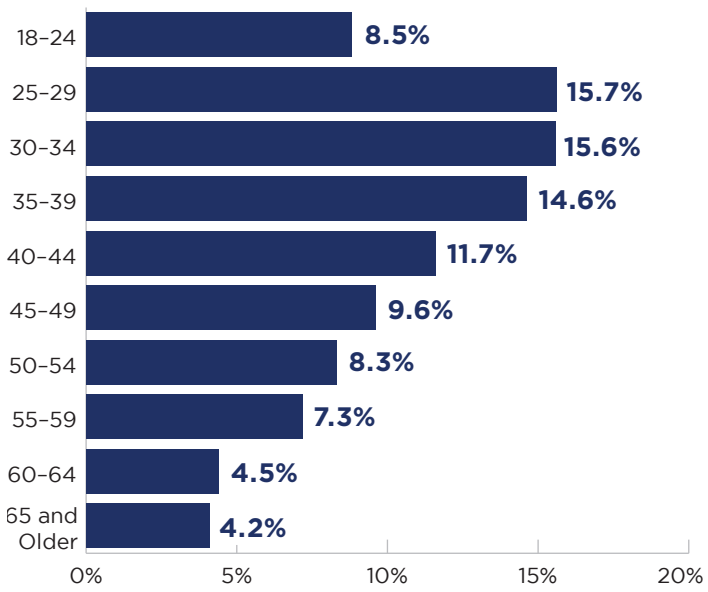
The state prison population is overwhelmingly male and a majority are under the age of 40.

Figure 2. 2019 State Prison Population by Gender



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2020). *Offender Data Points*. [Report] Sacramento, CA.: Author. Retrieved from https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/offender-outcomes-characteristics/offender-data-points/

Figure 3. 2019 State Prison Population by Age



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2020). *Offender Data Points*. [Report] Sacramento, CA.: Author. Retrieved from https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/offender-outcomes-characteristics/offender-data-points/

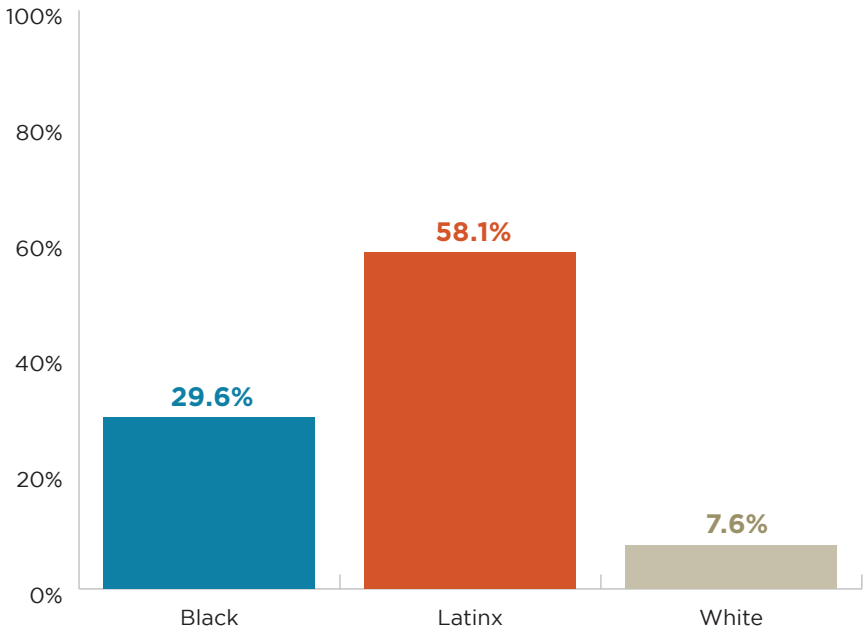


Division of Juvenile Justice

The Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) houses youth offenders ages 12-25 at three facilities in California. There are nearly 800 youth in the DJJ, the vast majority of whom are Black and Latinx males ages 17-20, the state's college-going age population.

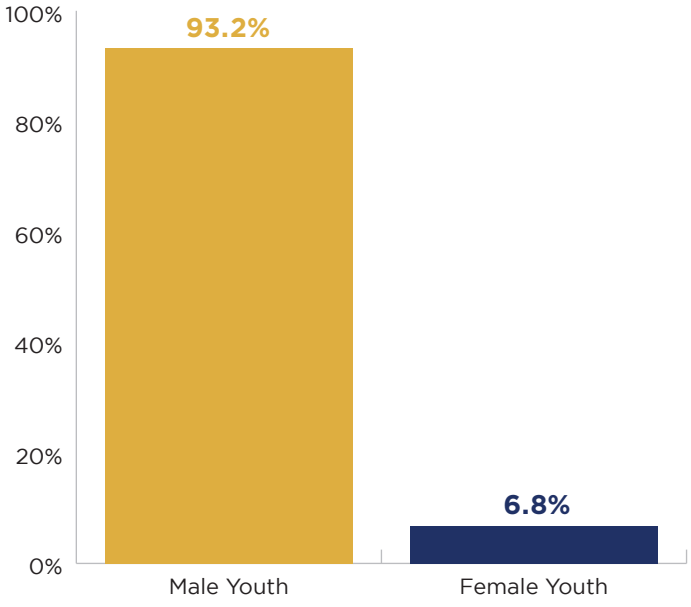
The state juvenile population is overwhelmingly Black and Latinx males who are college-aged.

Figure 4. 2019 State Juvenile Justice Population by Race/Ethnicity



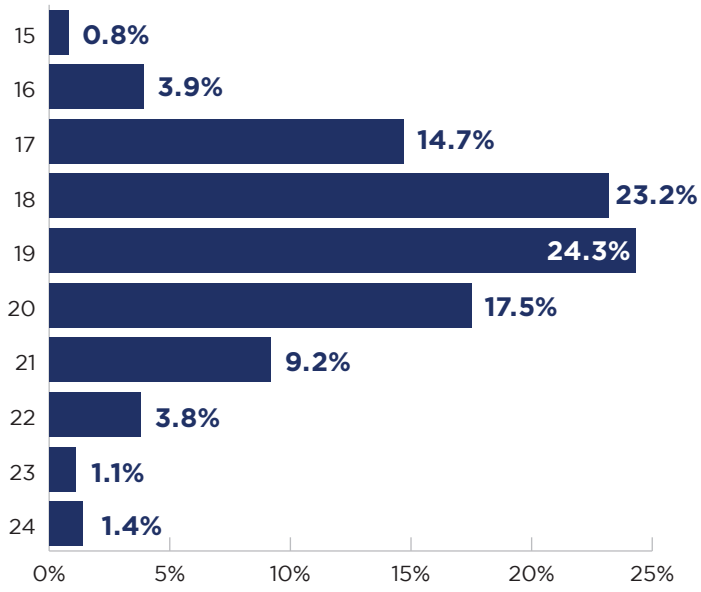
Source: Garcia, M. A., ARC Policy Coordinator (E-mail communication, May 20, 2020).

