



Postsecondary Program Participation and Completion Patterns Among Individuals Incarcerated in Washington State Prisons

Washington’s Department of Corrections (DOC) and State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) collaborate to provide educational programming to incarcerated individuals and formerly incarcerated individuals re-entering the community. Available educational programming includes adult basic education, workforce and vocational training, and Associate of Arts degrees, among other options.

In 2020, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), in partnership with DOC and SBCTC, received a grant from the Lumina Foundation to improve postsecondary credential outcomes for incarcerated and re-entering populations in Washington. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy’s (WSIPP) Board of Directors approved a contract with WSAC to (1) describe postsecondary education programs for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated adults in Washington, with a particular focus on demographic disparities, and (2) identify potential challenges to attainment and best practices to encourage or support participation and completion.

Summary

This study presents an overview of the postsecondary correctional education system in Washington. We examined patterns of enrollment in and completion of postsecondary programs for incarcerated individuals. We found that Black, Latino, and other people of color participated in correctional education programs at a greater rate than White individuals while incarcerated. Rates of retention and completion once enrolled were similar across all racial groups, although Black and Latino students were slightly less likely to complete their degree programs. These findings were consistent for both professional/technical degrees and academic transfer degrees.

A review of national research literature identified challenges that may inhibit participation in postsecondary programs and best practices that may promote access. We found that Washington already implements many useful practices, chiefly the coordination between the Department of Corrections, community colleges, and other stakeholders and reentry services for formerly incarcerated students. Though barriers to participation still exist, often around funding, eligibility, and course quality, we found that these challenges would not generally limit participation for incarcerated students of color uniquely. However, some policies, particularly those related to student eligibility factors, may indirectly contribute to inequities.

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[Section I](#) provides background on correctional education programs nationally and in Washington. [Section II](#) describes the data used in our analysis including data limitations. We present findings from our analysis of correctional postsecondary education programs in [Section III](#). [Section IV](#) reviews challenges and best practices for correctional postsecondary education programs. Finally, [Section V](#) discusses opportunities for future research regarding Washington's correctional postsecondary education programs.

I. Background

In 2013, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) adopted a ten-year roadmap for increasing educational attainment for adults in Washington. Specifically, the roadmap outlined two goals for 2023—that all adults aged 25-44 would have a high school diploma or equivalent and that at least 70% of adults would have a postsecondary credential.

In order to achieve the goals outlined in the roadmap, WSAC issued a series of actions focused on increasing access to postsecondary programs, enhancing the learning process, and preparing students for future challenges. In addition to general attainment goals, the roadmap calls for additional focus on possible racial and ethnic disparities in attainment and specifies that the 70% postsecondary attainment goal should be met within each racial and ethnic community and region.

WSAC continued to center concerns over equity in access to and completion of postsecondary education as the priority in their 2021 Strategic Action Plan.¹ In their review of postsecondary credentials among Washington State adults, WSAC found substantial differences in educational attainment by race with 52.3% of White adults having a postsecondary credential but only 37.1% of Black or African American, 28.4% of Hispanic or Latino, 22% of Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders, and 25.8% of American Indian or Alaskan Natives having a postsecondary credential. Asian adults were the only population to surpass the 70% State Attainment Goal with 76.6% of Asian adults having a postsecondary credential.

Adults incarcerated in state prisons may face unique challenges in meeting the goals outlined by WSAC, and data on these populations in Washington is limited. In addition, incarcerated adults may face unique challenges and barriers to postsecondary education, and issues of equity may be further exacerbated if certain populations are overrepresented among incarcerated adults.

WSAC, in coordination with DOC and SBCTC, obtained a grant from the Lumina Foundation to examine the landscape of postsecondary education, participation, and completion in Washington State prisons. This report, the result of a contract between WSIPP and WSAC, seeks to fill the gap in available information on Washington's incarcerated populations as well as to identify unique challenges and potential best practices to support postsecondary programs in correctional facilities.

This section provides background on incarcerated populations nationally, with a particular focus on educational characteristics. We then detail the various postsecondary programs available to incarcerated individuals in Washington. Finally, we present our research questions for the present study.

¹ Washington Student Achievement Council (2021). [2021 Strategic Action Plan](#). Olympia: WA.

Correctional Postsecondary Education in the United States

United States Correctional Population

About 2 million individuals are incarcerated in federal, state, and local facilities at any given time in the United States, while an additional 4 million are under community supervision.² The population is overwhelmingly male and about 50% Black or Latino.³

Individuals involved with the criminal justice system tend to have lower rates of educational attainment than those in the general population (Exhibit 1). Notably, the largest, most persistent differences occur in rates of postsecondary attainment.

According to a 2009 report, more than 50% of the general population completes some postsecondary coursework, while fewer than 20% of those involved with state and local criminal justice systems have any postsecondary attainment.⁴

A recent analysis of a 2014 nationally representative survey of individuals incarcerated in federal and state prisons similarly found significant differences such that 45% of the general population had more than a high school diploma or GED compared to 15% of those who were incarcerated.⁵

Correctional Education Programs in the United States

Correctional education programs (i.e., programs that provide basic skills including General Educational Development (GED) test preparation and English as a second language, pre-college courses, workforce and vocational training, and college-level academic coursework) offer one pathway to increasing the educational attainment for incarcerated persons. While numerous correctional education programs exist, this report focuses on postsecondary education programs in adult prisons.

² Maruschak, L., & Minton, T. (2020). *Correctional populations in the United States, 2017-2018*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

³ Zeng, Z., & Minton, T. (2021). *Jail inmates in 2019*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics and Carson, E.A. (2020). *Prisoners in 2019*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

⁴ Brazzell, D., Crayton, A., Mukamal, D.A., Solomon, A.L., & Lindahl, N. (2009). *From the classroom to the community: Exploring the role of education during incarceration and reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

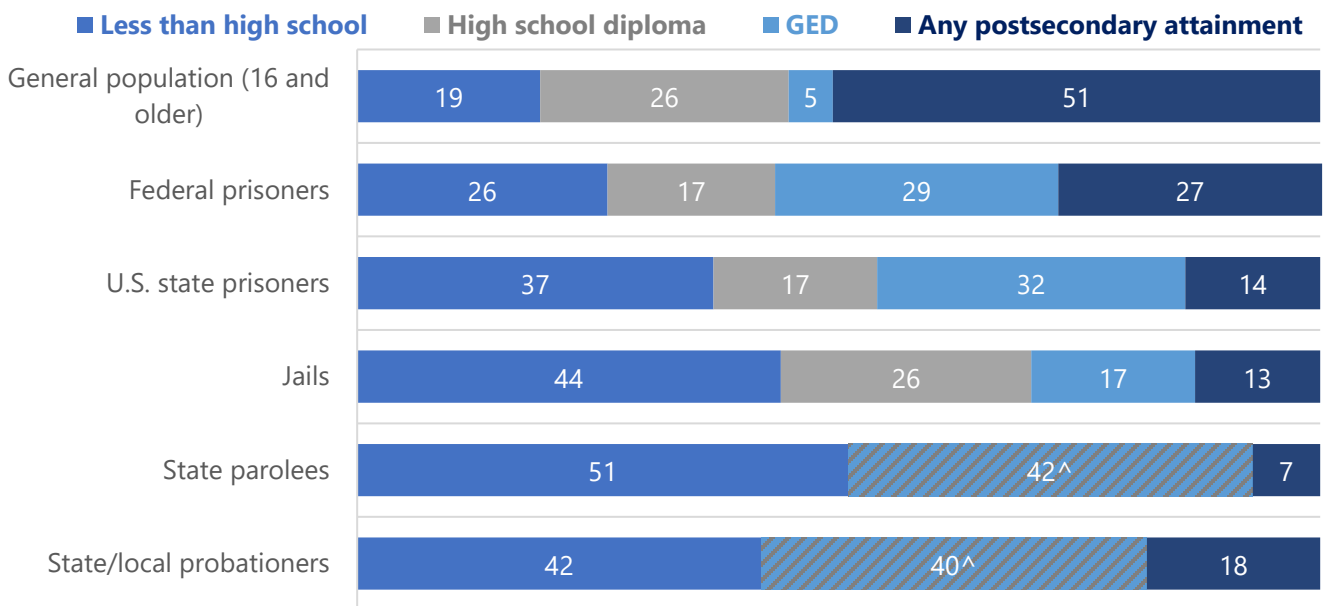
⁵ Ositelu, M. (2019). *Equipping individuals for life beyond bars: The promise of higher education & job training in closing the gap in skills for incarcerated adults*. Washington, DC: New America.

We define postsecondary programs as workforce or academic programs beyond a high school diploma or GED that can lead to a certificate, associate, bachelor's, or graduate degree.⁶ In Washington, these primarily include programs that offer vocational certificates (also called professional-technical certificates), workforce associate degrees,⁷ academic or

direct transfer associate degrees,⁸ bachelor's degrees, and graduate degrees.⁹

Exhibit 1

Percentage of Population at Each Educational Attainment Level, United States



Notes:

Source: Brazzell, D., Crayton, A., Mukamal, D. A., Solomon, A. L., & Lindahl, N. (2009). *From the Classroom to the Community: Exploring the Role of Education during Incarceration and Reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

[^] High school diploma and GED receipt combined.

Reported percentages come from different sources in different years. See Table 1 in Brazzell et al. (2009) for more information.

⁶ This definition follows that used in Washington and the literature regarding postsecondary programming in prisons including Gorgol, L.E., & Sponsler, B.A. (2011). *Unlocking potential: Results of a national survey of postsecondary education in state prisons*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy.

⁷ Associate degrees intended to prepare students for employment in a particular sector. Also referred to as Associate of Applied Science degrees. Washington Community and Technical Colleges. *Types of degrees and certificates*.

⁸ Associate degrees intended to transfer toward a bachelor's degree at any Washington public college or university. Completion of these degrees allow students to enter a public college or university as a junior. Also referred to as Associate in Arts Direct Transfer Agreement degree, or Associate in Science-Transfer degree at Washington Community and Technical Colleges. *Types of degrees and certificates*.

⁹ For description of each program type, see also Seibert-Love, P. (2020). *Corrections education annual report 2019-2020*. Olympia, WA: State Board of Community and Technical Colleges.