Figure 5. 2019 State Juvenile Justice Population by Gender



Source: Garcia, M. A., ARC Policy Coordinator (E-mail communication, May 20, 2020).

Figure 6. 2019 State Juvenile Justice Population by Age



Source: Garcia, M. A., ARC Policy Coordinator (E-mail communication, May 20, 2020).

The State Parole/Probation Population

At least 95 percent of all state prisoners will be released from prison at some point.[15] In California, the majority of people released from prison are placed into parole or probation programs. In 2018, the number of people in a post-release or court mandated supervisory program was estimated at 405,505 adults and 27,570 youth.[16]

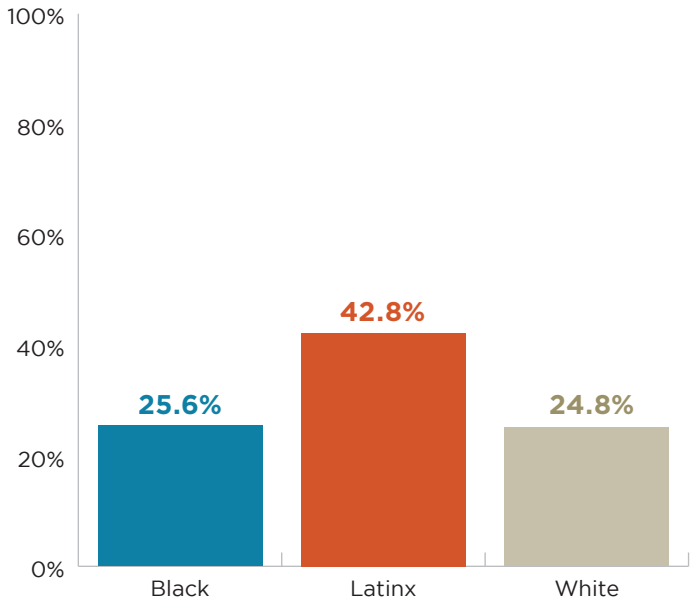
Probation and parole are forms of post-release supervision. Formerly incarcerated individuals are on probation or parole for time periods ranging anywhere from three to five years. Formerly incarcerated individuals must meet a set of probation or parole requirements, such as, but not limited to, attending bi-weekly or monthly meetings with probation or parole officers, maintaining employment, and participating in job training or life skills programs. Formerly incarcerated people on probation/parole are also subject to random housing inspections, drug testing, and geographic restrictions.

Only detailed demographic data for paroled individuals is centralized and readily available from California's state prisons.

A majority of individuals on parole from state prison are Black and Latinx with nearly half between the ages of 25-39.

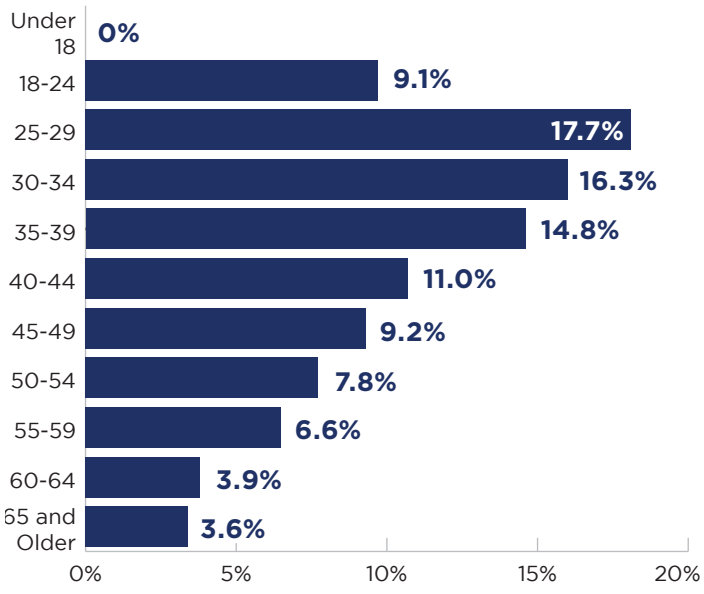


Figure 7. 2019 California State Prison Parole Population by Race/Ethnicity



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2020). *Offender Data Points.* [Report] Sacramento, CA.: Author. Retrieved from https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/offender-outcomes-characteristics/offender-data-points/

Figure 8. 2019 California State Prison Parole Population by Age



Source: California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2020). *Offender Data Points*. [Report] Sacramento, CA.: Author. Retrieved from https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/research/offender-outcomes-characteristics/offender-data-points/



Higher Education Programs Inside California Prisons

According to the Division of Rehabilitative Programs, which oversees college programs in California state prisons, 11,472 incarcerated students were enrolled in a face-to-face or correspondence program, and 1,214 incarcerated students earned a college degree in 2020 (Table 1).[17] That means less than 10 percent of the total state prison population who enrolled in a higher education program earned a degree. There are multiple factors why access to postsecondary education inside California state prisons is not widely accessible including, but not limited to the following: classroom space is limited; colleges and universities do not have enough staff and faculty; and potential students need to complete their GED or high school equivalency diploma before they can begin a postsecondary education program.

Table 1 also shows that not all groups are accessing higher education equally inside state prisons. Latinos represent 44 percent of the California state prison population but only 38 percent of incarcerated students and 27 percent of incarcerated college graduates.[18]

Not all groups are accessing higher education equally inside state prisons.

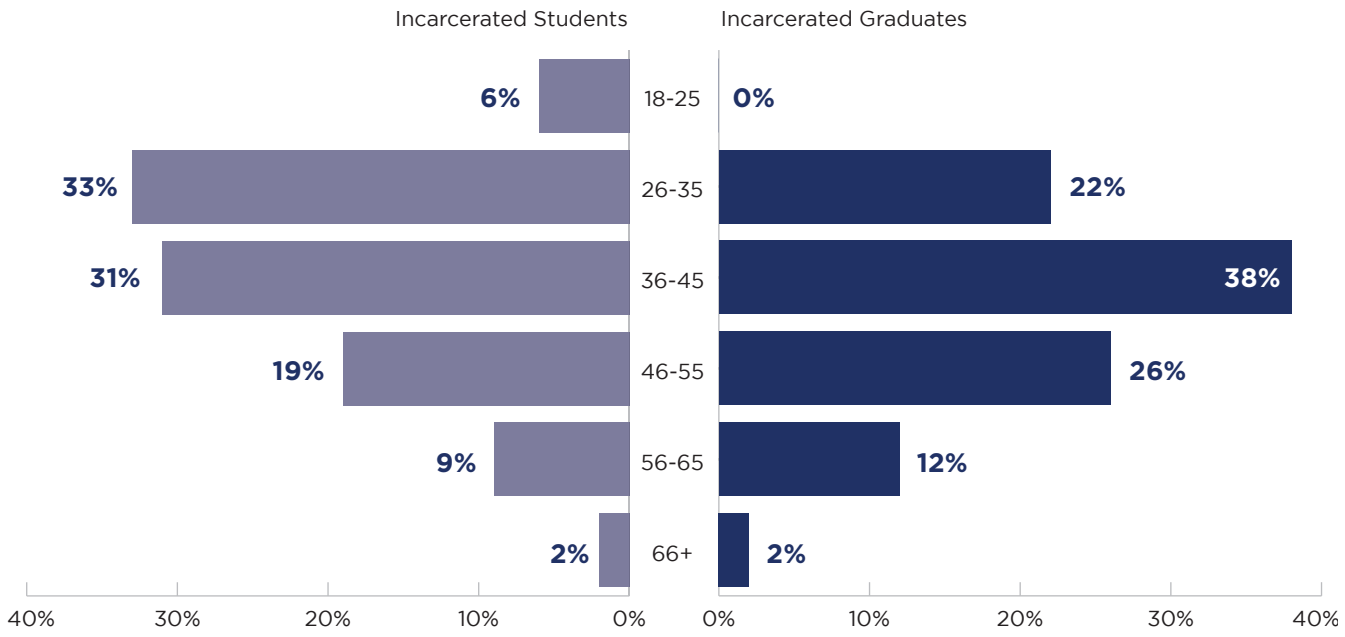
Table 1. 2020 Student and College Graduate Population in California State Prisons

	State Prison Population	State Incarcerated Student Population	State Incarcerated College Graduates
Total	**127,709**	**11,472**	**1,214**
Male	95.5%	95%	91%
Female	4.5%	5%	9%
Black	28%	28%	27%
Latinx	44%	38%	27%
White	21%	26%	33%

Source: Choate, B., DRP-CDCR., Director (E-mail communication, June 08, 2020).

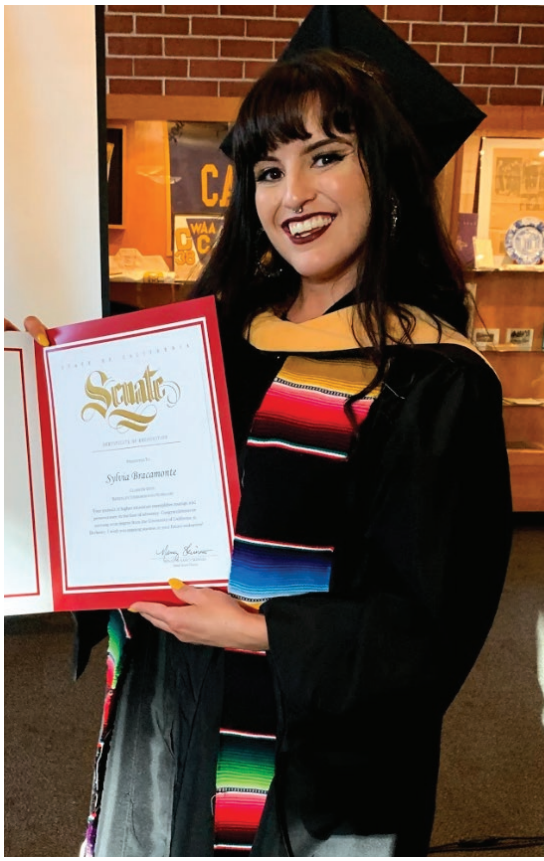
More than 80 percent of incarcerated students are between the ages of 26-55, a population significantly older than the traditional college-aged student. While California's state prisons house over 11,000 18 to 24-year-olds, only 725 18 to 25 year-olds are enrolled as college students and only four earned their college degree this year.

Figure 9. 2020 California State Prison Students and Graduates by Age



Source: Choate, B., DRP-CDCR., Director (E-mail communication, June 08, 2020).

From July 2018 to June 2020, 8,236 people who were enrolled in a college course while incarcerated but had yet to earn their degree were released from state prison. Another 595 people earned a college degree while in prison over this same time period.[19] Of those released with some college but no degree, 93 percent were male, 27 percent Black, 35 percent Latinx, and three-quarters under the age of 75.[20]There is no data available on whether individuals who started a college program in prison continued their education and obtained a degree post-release, representing a huge opportunity lost to understand persistence and degree completion rates.



In June of 2020, the Campaign for College Opportunity distributed a survey to all 148 public colleges and universities in the state inquiring about their educational offerings for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. We closed the survey in September 2020 and received 103 survey responses and found that 24 campuses offer face-to-face courses, 2 colleges offer correspondence courses, and another 12 offer a combination of modes. Additionally, 35 campuses report offering support services that include registration support, tutoring, and transfer services. An additional six campuses offer transitional services that include writing letters of support to the Board of Parole Hearings and referrals or resource lists for housing, legal, and re-entry service providers.