Prior work shows that correctional education programs, including postsecondary programs specifically, are effective in reducing recidivism¹⁰ and may increase employment and earnings.¹¹

WSIPP's analyses of the research literature estimating the effectiveness of correctional education found that participation in most correctional education programs reduces the likelihood of recidivism.¹² Using these general findings, we also estimated that for each dollar invested in postsecondary education programs in prison, namely vocational education training and college programs, Washington State would realize about \$12 and \$20 in benefits, respectively.¹³ These benefits come from reduced victimization and criminal justice system costs due to reduced recidivism.

Nationally, there is considerable variation in the availability of different types of correctional education programs. For example, in 2005, about half of federal and state prisons offered vocational training and only 35% offered college-level courses.¹⁴

According to a nationally representative survey, about 20% of incarcerated adults participate in postsecondary programs, and about 10% of the population completes a certificate or degree while incarcerated.¹⁵ Notably, these rates of enrollment and completion do not appear to differ by race. By some estimates, Black, Latino, and other people of color account for about 66% of the incarcerated population and about 60% of those who enroll in or complete a postsecondary program in prison.¹⁶

Funding for Postsecondary Programs in Federal and State Prisons

Program funding has a substantial impact on the availability and accessibility of postsecondary programs for incarcerated individuals. Funding for postsecondary correctional education programs has changed considerably over time often driving changes in program availability. Postsecondary correctional education programs were widely available in federal and state prisons prior to 1994.

¹⁰ Defined as re-offense, re-arrest, re-conviction, technical violation, and/or re-incarceration. Bozick, R., Steele, J., Davis, L., & Turner, S. (2018). Does providing inmates with education improve postrelease outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 14(3), 389-428.

¹¹ Bozick et al. (2018) and Darolia, R., Mueser, P., & Cronin, J. (2021). Labor market returns to a prison GED. *Economics of Education Review*, 82.

Bozick et al. (2018) find increases in employment among a sample of studies. When restricted to "high-quality" studies, they fail to find an effect of correctional education programs on employment, though the sample of high-quality studies is reduced considerably. Darolia et al. (2021) find increases in employment and earnings immediately after release from prison for those who participated in GED programs while in prison, though these effects fade over time.

¹² WSIPP evaluated the literature assessing the effects of [life skills](#), [basic skills](#), [vocational education](#), and [postsecondary \(college\) education](#) programs. We find that basic skills, vocational training, and postsecondary education programs

in prison reduce recidivism and have benefits that outweigh costs. Our analysis indicates that life skills education does not reduce recidivism, and the costs of the program do not outweigh the monetary benefits. We perform meta-analysis and benefit-cost analysis to estimate the effects on crime and other reported outcomes. We also use a standard approach to estimate monetary benefits and costs of the programs. For more information on our meta-analytic and benefit-cost methodologies, see Washington State institute for Public Policy. (December 2019). [Benefit-cost technical documentation](#). Olympia, WA: Author.

¹³ See Washington State institute for Public Policy. (2016, July). [Vocational education in prison benefit-cost/meta-analytic results](#). Olympia, WA: Author and Washington State institute for Public Policy. (2016, July). [Correctional education \(post-secondary education\) benefit-cost/meta-analytic results](#). Olympia, WA: Author.

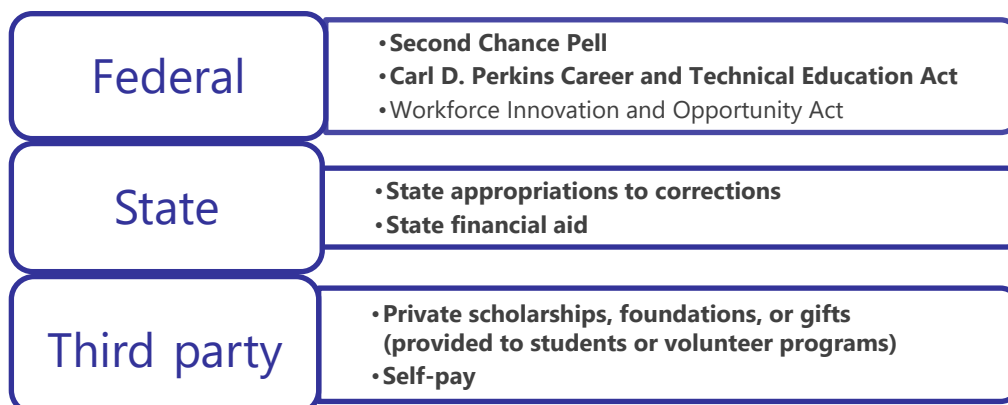
¹⁴ Stephan, J. (2008). *Census of state and federal correctional facilities, 2005*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

¹⁵ Ositelu (2019).

¹⁶ Ibid.

Exhibit 2

Current Funding Sources for Postsecondary Correctional Education Programs and Services
(**Bolded** sources are currently used in Washington)



Notes:

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2009). *Partnerships between community colleges and prisons: Providing workforce education and training to reduce recidivism*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education and Bacon, L., Lee, G., Weber, J., & Duran, L. (2020). *Laying the groundwork: How states can improve access to continued education for people in the criminal justice system*. New York, NY: The Council of State Governments Justice Center.

In 1994, Congress amended the Higher Education Act to prevent incarcerated individuals from receiving Pell Grants,¹⁷ a grant program for low-income students to fund their college educations. This policy eliminated an important funding stream for incarcerated students, creating a financial barrier to accessing postsecondary programming. Ultimately the ban led to fewer programs and reduced participation.¹⁸

In 2015, the federal government experimented with reinstating Pell Grants with the Second Chance Pell pilot program. This program restored Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students at some facilities in partnership with numerous colleges across the country beginning in the 2016-17 academic year.¹⁹ In 2020, the federal government lifted the ban on Pell eligibility for all incarcerated students, though states have until 2023 to fully implement these changes.²⁰

¹⁷ Davis, L. (2019). *Higher education programs in prison: What we know now and what we should focus on*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

¹⁸ Tewksbury, R., & Taylor, J.M. (1996). The consequences of eliminating Pell Grant eligibility for students in post-secondary correctional education, programs. *Fed. Probation*, 60(3), 60-63 and Welsh, M.F. (2002). The effects of

the elimination of Pell Grant eligibility for state prison inmates. *Journal of Correctional Education*, 53(4), 154-158.

¹⁹ Delaney, R., & Montagnet, C. (2020). *Second Chance Pell: A snapshot of the first three years*. Washington, DC: Vera Institute of Justice.

²⁰ Burke, L. (2021, January 27). *After the Pell ban*. Inside Higher Ed.

The federal government also funds correctional postsecondary education programs through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins IV) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (see [Exhibit 2](#)). Though not specifically allocated for correctional education programs, up to 2% of Perkins IV funds and up to 20% of WIOA funds may be used to fund postsecondary programs for incarcerated populations.²¹

In addition to funding provided by the federal government, correctional education may be funded through state appropriations to correctional departments, state-based financial aid programs, private funds, and personal funds provided by incarcerated individuals themselves. The availability of these funds and restrictions associated with their use vary by location.

[Postsecondary Programs in Washington State Prisons](#)

Prior data specific to postsecondary correctional education programs in Washington is relatively limited. The available information indicates that Washington enrolls more incarcerated individuals in postsecondary programs than most other states.²² The following is a discussion of the available information on the landscape of Washington's correctional postsecondary education programs.

[Washington State Correctional Population](#)

About 30,000 individuals are incarcerated in Washington state prisons and local jails, and approximately 90,000 individuals are under community supervision.²³ Similar to national trends, the incarcerated population in Washington is disproportionately male. The majority of the jail and prison populations are White; however, Black, Latino, and Native American individuals are disproportionately represented in the incarcerated population. While about 18% of the state population is Black, Latino, or Native American, these groups account for 36% of the state prison system.²⁴

²¹ The federal government also implemented the Workforce and Community Transition Training for Incarcerated Youth Offenders Program (IYO) in 1998, which provided a maximum amount of funding for student aged 25 and younger. Congress later expanded this program under the Workforce and Community Transitions Training for Incarcerated Individuals Program (IIP), which expanded eligibility and funding limits. Many postsecondary programs and students were funded through these programs, but the grant program ended in 2010. Davis (2019).

²² Erisman, W., & Contardo, J.B. (2005). *Learning to reduce recidivism: A 50-state analysis of postsecondary correctional education policy*. Washington, DC: Institute for Higher Education Policy; and Gorgol, L.E., & Sponsler, B.A. (2011).

²³ Maruschak & Minton (2020). Only about 17,000 individuals are under state (i.e., DOC) community supervision. The remaining individuals are under community supervision by a local court.

²⁴ Vera Institute of Justice. (December 2019). [Incarceration trends in Washington](#).

Washington State Postsecondary Education Programs

Professional/technical

Certificate or workforce associate degree programs intended to prepare students for employment in a particular sector.

Includes:

- *Professional-technical or vocational certificate*
- *Workforce associate degree or Associate of Applied Science degree*

Academic transfer

Programs intended to transfer toward a bachelor's degree or higher at any Washington public college or university.

Includes:

- *Direct transfer associate degrees, Associate in Arts direct transfer agreement degree, or Associate in Science-transfer degree*
- *Bachelor's degree*
- *Graduate degree*

The limited information available on the educational attainment levels of Washington's incarcerated population suggests incarcerated individuals in Washington have lower levels of educational attainment than the general population. For example, one study reports that about 60% of the incarcerated population in Washington has below a 12th-grade education upon confinement.²⁵ However, differences in samples and measurement preclude us from directly comparing these estimates to national trends.

Correctional Education Programs in Washington State

In Washington, DOC and SBCTC have long collaborated to provide adult basic education, life skills education, and vocational training at all DOC facilities. In 2017, the Washington State

Legislature allowed DOC to use state appropriations to fund associate workforce degree programs and increased the presence of these programs across facilities (see [Exhibit 3](#)). Incarcerated individuals in Washington may also have access to postsecondary correspondence courses, associate direct transfer degree programs, and bachelor's degree programs, though availability depends on facility and funding (see [Exhibit 3](#)).

In the 2020 fiscal year, about 6,500 incarcerated students participated in DOC-contracted correctional education programs.²⁶ In FY 2019, the year prior to the COVID pandemic, about 7,000 incarcerated students enrolled in these programs.²⁷ In both years, the majority of students participated in basic skills education programs.

²⁵ Evans, M. (2011). *Tracking Washington State offenders pilot study: Do education programs affect employment outcomes?* Olympia, WA: Washington State Department of Corrections.

²⁶ Seibert-Love (2020). Data on the number of students funded through Second Chance Pell or volunteer programs are not available.

²⁷ Seibert-Love, P. (2019). *Corrections education annual report 2018-2019*. Olympia, WA: State Board of Community and Technical Colleges

Exhibit 3

Associate Workforce and Direct Transfer Associate Degree Programs Offered at Washington State DOC Facilities, by Funding Source[#] (as of 2019-20 academic year)

Facility	College	State DOC-funded	Privately funded	Second chance Pell-funded
Airway Heights Corrections Center (AHCC)	Spokane	Workforce		
Cedar Creek Corrections Center (CCCC)	Centralia			Transfer
Clallam Bay Corrections Center (CBCC)	Peninsula	Workforce	Transfer*	
Coyote Ridge Corrections Center (CRCC)	Walla Walla	Workforce and transfer	Transfer	Transfer
Larch Corrections Center (LCC)	Clark			
Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women (MCCCW)	Tacoma	Workforce		
Monroe Correctional Complex (MCC)	Edmonds	Workforce		
	Seattle Central [^]		Transfer ^{^^}	Transfer ^{^^}
Olympia Corrections Center (OCC)	Peninsula	Workforce		
Stafford Creek Corrections Center (SCCC)	Grays Harbor	Workforce	Transfer*	
Washington Corrections Center (WCC)	Centralia		Transfer*	
Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW)	Tacoma	Workforce	Transfer ^{**}	Transfer
Washington State Penitentiary (WSP)	Walla Walla	Workforce and transfer	Transfer	Transfer

Notes:

Sources: [Seibert-Love, P. \(2020\)](#); Sinclair, S. & Armbruster, D. (2019). *Use of secured-internet to expand postsecondary education opportunities to enhance public safety - 2019 report to the legislature*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Department of Corrections.

[#] All facilities provide basic education for adults and professional-technical (i.e., vocational) certificates through DOC contracts.

[^] This college is not a DOC-contracted college.

* [Black Prisoner's Caucus Taking Education and Creating History \(T.E.A.C.H.\)](#) higher education programs. BPC TEACH has partnered with Peninsula and Centralia colleges to offer some courses at CBCC and WCC.

^{^^} Seattle Central College offers academic coursework at the Washington State Reformatory (WSR), which is a unit within the Monroe Correctional Complex. We consider WSR part of MCC. Private funds are through [University Beyond Bars](#).

^{**} Privately funded through [Freedom Education Project Puget Sound \(FEPPS\)](#), which works in partnership with Tacoma Community College. FEPPS also began offering bachelor's degrees at WCCW in partnership with the University of Puget Sound in Fall 2020.

Funding for Postsecondary Programs in Washington State

As shown in [Exhibit 2](#), various funding streams support Washington's postsecondary correctional education programs. The largest funding stream is state appropriations provided to DOC to fund correctional education programs. DOC contracts with SBCTC to provide most of these education programs in prison and contracts with colleges to provide reentry education services. Importantly, these DOC contracts fund programs that can support a certain number of full-time equivalent students rather than funding students directly through a tuition-based model.

Washington's funding structure can limit a student's ability to access state-based financial aid that would pay tuition such as the Washington College Grant, a need-based aid program in Washington. However, these limitations have changed over time.²⁸ For example, individuals opting to apply for the Washington College Grant would then self-fund their education. The types of programs available to students who self-fund may be more limited than the programs available with DOC funds.

²⁸ The Washington College Grant (formerly the State Need Grant), Washington's largest need-based financial aid program, has no restrictions that would prevent incarcerated students from accessing that aid to fund their education. However, the Washington College Grant is used to pay tuition at a Washington college or university. Under the current system, programs funded through DOC contracts are not tuition-funded programs and thus, incarcerated students participating in these DOC-funded SBCTC programs cannot use the Washington College Grant for their education. Washington's other largest need-based aid program, the College Bound Scholarship program is not available to anyone with a felony conviction.

Funds received by Washington under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) are administered through the Employment Security Department and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.²⁹ At this time these funds are not used to support postsecondary education programs for incarcerated persons.

State law does not require DOC to fund vocational training beyond one-year certificates,³⁰ and funding requirements for correctional education programs have changed over time. Prior to 2017, state DOC funding could not be used for any associate workforce or academic transfer postsecondary degree programs.³¹ While DOC might fund additional programming, often postsecondary coursework, including correspondence courses,³² had to be privately or self-funded.

In addition to DOC-funded postsecondary programs, two facilities began providing academic transfer degree programs through private funds in 2008. Other privately funded volunteer programs, including the Freedom Education Project Puget Sound, University Beyond Bars, and Black Prisoner Caucus T.E.A.C.H., have also emerged over time to offer academic programs in Washington prisons, often in collaboration with nearby community colleges (see [Exhibit 3](#)).

²⁹ For more information, visit the [Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board's website](#).

³⁰ DOC Policy Number 500.000 states that those who, "already earned an associate degree or a one-year state vocational certificate while incarcerated may be required to pay tuition." See [Education and vocational program in prisons](#). See also Erisman & Contardo (2005).

³¹ Seibert-Love, P. (2017). *Corrections education annual report 2016-2017*. Olympia, WA: State Board of Community and Technical Colleges.

³² [DOC Policy 500.100 Correspondence Education in Prisons](#).

Beginning in 2016, potential funding sources for academic workforce and transfer degree programs expanded considerably. In 2016-17, three colleges began offering postsecondary courses at three correctional facilities in Washington through the Second Chance Pell pilot program.³³ This number expanded to four colleges at four facilities by the 2019-20 academic year.³⁴

Then, the 2017 Washington State Legislature eliminated the ban on state funds for associate workforce degree programs.³⁵ This change did not allocate any additional funding for these programs but allowed DOC to redirect current funding toward some postsecondary programs increasing the number of associate workforce degree programs available in Washington facilities. For the current list of the types of postsecondary programs and associated funding sources offered in correctional facilities, see [Exhibit 3](#).³⁶

Most recently, the 2021 Washington State Legislature expanded the scope of DOC-funded correctional education programs to include certificates and academic degree programs up to a bachelor's degree.³⁷ DOC and SBCTC are working together to implement these changes in the coming years.

Funding for postsecondary programming in Washington prisons could expand further in future years. As mentioned, the federal government recently removed the ban on Pell Grant eligibility for all incarcerated students. This change could impact funding for postsecondary programs in various ways. First, by increasing access to Pell Grants, students who would otherwise have to rely on private or personal funds to participate in postsecondary courses can now access federal funds.

Second, unlike other incarcerated students who are funded through contracts between DOC and SBCTC, incarcerated students funded through the Second Chance Pell program must pay tuition using their Pell Grants. Thus, the funding structure for postsecondary programs may need to change with the expansion of Pell Grant funding.³⁸ Absent any change to the FTE-based funding model, there may be additional barriers to individuals self-funding participation in post-secondary education programs such as restrictions on Internet access for online or remote learning. Additionally, the types of programs offered may be limited due to a lack of interest or access by colleges and universities not in contract with the DOC.

³³ [Seibert-Love \(2020\)](#).

³⁴ [Ibid.](#)

³⁵ [Substitute Senate Bill 5069, Chapter 120, Laws of 2017](#).

³⁶ Exhibit 3 includes all programs that are offered, regardless of whether or not individuals are currently participating in these programs.

³⁷ [Second Substitute House Bill 1044, Chapter 200, Laws of 2021](#).

³⁸ Full implementation of these changes is not expected until 2023.

Eligibility Requirements

Prior to 2021, to be eligible to participate in a state-funded associate degree program in correctional facilities, individuals must (1) not already have an associate degree or higher, (2) have a reentry plan which includes participation in an associate degree program that is at their facility, approved by DOC, and (3) be limited to an associate workforce degree.³⁹ Further, priority is given to those with fewer than five years on their sentences.⁴⁰ Those who do not satisfy these criteria generally must fund their educations through third-party or personal means.

Individuals serving life without the possibility of release or a death sentence or who are the subject to a federal deportation order were prohibited from participating in any state-funded associate degree programs regardless of whether they could secure funding from another source.⁴¹ In 2021, these restrictions were modified such that those with a life sentence, those sentenced to death, and those subject to deportation may participate in a degree program, but it must be funded by a third party or the individual.

Additional restrictions may be imposed less uniformly—e.g., by facility policy. Incarcerated students are also subject to requirements that apply to the general college population. For example, incarcerated students are also subject to eligibility requirements imposed by colleges such as minimum placement test scores.

Any restrictions on accessing funds could also indirectly restrict student access to postsecondary programs if they rely on those funds to participate. For example, Pell Grant eligibility requires satisfying numerous criteria unrelated to criminal justice system involvement including, but not limited to, completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), valid selective service registration, and having no federal loans in default.⁴² Additional justice-related eligibility requirements for federal Pell Grants include no conviction for drug possession or drug dealing while receiving federal financial aid, cannot be serving life without parole or a death sentence, and must not currently be subject to an involuntary commitment order after incarceration for a sexual offense.⁴³

Reentry Programs for Postsecondary Program Students

While this study focuses on students who participate in postsecondary programs while incarcerated, it is possible that those who enroll while incarcerated will not complete their degree prior to their release from prison. Thus, we provide a brief overview of reentry services for incarcerated students who intend to continue their education upon release.

³⁹ [Substitute Senate Bill 5069, Chapter 120, Laws of 2017](#).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ [RCW 72.09.460](#).

⁴² Wachendorfer, A., & Budke, M. (2020). *Lessons from Second Chance Pell: A toolkit for helping incarcerated students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid*.

Washington, DC: Vera Institute for Justice. Federal restrictions for selective service and drug restrictions will be eliminated in the 2021-2022 academic year.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Federal restrictions regarding prior drug convictions are scheduled to change in the 2021-2022 academic year.