Table 2. California's Public Colleges and Universities Self-Reported Higher Education Programs for Incarcerated Students

Program Type	California Community Colleges *32 Respondents*	California State University *4 Respondents*	University of California *1 Respondent*
Face to Face	23	1	
Correspondence	2		
Combination of face to face and correspondence	12		
Support services	30	4	1
Transitional support	4	1	1

Note: Programs could be in state and federal prisons, local adult jails, DJJ and local youth facilities.
Source: Campaign for College Opportunity Survey, 2020.

Higher Education Programs For Formerly Incarcerated Students

Although California's public colleges and universities do not collect data on the number of formerly incarcerated students they serve, it is estimated that in 2019, over 1,000 formerly incarcerated students were enrolled across all three segments of California's public higher education system.[21] While that may seem encouraging, it is important to note that California has over 425,000 people on probation or parole that could be enrolled in higher education.

Table 3. California's Public Colleges and Universities Self-Reported Higher Education Support Efforts for Formerly Incarcerated Students

Program Type	California Community Colleges *45 Respondents*	California State University *14 Respondents*	University of California *6 Respondents*
Support program	29	12	2
Student club	20	9	6

Source: Campaign for College Opportunity Survey, 2020.

There are 76 support programs and campus clubs for formerly incarcerated students in California public colleges and universities today according to our survey results. These clubs and programs provide a variety of critical supports to formerly incarcerated students including access to tutors, printing, a dedicated place to study, peer support, employment referrals, housing and transportation vouchers, and record clearance support, among other services.



FORMERLY INCARCERATED STUDENTS SPEAK OUT

To better understand the challenges and opportunities formerly incarcerated students encounter in public colleges and universities, the Campaign for College Opportunity hosted three virtual focus groups with 29 students representing a cross-section of California Community College (CCC), CSU and UC campuses. Due to the Covid-19 global pandemic and social distancing requirements, our team facilitated three two-hour virtual focus-groups through Zoom. The focus group participants were diverse in terms of gender and race/ethnicity, and they had an array of experiences accessing and succeeding in higher education. The focus groups included individuals who were enrolled in a college program while incarcerated and continued their education upon release, as well as participants who enrolled only after their release from jail or prison. Focus group participants included formerly incarcerated students pursuing certificate degrees, Associate in Arts and Science, Associate Degree for Transfer, Bachelor's, Master's, PhD's, and Law degrees.

Figure 10. Focus Group Participant Race/Ethnicity and Gender

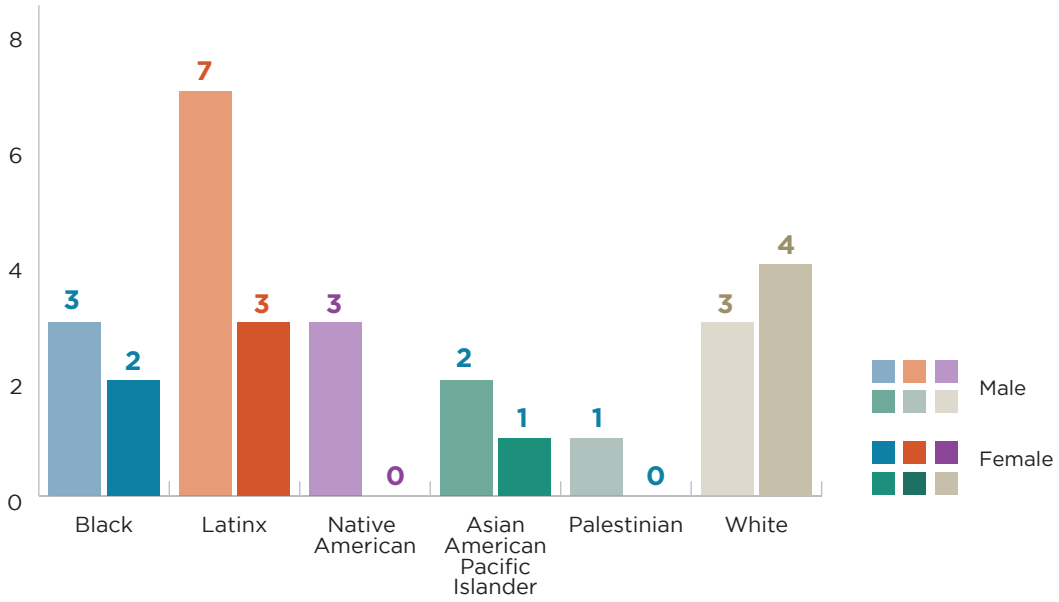


Figure 11. Focus Group Participant Colleges and Universities





Though focus group participants had a varied set of life experiences, five common themes emerged across all three focus groups:

- **Parole and Probation:** The parole and probation systems in California do not prioritize higher education and often present barriers that keep formerly incarcerated students from achieving their educational goals.
- **Housing:** Requirements to access housing or parole requirements leave students with unstable living situations creating an environment unconducive to going to or staying in college.
- **Employment:** Formerly incarcerated students straddle two employment problems: Finding work with a conviction history and balancing the need to work while attending school.
- **Targeted Student Support:** Support services are key to college retention but are inconsistent across campuses, and in some instances, the responsibility to create a space for formerly incarcerated students falls on the students themselves.
- **Career Transition:** Campus advisors lack the knowledge and understanding to properly advise students with criminal records on career opportunities.

Parole and Probation

The parole and probation systems in California do not prioritize higher education and often present barriers that keep formerly incarcerated students from achieving their educational goals.

> My parole officer encouraged work over education even saying, "school is a nice little hobby—is that clear?" There was no emphasis or focus on education, but education saved my life.
>
> *CSU student*

There is no centralized policy guidance informing probation and parole officers on managing and supporting formerly incarcerated students on parole/probation. For the most part, participants in the focus groups described probation and parole officers as unsupportive of their educational aspirations and goals.

> Parole was not really open to the idea of us to go into college—they want us to go into treatment or find a job A.S.A.P. Their resources aren't focused on the [college] route.
>
> *CCC student*

In addition to a focus on employment over education, one student shared how they had to pass up the opportunity to attend the school of their dreams because of parole/probation travel restrictions. Some of those restrictions include not being allowed to travel more than fifty miles from a primary residence or leaving the county of residence.