The primary supports for formerly incarcerated students are the college reentry navigators. SBCTC provides funding for prison- and community-based reentry navigators. Prison-based reentry navigators work with students in prison to develop an education plan while incarcerated that also transitions to the community.⁴⁴

Colleges in seven counties where the majority of individuals reenter the community have community-based college reentry navigators.⁴⁵ In addition to six community and technical colleges, the Evergreen State College also contracts with SBCTC to fund a reentry navigator in Thurston County.⁴⁶ Reentry navigators assist with enrollment and financial aid, provide tools and academic and peer support, and offer referrals to community resources to assist with the transition including housing, employment, counseling, and other services.⁴⁷ These navigators provide both support and structure that allow students to continue building upon the education they receive while incarcerated.

Research Questions

The present study provides further information about postsecondary education experiences among incarcerated individuals in Washington by addressing the following research questions:

- 1) What is the rate of participation in and completion of education programs in prison? Do these rates vary by location, and race/ethnicity?
- 2) What challenges may exist that could limit access to participation in and completion of postsecondary programs while incarcerated? Do these barriers result in disproportionate access and participation opportunities among incarcerated communities of color?
- 3) What best practices exist that can facilitate access to and completion of postsecondary programs for incarcerated individuals? What best practices exist to encourage equitable enrollment and completion in education programs?

⁴⁴ Seibert-Love (2020).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ For example, see [Seattle Central College's re-entry support programs](#) or [Tacoma Community College's re-entry navigators](#).

II. Data Sources

In this section, we describe the data used in our analyses of enrollment and completion patterns of incarcerated students in postsecondary correctional education programs. We highlight important limitations that relate to the interpretation of our findings.

Data Description

SBCTC currently publishes annual reports about incarcerated students in DOC-funded programs in Washington. These reports provide comprehensive information on the availability of DOC-funded programs and courses by facility and college. They also provide a detailed snapshot of the number of students who participate and complete basic skills education, job training, vocational training, and associate workforce degree programs in a particular year.

This study expands on those annual reports in various ways. First, this study provides extensive information on students in postsecondary programs, namely professional-technical certificate and associate workforce degrees, and associate direct transfer degree programs. Individuals in other correctional education programs are not included.⁴⁸

Second, we obtained data following the same students over time. These data allow us to examine patterns of persistence and completion both within facilities and at colleges in the community. We also consider an extended time period from 2009 to 2019 allowing us to examine trends in participation and completion.

Third, a primary goal of this study is to identify whether and how postsecondary program participation and completion varies across racial groups. Thus, we obtained data that allow us to explicitly consider differences in enrollment and completion across racial groups. We also include information about the general CTC and DOC populations to contextualize our data for incarcerated students and to examine whether the racial composition of incarcerated student populations differ from the general CTC and incarcerated populations.

Data for this study come from SBCTC and DOC. To the extent possible, we obtained data for all incarcerated postsecondary students participating in DOC-funded programs, all CTC students in the general population, and all incarcerated individuals between academic years 2008-2009 and 2018-2019. Relevant data and sample restrictions are noted in the data limitations section that follows.

⁴⁸ For example, we do not include individuals who participate in adult basic education programs or English as a Second

Language programs. We also do not include those who participate in a bachelor's or graduate degree program.

Incarcerated Student Population

We received information about the total number of students enrolled in a DOC-funded postsecondary program from the SBCTC research department. Students were included if they participated in a professional-technical, associate workforce, or associate direct transfer programs. We combined the number of students in the professional-technical certificate and associate workforce degree programs. While these programs differ in degree type, they both have similar goals of preparing students for employment in a particular field or sector. Additionally, credits from these programs are not transferable to an academic degree program.

For each academic year between 2009 and 2019, we received the total number of students who enrolled in professional-technical/associate workforce degree, the total number of students who enrolled in associate direct transfer degree programs, and the total number who completed a certificate or degree while incarcerated. These totals were disaggregated by facility and race/ethnicity (including American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian or Asian-American, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, multiple races, and not reported or other person of color ("POC"). These counts constitute a **snapshot dataset** of the student population each year (see [Exhibit 4](#)).

To expand on these snapshots, we also obtained information on incarcerated first-time college students from SBCTC.⁴⁹ We then obtained information about how many of these students were retained (i.e., re-enrolled) or completed a degree in each subsequent year for up to six years after participation. Rather than a snapshot of students enrolled or completing at one point in time, this **cohort dataset** follows the same students over time.

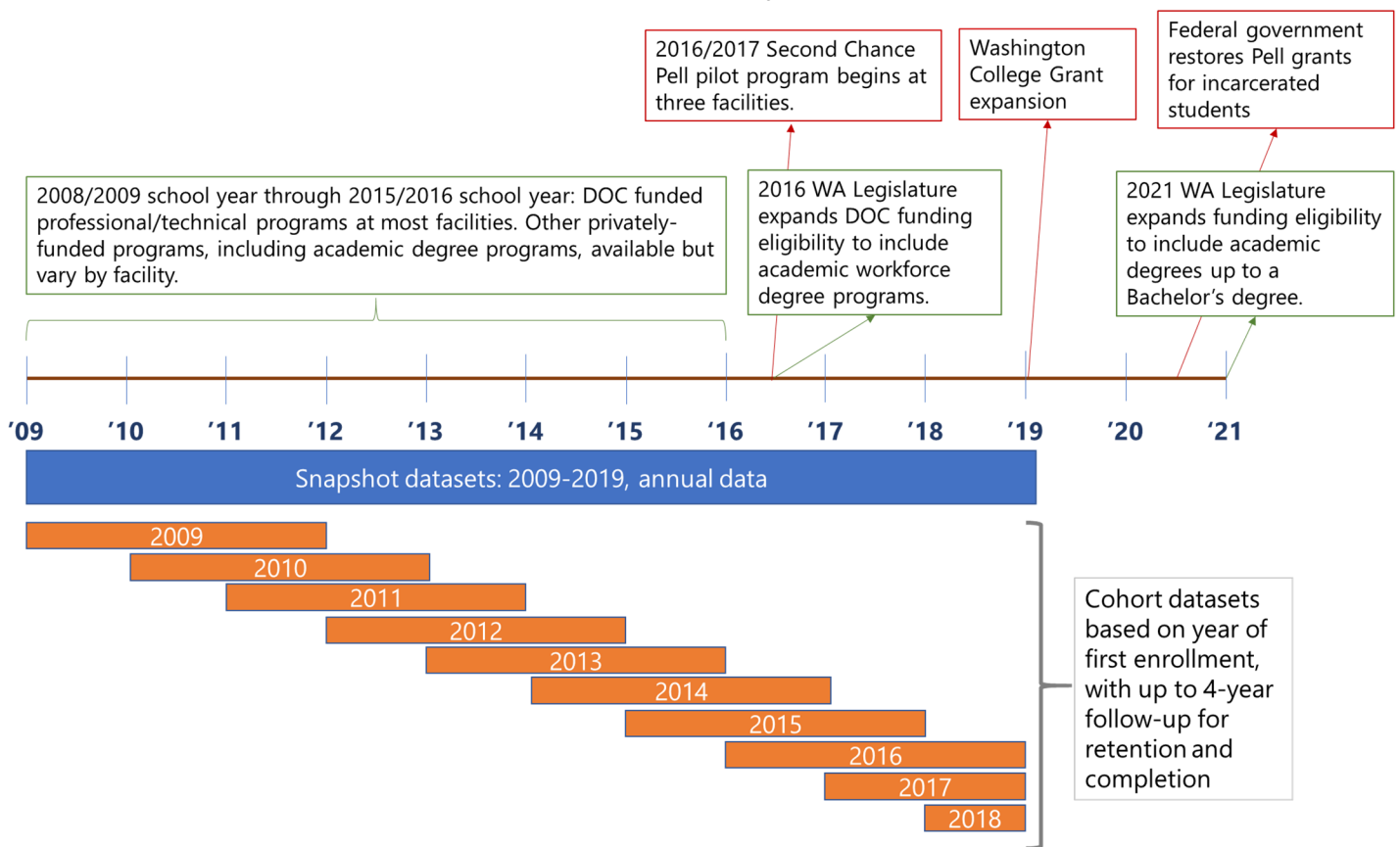
Information in the cohort dataset is disaggregated by facility and racial group. For the cohort dataset, racial groups were limited to White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, and other people of color (POC)/not reported when possible.

Due to restrictions related to student privacy under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), we did not receive any information if the number of students within a particular racial group, facility, and year was fewer than ten. In these cases, SBCTC used various methods to ensure student privacy. If possible, they combined multiple racial groups to obtain counts that included ten or more students. For example, if a facility had seven Black individuals participating in a professional-technical program and three individuals identified as other POC, then we combined the count of Black students with the count of other POC to obtain a count of ten in the other POC group for that facility and year. We only combine racial groups for students of color; we did not combine White students and students of color. This approach allows us to examine potential differences between White incarcerated students to incarcerated students of color.

⁴⁹ This dataset included students who never enrolled in another CTC or college that is part of the National Student Clearinghouse.

Exhibit 4

Timeline of Major Changes to DOC-funded Correctional Education Programs in Washington State and Outline of Study Samples



If combining data was not possible or would not result in counts greater than ten, then that information was **suppressed** for that group in the given facility and year. We did not receive any information about subsequent retention or completion for any suppressed information in the cohort dataset.

Other Populations

We obtained data on the full population of those enrolled in professional-technical or transfer degree programs in all public CTCs from SBCTC's public dashboard (referred to as the "CTC population"). These data were disaggregated by race.

We used individual-level data from DOC in WSIPP's criminal history database to obtain counts of the total number of individuals incarcerated in a DOC facility between fiscal years 2009 and 2019 (referred to as the "DOC population"). We also disaggregated these counts by racial group and ethnicity.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ DOC and SBCTC have different approaches to recording race and ethnicity resulting in differences in these measures across datasets.

Data Limitations

We obtained comprehensive data on most degree-seeking incarcerated students in a postsecondary program in Washington between 2009 and 2019. However, various limitations restrict both the sample of data available for analysis and the measurement of important variables.

First, incarcerated students are identified in the SBCTC data system as those students attending colleges with DOC contracts. While our data may capture some students who are not funded through DOC but who are participating in DOC-funded courses, it does not include students who participate in correspondence programs, third-party sponsored volunteer programs, or programs at colleges that are not DOC-contracted colleges. Individuals who participate in programs offered by 4-year colleges or universities, private institutions, or programs at CTCs that do not have contracts with DOC are not included. This restriction also applies to volunteer programs such as University Beyond Bars, Freedom Education Project Puget Sound, or Black Prisoner's Caucus T.E.A.C.H.

Second, data suppression required for FERPA lead to the exclusion of some students. We attempted to limit suppression by combining groups when possible, but some students are still excluded. This precludes our ability to conduct full racial subgroup analysis for each facility in each year of our data.

Data limitations also impacted some of the measures used in our study. A primary focus of this report is investigating potential racial disproportionalities in access to and completion from postsecondary programs in prison. Two factors impact the interpretation of racial differences in our data. First, DOC and SBCTC record race differently. DOC requires that a single race be reported, and Hispanic ethnicity is reported separately. Those who identify as Hispanic and any other race have both a race reported and are also identified as Hispanic. SBCTC allows individuals to identify as more than one race and they include Hispanic/Latino as one of the racial options. Consequently, those who identify as Hispanic/Latino and any other race are recorded as multiracial.

We attempted to construct measures of Latino and multiracial identifiers using WSIPP's criminal history database that were comparable to the measures in the SBCTC data. However, analysis of both DOC and SBCTC data revealed important differences in the rates at which Hispanic/Latino individuals report other races and thus would be categorized as multiracial. In the DOC data from WSIPP's criminal history database, Hispanic/Latino individuals identified another race about 90% of the time. In the SBCTC data incarcerated Hispanic/Latino students identified another race only 30% of the time.

We believe this large disparity is related to differences in how race and ethnicity are recorded rather than differences in the identities of individuals in each population. That is, in the DOC data, individuals *must* select a race separate from Hispanic. In that instance, individuals may be more likely to select a race such as "White." In the SBCTC data, individuals may select Hispanic without selecting another race. After review, we concluded that we could not construct measures of Hispanic/Latino and multiracial in the DOC data that were comparable to the measures in the SBCTC data. Given these limitations, we could not easily compare Hispanic/Latino individuals in the DOC population data to the incarcerated student population from SBCTC, and therefore do not report on Hispanic/Latino individuals in analyses using DOC data.

Data suppression also impacted our ability to identify certain racial groups in the cohort dataset. Counts for Asian-American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students were generally too small to report when disaggregated by facility and year. Thus, we combined these racial groups into a category that captures "other people of color (POC)." This category was also combined with those who report no race. Consequently, we cannot discern differences in enrollment or completion between students with these different racial identities in the cohort dataset.

When counts of Black and Hispanic/Latino students were less than ten in the cohort dataset, we combined these categories with the other POC/not reported category. We observed fewer than ten Black students enrolling in a professional-technical program about 30% of the time that any Black professional-technical students are observed in the cohort dataset; for Black students in associate transfer programs, this number jumps to over 50%.⁵¹

There was greater suppression among data for Hispanic/Latino students than for Black students. In cases where we observe any Hispanic/Latino students participating in a professional-technical program in the cohort dataset, we found that about 60% have fewer than ten students. For associate transfer programs, approximately 90% of cases have fewer than ten students. Thus, for the majority of cases where we observed Hispanic/Latino students, we included those students in the "other POC/not reported" category.

⁵¹ See Appendix I for additional information.

Combining the number of Black and Hispanic/Latino students with the number of other POC students allowed us to include information about these students when they might otherwise be excluded due to suppression. This approach can change the meaning of the other POC/not reported category as it includes different groups of students depending on the number of Black and Hispanic/Latino students.⁵²

Third, we received separate, de-identified data from SBCTC and the DOC. As such, we could not link incarcerated students in the two data systems or link the student records to criminal justice records in WSIPP's Criminal History Database. With aggregate, de-identified data, we could not examine differences in recidivism outcomes for those who participated in correctional education programs and those who did not.

Fourth, SBCTC identifiers for incarcerated students limited the information included for completion. Specifically, individuals are assigned a new identifier for each facility in which they participate in postsecondary programs. Our data only included completion information if the individual completed their certificate or degree program in the same facility where they first enrolled. As such, our completion data does not capture individuals who are transferred to a different DOC facility prior to completing their coursework and also does not include those who completed their degree in the community following release from incarceration.

Finally, we were unable to complete full analyses of gender-based differences in participation and completion. Incarceration facilities in Washington State are gender segregated, so analyses completed at the facility-level do allow for some gender-based comparisons. However, the small sample sizes for the two women's facilities – Washington Corrections Center for Women and Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women – lead to significant suppression and instability in associated racial classifications.

Despite these limitations, the data for this study still capture the majority of students in the professional-technical certificate and associate workforce degree programs. The datasets also include students participating in associate transfer degree programs at DOC-contracted colleges which may identify changes in program participation following the 2017 expansion of degree programs. This study provides an initial examination of the landscape of postsecondary education programs in Washington's prisons. Future research addressing these limitations is discussed in [Section V](#).

⁵² However, the bias in the "other POC/not reported" category would never exceed +18 students per facility. That is, under conditions where both Black and Hispanic/Latino

student counts were suppressed, at most, those counts could sum to 18 students (i.e., if there were only nine Black and nine Hispanic/Latino students).

III. Analysis of Incarcerated Students in Washington

This section presents our analysis of data on incarcerated students. We describe the participation and completion patterns of incarcerated students in professional-technical/associate workforce and associate transfer programs between 2009 and 2019. We also discuss whether and how participation and completion patterns vary by racial group both among incarcerated students and compared to all CTC students and the full DOC population. Findings are presented at the system level, which includes information for students at all facilities combined. We then briefly describe findings at the facility level.

General Population Trends

Our analysis includes an examination of incarcerated persons participating in CTC programs while incarcerated. Consequently, our study analyzes a subset of both the statewide CTC population and a subset of the statewide incarcerated populations. For context, [Exhibit 5](#) presents the general population estimates for our study period (2009 – 2019) for statewide CTC enrollees and statewide cumulative incarcerated populations. During our study period, the number of individuals enrolled in a CTC program declined by 17% while the number of individuals incarcerated in a DOC facility increased by 3%.

Exhibit 5

Statewide CTC and Incarcerated Populations, by Academic Year

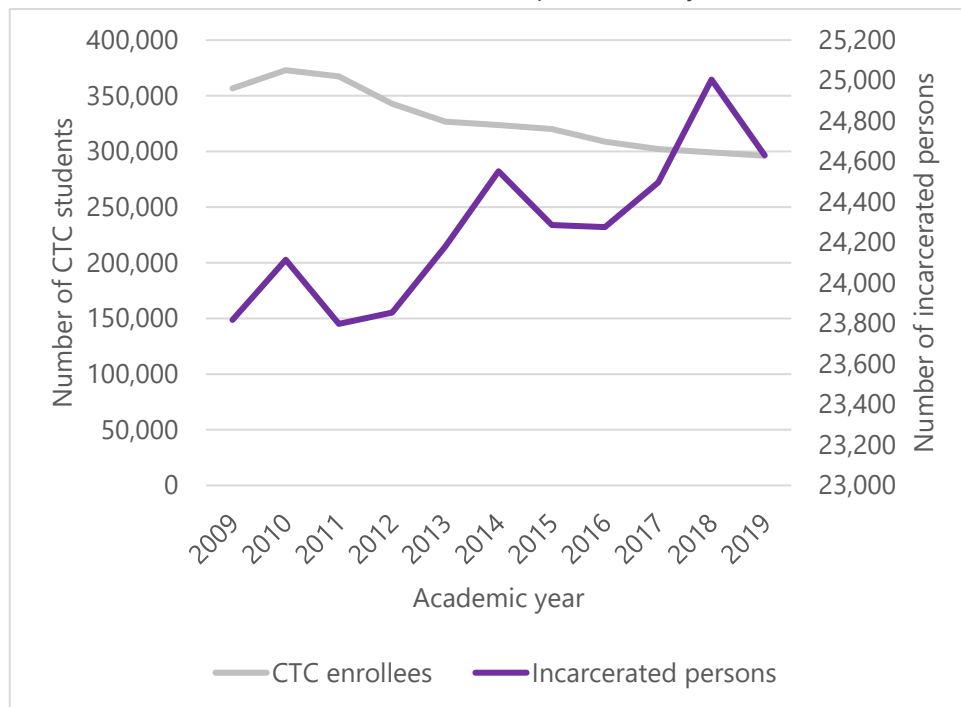


Exhibit 6 presents the overall counts for both the total number of incarcerated students enrolled in a CTC degree program and the number of those students who are enrolling in a CTC program for the first time. Both the total number of enrollees and the number of first-time enrollees declined throughout the study period.

Exhibit 7 compares trends in enrollment in the statewide CTC population to the trends in the incarcerated student population by type of degree. In general, we find that the number of incarcerated students in academic transfer degree programs has increased over time, while the number in professional-technical/associate workforce degree programs has fallen. This trend corresponds to similar trends for the entire CTC population, although the general CTC population saw a slight decline in academic transfer degree programs over time. This latter discrepancy is consistent with changes in state policy that allowed more opportunities for incarcerated students to participate in academic transfer degree programs in 2017 which would not have had the same impact on general CTC populations.