> I was still on parole. I think that interfered with making a decision on which school I could go to because I got accepted to nine schools, but ultimately chose something nearby.
>
> *UC student*

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The state should establish guidelines that require parole/probation officers to promote higher education and treat both part-time and full-time enrollment in public and private non-profit postsecondary education as equivalent to securing a job when meeting parole/probation requirements.
2. The state should establish guidelines for parole/probation to provide support services and resources for formerly incarcerated individuals pursuing a higher education. This should include:
    - Parole/Probation officers provide materials and contact information about higher education opportunities to those under their supervision.
    - Parole/Probation guidelines allow for travel flexibility related to college/university visits for purposes of admission.
    - Parole/Probation guidelines establish seamless transfer for students admitted to a college or university outside their confined geographic region as defined by their parole/probation.
    - Parole/Probation officers are required to offer flexible check in times or online check in times so as not to interfere with class schedules
    - Parole/Probation establish guidelines that include strict limits to NOT promote the enrollment in for-profit institutions.

Housing



Requirements to access housing or parole requirements leave formerly incarcerated Californians with unstable living situations creating an environment unconducive to going to or staying in college.

Many students shared that conditions for transitional housing require that an individual not be a full-time student or that they could not apply for affordable housing because they had ankle bracelets and/or felony convictions. Many of our focus group participants shared that they had, during their educational journeys, lived in vehicles and were often homeless.

A UC student described how he had to put his plans to pursue his education on hold because, "coming out of prison, I was indigent, and so I was relying on state financing for housing, primarily. And almost every one of the housing locations I was at had a rule in place that you couldn't be a full-time student and live there. So, yeah, housing was a big problem."

> Housing was my issue. On my first day of class which started at 9 am, I was in a raid at my halfway house. They kicked me out of the halfway house because I wasn't attending a GED program even though I had completed a GED program and was (enrolled) at a university. I had a job, but Sacramento wanted a signature that I was taking a work course, or the halfway house doesn't get money, so they asked me to leave. Every application asked if I was felon so now, I live with a bunch of frat boys.
>
> *CSU student*

Students attending a University of California campus shared that at the time of admission they were unclear if they had to live on campus and were worried that their status as formerly incarcerated or parole/probation situation would pose a barrier. "I couldn't live in campus housing because parole couldn't get to me at any time. I couldn't just be a student."

One bright spot was a Project Rebound program at Cal Poly Pomona that provided relief to formerly incarcerated students without stable housing so they could maintain their academic progress. A Cal Poly Pomona Student stated, "We have a trailer on campus where people can kickback, do homework, watch TV. We have a refrigerator and a microwave, a place to shower and take naps."

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The state and California's counties should allow enrollment in higher education at least part-time as an option for transitional and affordable housing sponsored by the county or state.
2. Public colleges and universities should clearly communicate any requirements for on-campus living to those that are formerly incarcerated and ensure support staff are available to answer questions.
3. Public colleges and universities should provide a place where formerly incarcerated students who may be struggling with housing stability to take care of basic needs, such as hygiene and sleep.
4. Public colleges and universities should designate a space where formerly incarcerated students who are on parole can live on campus.

Employment

Formerly incarcerated students straddle two employment problems: Finding work with a conviction history and balancing the need to work while attending school.

The need to work poses serious issues for formerly incarcerated students. Employment is key to maintaining stable housing, meeting basic needs, caring for family, and, more than likely, is a condition for probation, parole or housing.

The students we spoke with elevated the difficulties with being a parent, finding stable work, and finding enough work to meet financial obligations.

> The problem with working on campus is the limit to 20 hours. That's great if you're 22 years old. It's pocket money, but to try and survive on that is impossible.
>
> *CSU student*

A few students noted that their conviction history posed a barrier to securing on-campus work.

> There is still a box for us to check, even though the fair chance hiring policy exists at my community college, so we can't even access [federal] work-study.
>
> *CCC student*

The "box" the student is referencing can be found on an employment form and would need to be checked if a job applicant has a prior conviction. By checking the box, an applicant may be discounted from the application process. Students required to check the box for jobs on campus likely experience discrimination in job placement.

> I think as far as getting employment, there has been discrimination. It took me a whole year and a half to get employed on campus, even through the Federal Work-Study.
>
> *CCC student*

Once employed, students shared that working full-time is a necessity to meet financial obligations, but that interferes with their ability to take more courses and to graduate in a timely fashion.

> Choosing between employment and a full load for school is hard. I need a full paycheck per week. It's a slow grind. I get in one class per semester, maybe two.
>
> *CCC student*

One bright spot in the employment discussion is the University of California and the California Community Colleges' recent changes in their hiring policies prohibiting the use of a conviction against a qualified applicant.[22] Although these policies are not identical, they are both a step in the right direction in creating employment opportunities for qualified people with a conviction or incarceration history.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement a hiring policy to prohibit the use of a conviction against a qualified applicant at the CSU. Ensure that all colleges and universities comply with their specific hiring policy.
2. Public colleges and universities should prioritize formerly incarcerated students for Federal Work-Study opportunities and significantly expand Federal Work-Study opportunities.
3. Public colleges and universities should train staff to better serve formerly incarcerated students seeking job opportunities and resources on campus.



Targeted Student Support

Support services are key to college-going and degree completion but are inconsistent across campuses. In many instances, the responsibility to create a space for formerly incarcerated students falls on the students themselves.

There are so many steps a student must take before they even step foot on a campus. That is why many of our focus group participants suggest that higher education support begin before release, while incarcerated. Students urged that support take the form of advising and help with transcripts, registration, financial aid, housing, mental health services, and legal support.

> I think having accessible resources while incarcerated that school you and really give you the knowledge about what you are jumping into. I did not know what a UC was until I started going to a UC. I did not know the difference between a CCC, a CSU, a UC or private school.
>
> *UC student*

As an example of the type of support students need while incarcerated, several students referenced their lack of knowledge about the Selective Service Registration condition for financial aid requiring men between the ages of 18-25 to sign-up for selective service.

> I went to prison when I was 18, but when I signed up for college, the [Selective Service] that's one thing I had to do, so I had to file an appeal. I had to provide proof that I was incarcerated.
>
> *CCC student*

> When I first came home, I could not get [federal] financial aid at my community college because I never registered for Selective Service. I didn't even know about it. I was 17 when I got busted, and I didn't come home 'til I was 26.
>
> *UC student*

Once on campus, students need intrusive supports that help them navigate college and personally succeed. Formerly incarcerated students face multiple challenges when they are released while working hard to pursue a college degree. If students are not supported to meet these challenges, they will drop out.