Exhibit 6

Incarcerated Students, by Academic Year

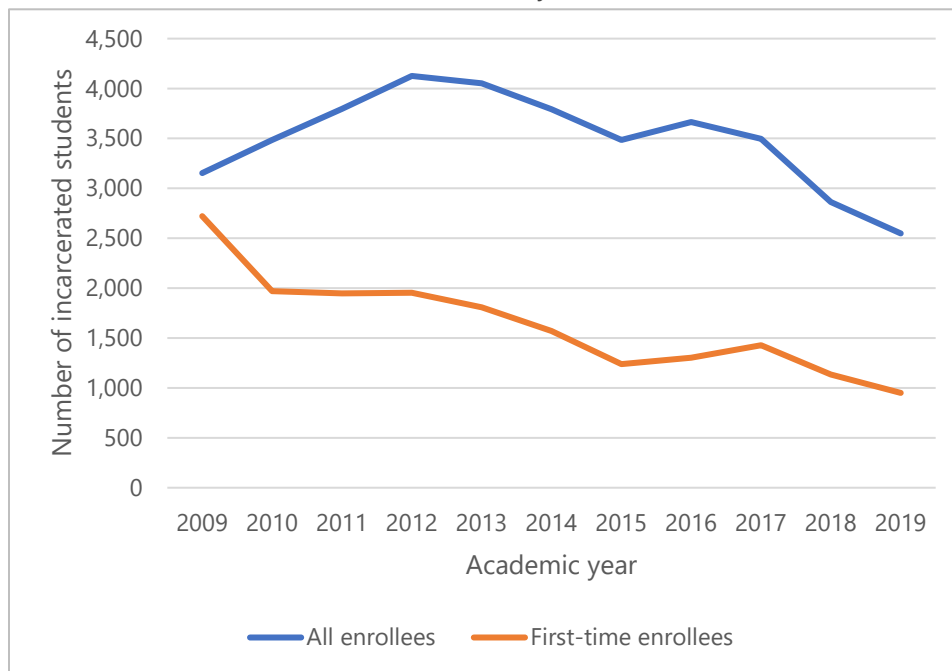


Exhibit 7

Changes in Enrollment, by Degree Type

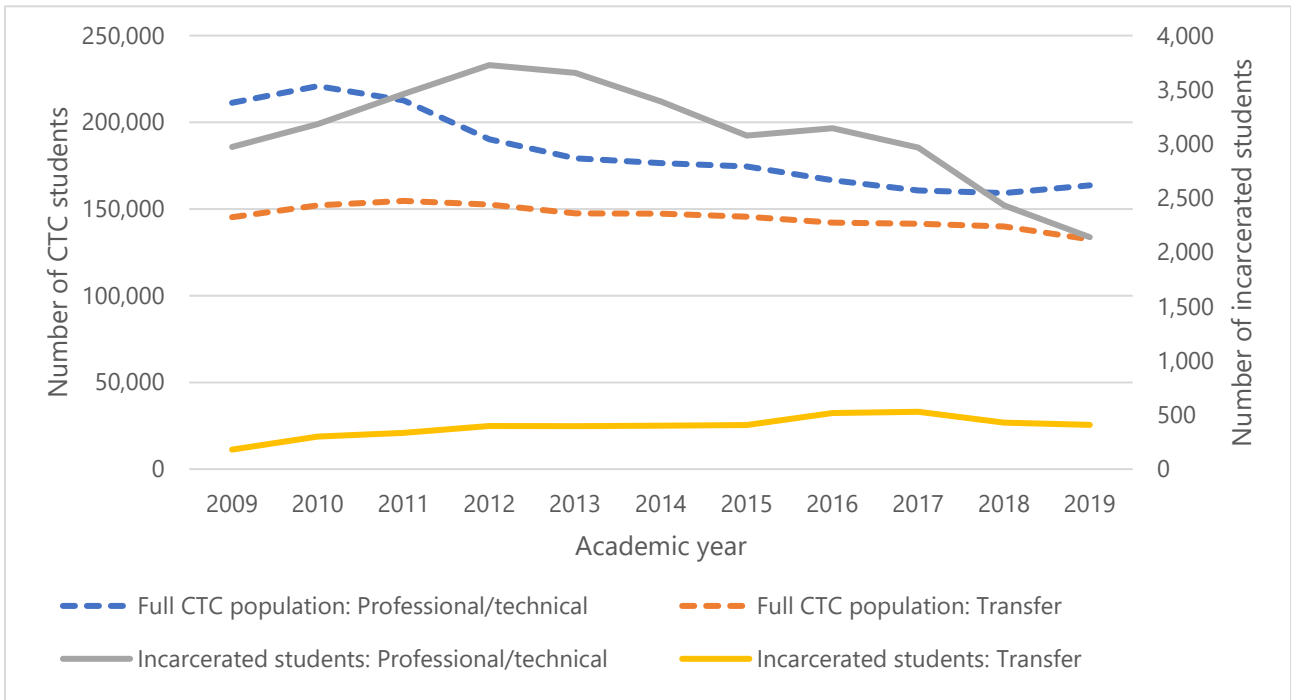


Exhibit 8

Rate of Postsecondary Enrollment for DOC Incarcerated Populations, by Program Type

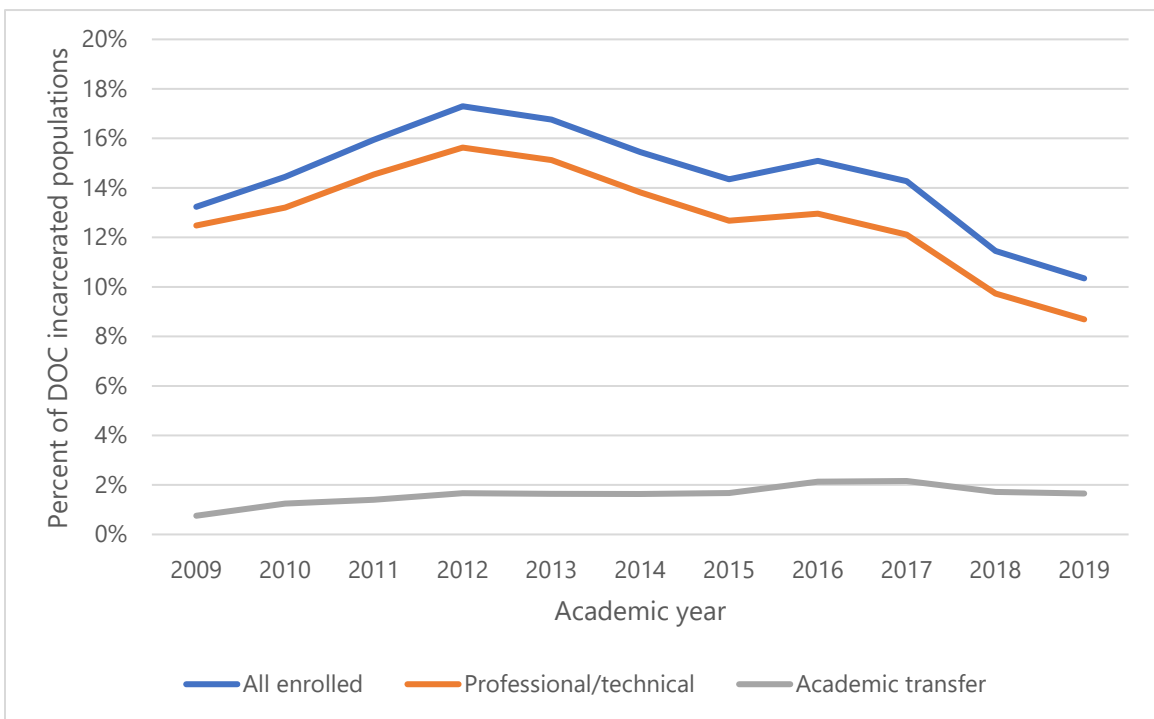


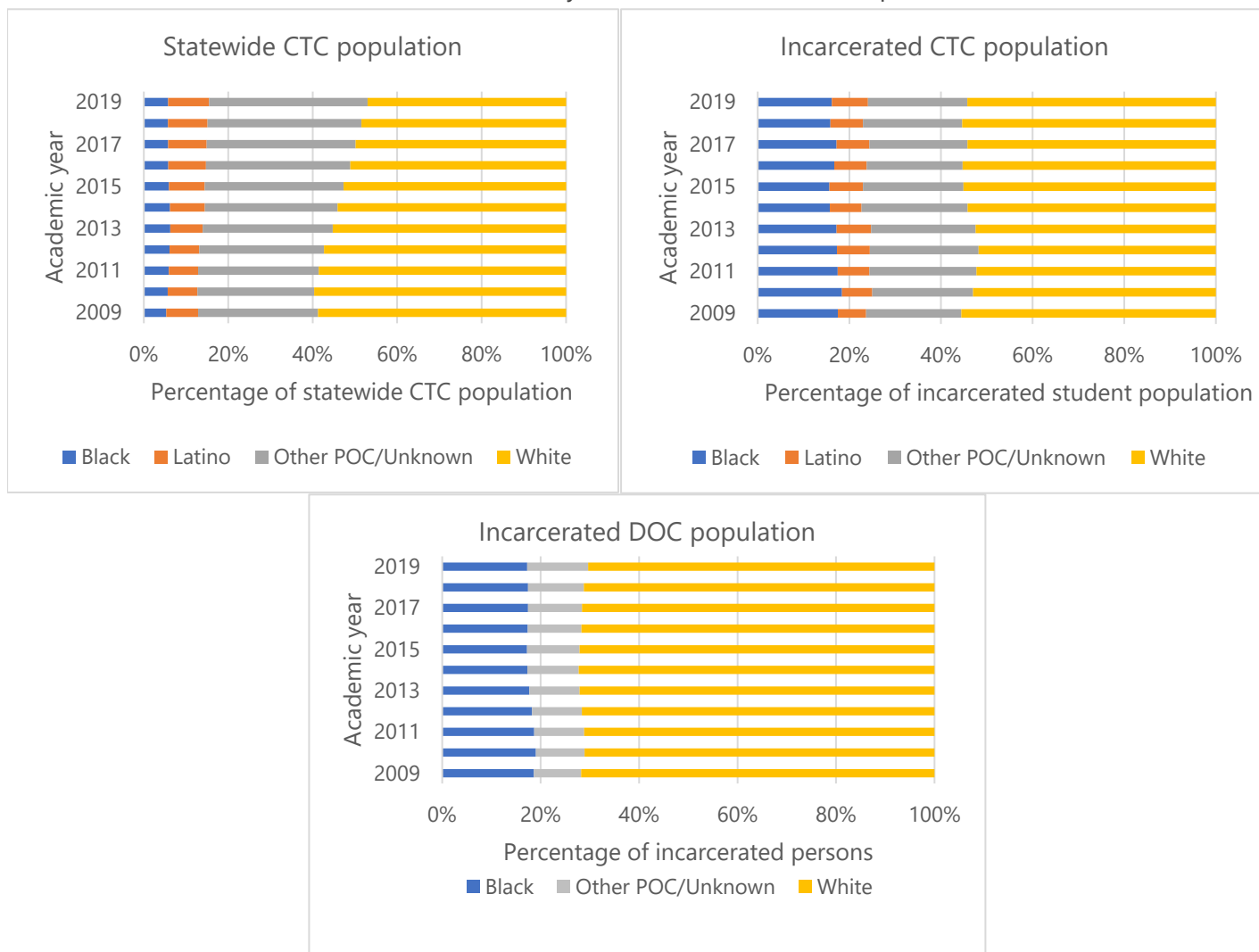
Exhibit 8 combines these population trends to examine changes in the rate of postsecondary enrollment for individuals incarcerated in DOC facilities over time. The overall rate of enrollment increased from 2009 to 2012, at which point it began to decline through 2019. However, these trends differed by program type. While the rate of enrollment into professional and technical programs paralleled the overall trends, the rate of individuals enrolling in an academic transfer program gradually increased across the study period. At the end of the study period, 10.3% of the incarcerated population was enrolled in a postsecondary education program with 8.7% of incarcerated persons being enrolled in professional/technical degree programs and 1.6% of incarcerated persons being enrolled in academic transfer degree programs.