> When I was released, I didn't have a high school diploma. I was living in a halfway house with no income and no work. My college wanted transcripts, which I didn't have. I was flustered. I had no high school credits, no money, no transportation. I was embarrassed by my age to be going back to school. I thought everyone would judge me. My school at the time didn't have a program for formerly incarcerated people. I bounced off the walls asking myself what I can do with my major. I have all these felonies and didn't know what I could do. I almost quit.
>
> *CSU student*

> I was on probation and parole. I was trying to get reintegrated with my children. I was trying to pay rent, stay in sober living, in my first year after release, I had to get my own place, work and go to school because I couldn't get my kids back until I had a stable living situation.
>
> *CCC student*

On-Campus Support Programs

Several campuses in the UC, CSU, and California Community Colleges have created safe spaces where formerly incarcerated students can find the support they need. Rising Scholars, Project Rebound, and Underground Scholars are three programs that were cited as being particularly helpful for formerly incarcerated students.

Rising Scholars: California Community Colleges

California Community Colleges serving incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students are part of the Rising Scholars Network. More than 20 Rising Scholars colleges provide transferable degree-granting courses to over 14,000 students incarcerated in California's prisons and jails. Students who come home from prison or jail and formerly incarcerated students in the community can continue building toward a degree or credential in more than 40 Rising Scholars colleges with campus support programs or student clubs for formerly incarcerated students. The Rising Scholars colleges believe that serving incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students is a critical matter of equity and is a core component of the California Community College Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley's *Vision for Success*. All students have a right to higher education, all students can succeed whatever their past, and all students deserve support in reaching their goals. The Rising Scholars colleges pair high expectations with high support to build a generation of graduates and leaders in the community.

Project Rebound: California State University

Project Rebound was established in 1967 by Dr. John Irwin, a formerly incarcerated professor at San Francisco State University. Irwin created Project Rebound to matriculate people into San Francisco State directly from the criminal justice system. Since the program's inception, hundreds of formerly incarcerated people have obtained bachelor's degrees and postgraduate degrees. In 2016, with the support of the Opportunity Institute and CSU Chancellor Timothy White, Project Rebound expanded into a consortium of nine CSU campus programs. The CSU Project Rebound Consortium is now a state- and grant-funded network of programs operating at 14 CSU campuses with the mission to support the higher education and successful reintegration of the formerly incarcerated through the mentorship and living example of other formerly incarcerated students, graduates, faculty, and staff. Since 2016, the Project Rebound Consortium has enrolled over 1,000 students and graduated 225 students. Project Rebound student's system-wide have earned an overall grade point average of 3.0, have a zero percent recidivism rate, and 87 percent of graduates have secured full-time employment or admission to postgraduate programs.

Underground Scholars: University of California

Berkeley Underground Scholars (BUS) was established in 2013 at the University of California, Berkeley as the Underground Scholars Initiative (USI), a student-led organization. USI was awarded a grant in 2014, through a fee referendum voted on by students, to acquire office space and develop the BUS program. With the support of state legislators in 2016, USI received funding from the state to establish the BUS program. BUS sits within UC Berkeley's Division of Equity and Inclusion. There are seven UC campuses with an Underground Scholars Initiative chapter. UC Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Santa Cruz have an on-campus program to support current students with critical needs, including tutoring; employment; food; financial aid assistance; academic, career and mental health advising; peer mentorship, and leadership development. Through recruitment, retention, and advocacy, the Underground Scholars program model creates pathways to the University of California for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. They provide academic advising, transcript analysis, and UC application support through outreach on college campuses, programs in state prisons, and county jails.

Participants acknowledged the high value of programs that provide opportunities for peer-to-peer mentoring in helping overcome the cultural, psychological, and social barriers they encounter on a college and university campus but far too few said these programs existed on their campuses.

> A support network is important. It is helpful to see your brother walking in your direction and being able to say "hi" to somebody with a shared experience. That camaraderie is important. Some could encourage me and say "no, you sit in the front of the class not the back...".
>
> *CSU student*

> Had it not been for Underground Scholars, I don't know that I could accomplish what I have or feel supported.
>
> *CCC student*

> Having a Project Rebound on campus where I could go to the office and decompress and like get all my study in there helped.
>
> *CSU student*

But peer support is not enough. College administrators and faculty members' support are crucial for creating a welcoming campus and classroom environment and for developing formal on-campus support service programs with adequate funding, work-study positions for student leaders, and peer mentors. Students elevated several accounts of that "one professor" who helped them but also highly recommended a formal onboarding process for formerly incarcerated students as well as ally/safe zone training for faculty and staff to better serve formerly incarcerated students.

> Our campus leadership believes students are from affluent backgrounds—that we aren't parents, that we can show up somewhere at 9 pm at night. Once students express, they are part of special population then the onus is on the campus to foster a comfortable environment.
>
> *UC student*

> We collaborated with Brittany Morton from Homeboy Industries on safe zone training for faculty and administration. The training helped educate them on what happens in the mind of justice-involved, previously incarcerated students and how to be more gentle.
>
> *CCC student*

Ally Training: Learning with and from Formerly Incarcerated Students

Breaking Bars Community Network (BBCN) was created by Brittany Morton, an Academic Program Coordinator at Homeboy Industries, and a coalition of creative consultants who identified the need for campuses and university staff, faculty, and administrators to understand students' unique experiences with incarceration. BBCN created and implemented the Liberating Scholars Educational Training (LSET)—a comprehensive training for faculty and staff on how to best work with, support, and learn from students with incarceration experiences. The trainings objectives are to call attention to the campus community that students with incarceration experiences are attending and graduating from colleges and universities. The trainings highlight the importance of hiring faculty and staff with incarceration experiences to lead support programs and incorporate the leadership of formerly incarcerated students. The training includes testimonials and storytelling from formerly incarcerated students to combat stigma and implicit bias on campus, and challenges participants to create an inclusive and supportive campus. Ultimately, the LSET urges and provides resources to campus leaders to establish or scale up support services for formerly incarcerated students.