System-level Trends by Race

Exhibit 9 compares the distribution of students by race for the general CTC population, the distribution of incarcerated CTC students by race, and the distribution of the full incarcerated population by race. We find that Black students constitute a larger portion of incarcerated students than they do of the general CTC population.

Exhibit 9

Distribution of Race, by Year for CTC and DOC Populations



We found that White individuals account for a far greater percentage of the general DOC population than they do for the population of incarcerated students. In 2019, 70% of the general DOC population identified as White while only 54% of the incarcerated student population identified as White.⁵³

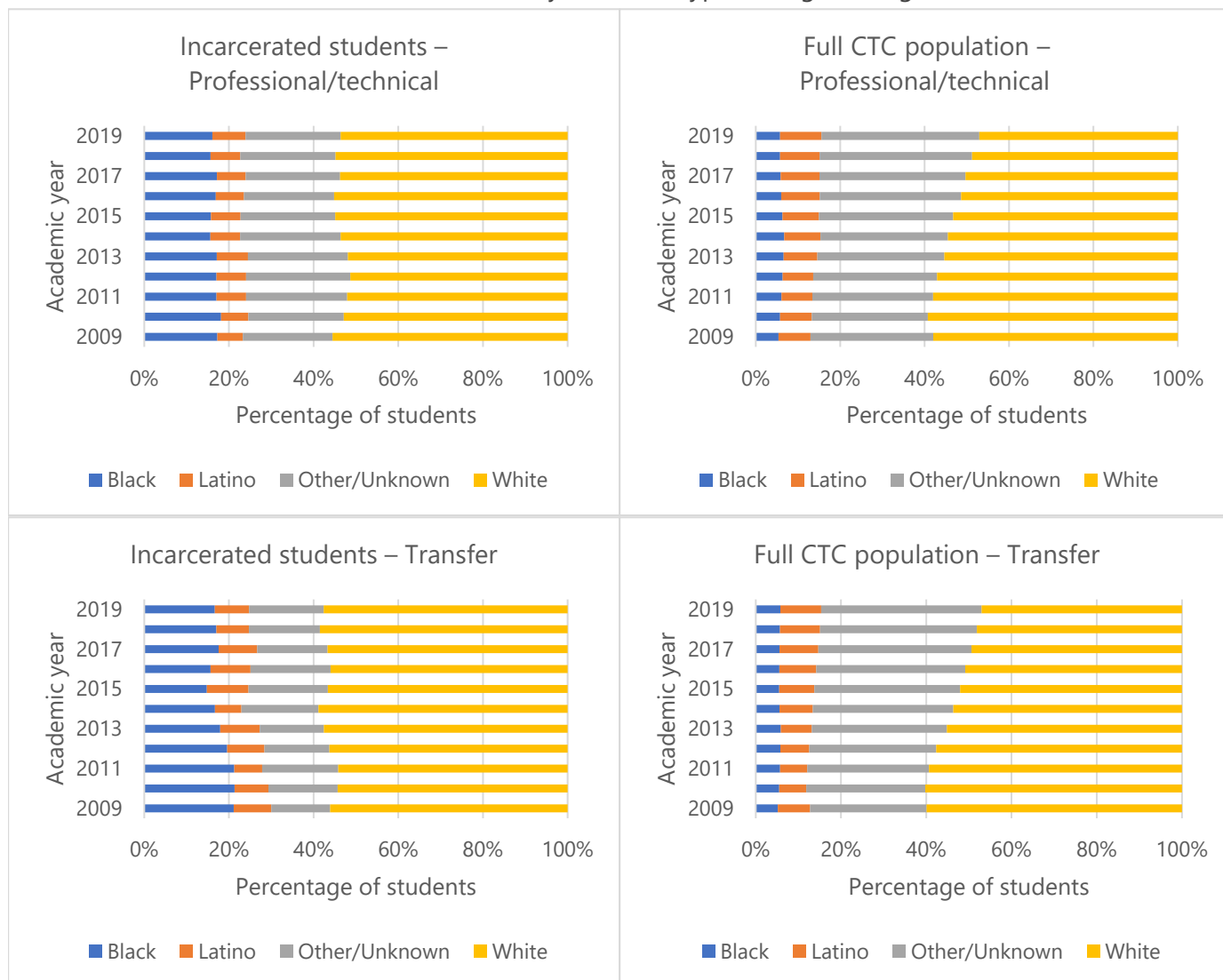
Over time, we identified larger shifts in the racial distribution for the general CTC population than the incarcerated student population. In general, the distribution of race among the incarcerated student population remained stable. On the other hand, the proportion of students identified as White in the statewide CTC population consistently declined over time.

⁵³ As a reminder, there may be different rates of enrollment for the Hispanic/Latino student population. Because of the difference in measures of Hispanic/Latino across DOC and SBCTC datasets, we cannot compare those identifying as Hispanic/Latino in the two datasets. However, even if you

combined the Latino population with the White population for incarcerated students, the percentage of White students in 2019 would increase only 8%, which would reduce, but not eliminate the difference in the distribution compared to the general DOC population.

Exhibit 10

Distribution of Race, by Year and Type of Degree Program

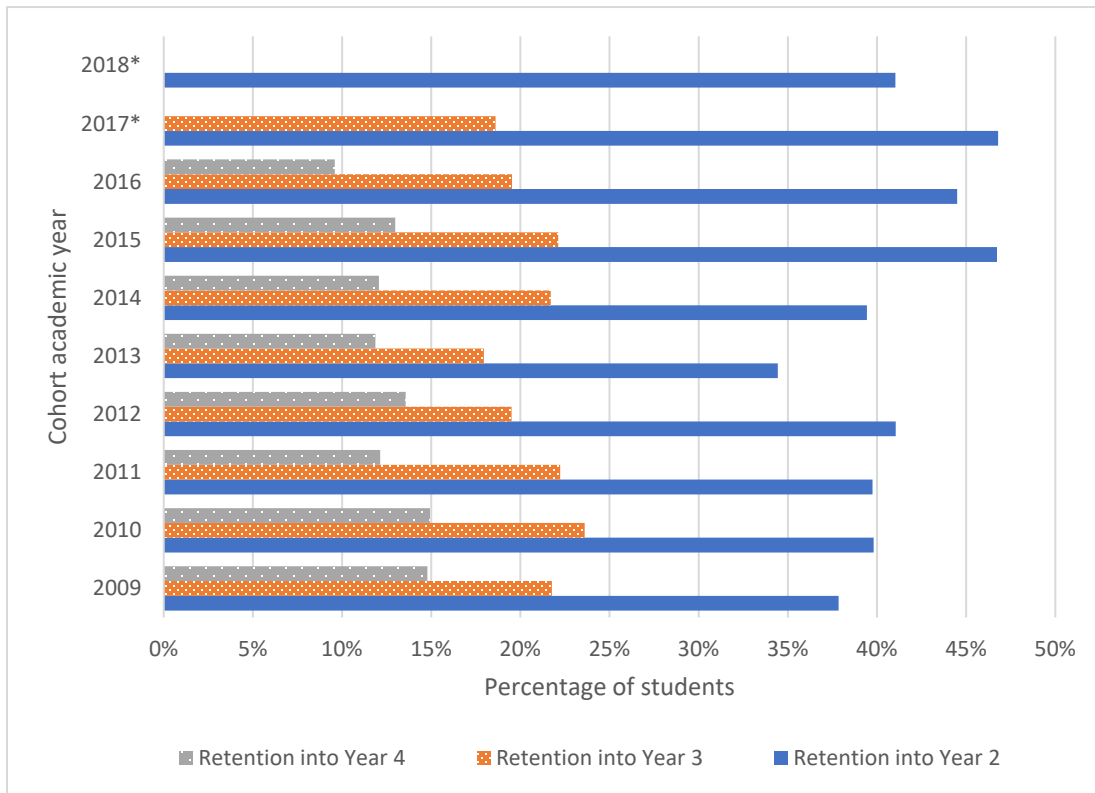


The findings for racial disproportionality by type of degree program followed a similar pattern. Exhibit 10 compares the racial distribution for professional/technical programs and academic transfer programs between the incarcerated student population and the full CTC population. For both types of degree programs, the percentage of White participants in the general CTC population steadily declined over time while the percentage of White participants in the

incarcerated student population remained relatively stable. In addition, both types of degree programs showed a greater representation of Black, Latino, and other people of color than the general DOC population as shown in Exhibit 9.

Exhibit 11

Rate of Retention within Three Years, by Cohort



Notes:

Retention is calculated starting with the total students who re-enrolled in year X, divided by the total enrollment in year (X-1), minus the number of students who graduated in year (X-1). Thus, we report the rate of retention for those who were previously enrolled but did not yet graduate.

Year-over-year retention is limited to students re-enrolling in the same DOC facility.

Data were available only through 2019. Thus, the 2017 cohort was limited to two years of retention follow-up and the 2018 cohort was limited to one year of retention follow-up.