The first LSET was in 2019, and since then BBCN has facilitated six trainings on college and university campuses.



Too often, however, the establishment of support programs and clubs is the result of student advocacy and not institutionally driven.

> In 2016 when I started, I felt out of place, alone. Nobody wanted to sit next to me, I was the oldest one in the classroom. I was kind of out of place. So, I asked my teacher, this woman that literally changed my life. I asked her where the parolees at? And she goes, "I don't know. Let me find out." We managed to find somebody that could get the parolees together. And I managed to start a club.
>
> *CCC student*

> There was no club for us on campus when we got there so we started a club. Our VP said we could have a campus program, but we had to take the reins.
>
> *CCC student*

Incarceration is a traumatic experience that continues to impact formerly incarcerated people years after their release. On-campus mental health services to address trauma histories and justice system stigma are essential to student success and completion, according to our focus group participants.

Several students called out the need for support groups and regular access to therapists with experience working with formerly incarcerated individuals. Students also mentioned how valuable being able to access mental health services through their campus abled-student program, also known as the disabled student program, was to their college experience.

> I couldn't focus on class during the lecture because seeing 20 people with pencils to me was seeing 20 people with weapons.
>
> *CCC student*

> If you have PTSD and issues with people, campus can be overwhelming because it's crowded.
>
> *CSU student*

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Correctional facilities, California's public colleges and universities should start the college-going process while students are still incarcerated. Utilize the current Adult Reentry Grant Program to support a prison to college transition effort.[23]
2. Public colleges and universities should designate professional student support service staff as a liaison for formerly incarcerated students with responsibilities of:
   - Maintaining a designated safe space on campus for formerly incarcerated students
   - Providing safe zone/ally training for faculty and staff
   - Formalizing an on-boarding process for new formerly incarcerated students
   - Coordinating and acting as a fiscal advocate for student clubs
   - Serving as the lead advocate for the success of formerly incarcerated students
3. Public colleges and universities should retain trained mental health professionals who have specialties in trauma and have worked with formerly incarcerated individuals.

Career Transition

Campus advisors lack the knowledge and understanding to properly advise students with criminal records on career opportunities.

Due to their arrest and conviction history, formerly incarcerated students need expert, and often legal, guidance as they map out their career aspirations. Even after receiving their degree, formerly incarcerated students are not guaranteed employment, especially if their chosen career requires a licensure certification or clearance.

In California, there are more than 50 occupational licensing boards and bureaus tasked with granting licensure certifications to more than 200 professions. Existing licensing barriers impact formerly incarcerated students' choices in academic majors and career fields and too often, academic and career advisors are unaware of those barriers.

A UC student described uncertainty about being allowed into the State Bar of California. "I'm studying law, and I don't even know if I'm going to be allowed to enter the profession. And there are so little formerly incarcerated lawyers that nobody has a clear answer on whether you are or you're not going to be allowed into the bar."

In the absence of guidance from colleges, universities, and schools of law, two formerly incarcerated lawyers recently started the California System Impacted Bar Association to support formerly incarcerated students with admissions into law school and becoming licensed attorneys.

Another UC student described her apprehension towards pursuing a law degree and the lack of knowledge from her campus career advisor, "my conviction history has limited my career aspirations in the sense that if I had no conviction history, I would be all on board with going to law school. I have talked about it with a career advisor, and they're not that clear either, was my impression. I talked to the career center, and they didn't have any clear guidance."

Throughout the focus group, we heard other participants recall how their academic or career advisor was oblivious to the legal barriers that formerly incarcerated students encounter when making decisions about their educational major and career aspirations.

> We need a lawyer within our group to help us find internships and work, who understand what expungement is, or a certificate of rehabilitation.
>
> *UC student*

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Public colleges and universities should ensure that academic and career counselors have appropriate training to support formerly incarcerated students with their major selection and career aspirations.
2. A campus liaison for formerly incarcerated students should have reputable legal counsel referrals for formerly incarcerated students who need support with their criminal records when considering employment and career options.
3. Public colleges and universities should provide training and access to legal counsel for formerly incarcerated students and graduates who might experience discrimination in the job market due to arrest or conviction history.



What Covid-19 Could Mean to the Future of In-Person Instruction for Incarcerated Students

Since we began writing this brief, the world was hit with the COVID-19 global pandemic, forcing higher education programs to move from in-person instruction to distance learning. State prisons moved their face-to-face programs to correspondence programs which was necessary for the health and safety of incarcerated students, college and prison staff.

There is tremendous value in face-to-face instruction particularly for college students who were pushed out of high school or middle school, and were denied the classroom experience that helps students learn together, develop their critical thinking skills and push the boundaries of their imagination. Higher education means more than simply receiving course content and completing an assignment. It is also an opportunity to develop their social and interpersonal skills that are built into the faculty and student relationship. For many incarcerated students this is their first positive experience in a classroom setting, and should not be relegated to a lesser experience. Incarcerated students have a right to higher education and to the extent possible; they should have access to all the resources and services available to students on campus.

There is growing concern that face-to-face instruction within state prisons will permanently be delivered through correspondence courses even after the country and state have fully opened. Having access to both face-to-face and correspondence courses allows incarcerated students to graduate sooner, but, most importantly, face-to-face instruction offers a more impactful college experience through collaborative learning and critical in-class discussions that cannot be replicated with correspondence packets or a recorded lecture. Additionally, incarcerated students can graduate sooner if allowed to enroll in both face-to-face and correspondence courses.

Unlike with students on campus, incarcerated students do not have the freedom to choose amongst college experiences. They deserve a full higher education experience and legislation may be required to ensure that they receive it.



CONCLUSION

The title of this report is "The Possibility Report," because it is possible for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated California's to transform their lives through higher education. It is possible to work intentionally toward college opportunity for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people as an economic, public safety, and racial justice imperative that benefits individuals and the state.

Just like a series of policies and practices led California to incarcerate generations of young, Black and Latinx men—jeopardizing their individual futures, devastating communities, and wasting human potential—a new set of policies, budget allocations, and practices are turning incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people into college graduates.

Our conversations with formerly incarcerated students in California's public colleges and universities Illuminate the difficult journeys formerly incarcerated students are on to earn a college degree and the ways in which campuses can either be barriers to success or opportunity givers.

What we heard from our focus groups participants is that they want their campuses to take ownership of creating a healthy social and academic environment that prepares students for college life, provides a sense of belonging, and supports them to succeed in college and career.

What we know is that campuses, however, cannot be sole actors in this work. Our state leaders must do a better job of stipulating expectations and supporting college opportunity for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. The state can and must do a better job of coordinating policies and investments across the community colleges, CSU, and UC systems while continuing to invest in campuses to serve incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students.

We end this brief with a set of policy recommendations for the state of California that speak to the need for better data, coordination, and investment in addition to the recommendations at the end of each Focus Group Key Finding.



ADDITIONAL STATE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a mechanism to collect data by race/ethnicity, age, and gender on enrollment, retention, completion, and success rates of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals that protects student privacy and serves only to improve student support services for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.

2. Establish a statewide coordinating body for higher education that would assume responsibility for coordinating with federal, state, county adult and youth carceral systems access to higher education for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Such a body should set goals for serving incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people and hold colleges accountable for meeting those goals. This body would also be responsible for data collection on enrollment, retention, completion, and success rates of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals.

3. Continue to prioritize providing college opportunity to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people through the California Community College Student Success Funding Formula, and investments in the Rising Scholars Network, Project Rebound, and Underground Scholars to expand their programmatic offerings both inside and outside of prisons.

4. Although this is a national issue currently being addressed, we want to emphasize the importance of lawmakers restoring the Federal Pell Grant funding for incarcerated students. Restoring Pell Grant funding will enable four-year postsecondary institutions to offer incarcerated Californians an opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree.

APPENDIX A

Policy Landscape: Policies Governing College Access and Success for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

A number of federal and state policies created the environment in which incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people access and succeed in higher education.

Federal Pell Grant—Federal: Title IV of the 1965 Higher Education Act included an amendment that allowed people in state and federal prisons to apply and use the funds from the Federal Pell Grant Program to cover the cost for tuition and textbooks.[24] In the early 1980s, over 350 postsecondary prison programs existed, and by the 1990s, it was estimated that 782 academic programs existed in state and federal prisons across the country.[25] During this period the majority of incarcerated students were Pell Grant recipients. In 1994, the last year of Pell grant eligibility for incarcerated people, approximately 23,000 Pell recipients were incarcerated students nationally, representing less than one percent of all recipients.[26]

California Master Plan for Higher Education—State: The 1965 California Master Plan for Higher Education established a coordinated postsecondary education system comprising three segments: the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California. The plan outlined each segments' eligibility targets, and it did not exclude either currently or formerly incarcerated students from enrollment in any of the three segments, opening the door to the education of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. In the 1970s, 11 community colleges provided postsecondary education programs in 11 California state prisons and four youth facilities.[27] Fourteen community colleges and state universities established on-campus support services to formerly incarcerated students.[28]

Uniform Determinate Sentencing Act of 1976—State: The Uniform Determinate Sentencing Act of 1976, signed by then-Governor Jerry Brown, shifted sentencing and prison time from an ideology of reform and rehabilitation to one of punishment and long-term sentencing. Ultimately, this resulted in keeping people in prison for longer sentences without access to rehabilitative and educational programs that incentivized good behavior with early release.[29] This policy drastically changed the state's prison landscape and set the stage for future tough-on-crime policies that disproportionately impacted people of color and resulted in the mass incarceration of Black and Latinx people.

The racial disparities in incarceration and sentencing were perpetuated by the overinvestment of state funds in constructing new incarceration facilities and the disinvestment in all levels of education in the state budget. In 1976, the state corrections budget accounted for 3.2 percent of the state's general fund revenue, while the UC and the CSU budgets combined made up nearly 12.4 percent.[30] By 1995, the share of state revenues going to the state corrections budget increased to 8.7 percent of the state's general fund, while the UC and CSU budgets had been reduced to 8.7 percent of the state's general fund revenue.[31] California was essentially valuing and investing in incarceration and higher education equally.

The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act—Federal: The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act eliminated access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students, and over three decades of postsecondary prison education programs came to an end with the passage of this bill. In California, this resulted in the termination of nearly all academic programs inside California's prisons.

Senate Bill 1391: The Community Colleges Inmate Education Programs Act 2014 (Hancock)—State: California State Senator Loni Hancock authored Senate Bill 1391 in 2014, allowing California Community Colleges to count incarcerated students in state prison as Full-Time Equivalent Students (FTES). Prior to SB 1391, CCCs could count students in jails and youth facilities but were prohibited from counting students in state prisons as Full-Time Equivalent Students (FTES) for state funding purposes. SB 1391 allowed CCCs to include students in state prison as FTES and receive state apportionments. Implementation of SB 1391 started with four community college districts (Antelope Valley, Chaffey, Folsom Lake and Lassen) partnering with their local state prisons.

Second Chance Pell—Federal: In 2015, the Department of Education launched the Second Chance Pell (SCP) Experimental Sites Initiative, a pilot program providing need-based Pell grants to incarcerated students in state and federal prisons.[32] The initial pilot sites included 63 colleges in 26 states and most recently the Department of Education announced 67 new experimental sites, doubling the number of colleges providing postsecondary education programs in 42 states.[33]

The California Community College Student-Centered Funding Formula of 2018: The California Community College Student-Centered Funding Formula established in 2018 created a new funding formula that moved away from a formula strictly based on enrollment to one that considers enrollment, number of students enrolled that are low-income, and a host of success measures. The new formula includes financial incentives for California community colleges serving incarcerated students.

Budget Investments for Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Students: SB 1391 opened the door for future budget allocations to support both postsecondary prison education and on-campus support programs. In 2014, two million dollars were allocated to four community colleges to teach inside California prisons. Former Governor Jerry Brown then included half a million dollars in the 2016 state budget for Underground Scholars, representing the first budget allocation for a support program for formerly incarcerated students at the University of California. In 2018, a one-time grant of five million dollars was allocated in the state budget for community colleges supporting formerly incarcerated students or teaching face-to-face inside California prisons. In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom signed a recurring state budget allocation for 3.3 million dollars for Project Rebound.

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Page 18 Barira Rashid

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