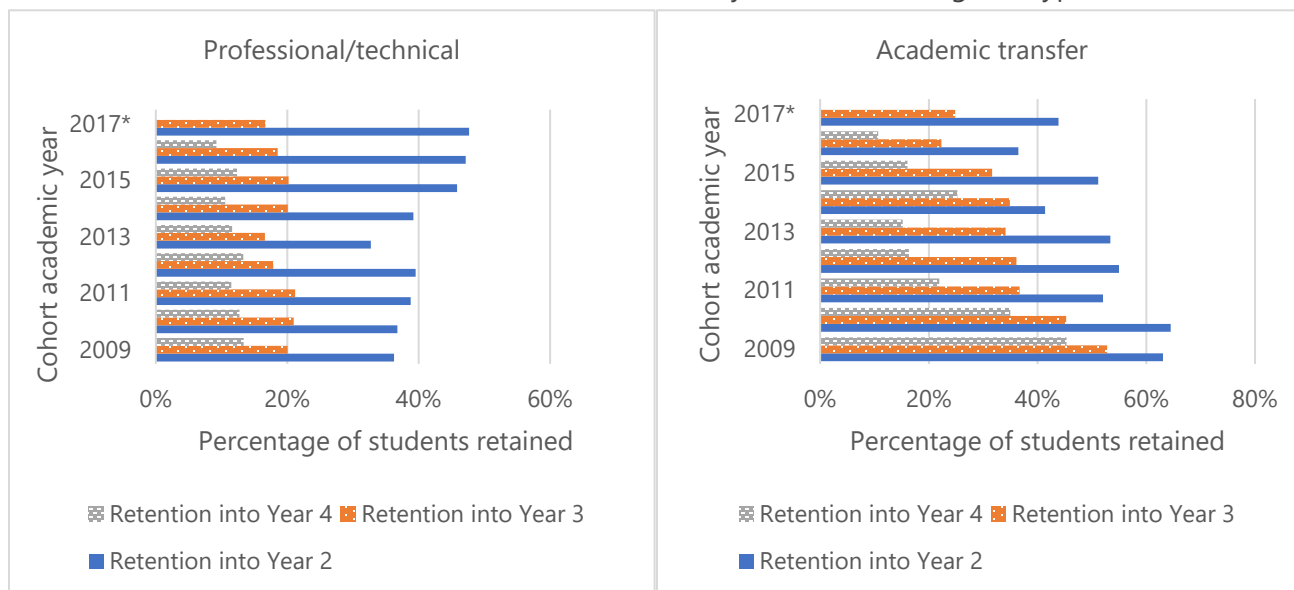
Retention and Completion

The rates of retention (defined as year-to-year re-enrollment in the same DOC facility) and completion (limited to the same facility of initial enrollment) for incarcerated students varied over time. For these analyses, we used the cohort dataset to follow individuals over time. This dataset is limited to first-time enrollees and thus represents a subset of the full enrolled population.

We examined year-to-year retention through the first three years following initial enrollment. Exhibit 11 shows the rate of retention for the first three years for individuals who first enrolled between 2009 and 2016. For 2017, we report the findings for the first two years, and for 2018 we report only the first year following initial enrollment.

Exhibit 12

Rate of Retention within Three Years, by Cohort and Program Type



Notes:

Retention is calculated starting with the total students who re-enrolled in year X, divided by the total enrollment in year (X-1), minus the number of students who graduated in year (X-1). Thus, we report the rate of retention for those who were previously enrolled but did not yet graduate.

Year-over-year retention is limited to students re-enrolling in the same DOC facility.

Data were available only through 2019. Thus, the 2017 cohort was limited to two years of retention follow-up.

Over time, the rate of students re-enrolling for a second year increased. However, the likelihood that students would re-enroll for a third or fourth year did not change over time. Exhibit 12 further disaggregates the overall trend by program type. For cohorts first enrolling between 2009 and 2016, academic transfer programs were more likely to retain students into the fourth year than were professional/technical programs. However, retention rates for academic transfer programs declined over time while the retention rates for professional/technical programs stayed generally consistent across cohorts.⁵⁴

Analyses of retention by race showed similar patterns to the overall retention trends. However, the retention rate for Black students into a second year decreased over time, as did retention into a third or fourth year. Overall retention rates for White students remained most stable across all cohorts.

⁵⁴ These changes over time may also be influenced by changes in completion rates over time.

Exhibit 13

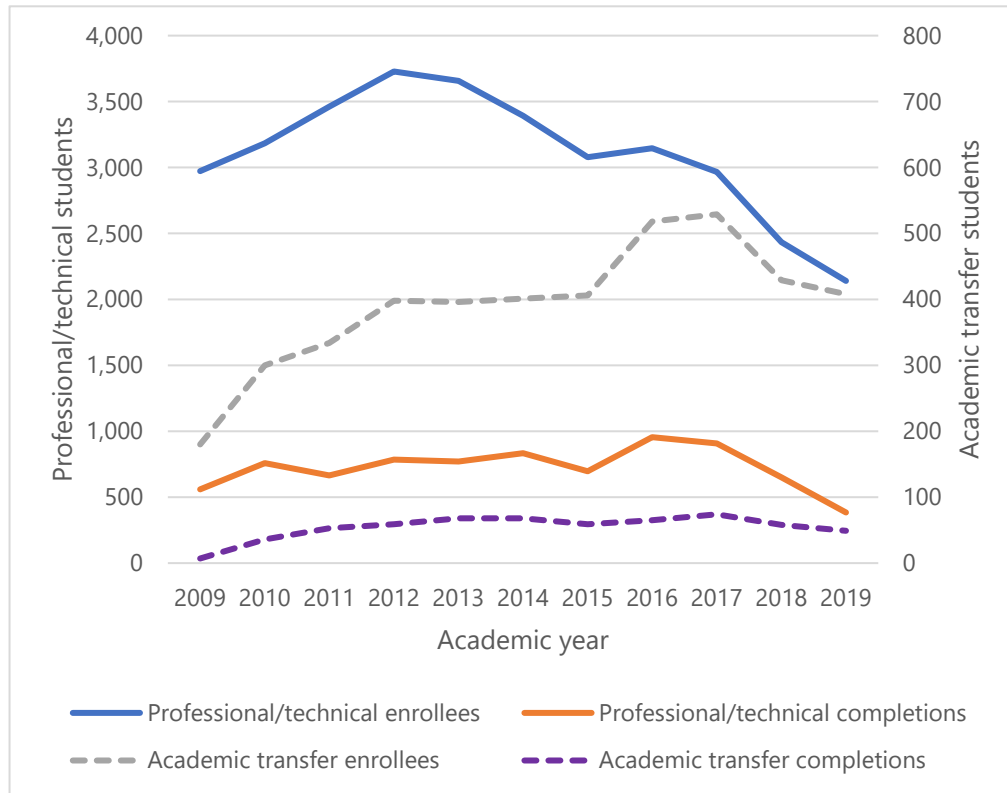
Rate of Retention within Three Years, by Cohort and Race



Notes:
 Retention is calculated starting with the total students who re-enrolled in year X, divided by the total enrollment in year (X-1), minus the number of students who graduated in year (X-1). Thus, we report the rate of retention for those who were previously enrolled but did not yet graduate. Year-over-year retention is limited to students re-enrolling in the same DOC facility. Data were available only through 2019. Thus, the 2017 cohort was limited to two years of retention follow-up. In some cohorts, some Hispanic and/or Black students may be combined in the other POC/unknown category. See Appendix I for more details.

Exhibit 14

Incarcerated Student Enrollment and Completion, by Program Type and Academic Year

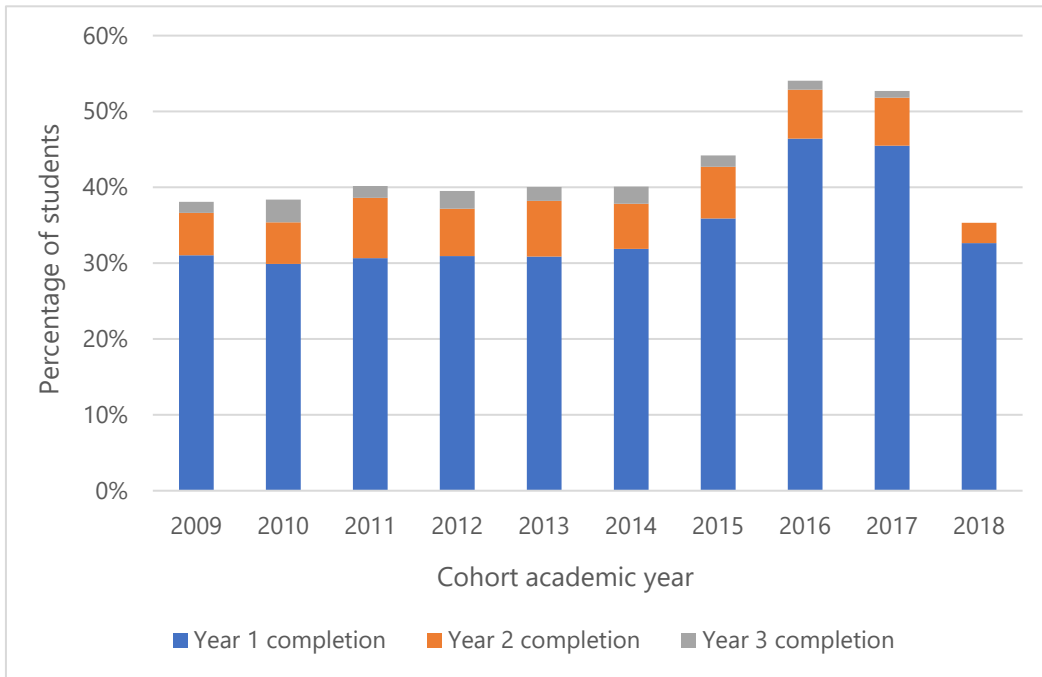


Completion rates also varied across time. Exhibit 13 reports the overall enrollment and completion counts for incarcerated students by type of degree. This exhibit uses the full dataset of incarcerated students for each academic year instead of the cohort dataset.

Overall, the number of professional/technical enrollees peaked earlier than the number of academic transfer enrollees. The number of incarcerated persons completing a professional/technical degree program declined over time, while the number of those completing an academic transfer degree increased over time.

Exhibit 15

Rate of Completion within Three Years, by Cohort



Note:

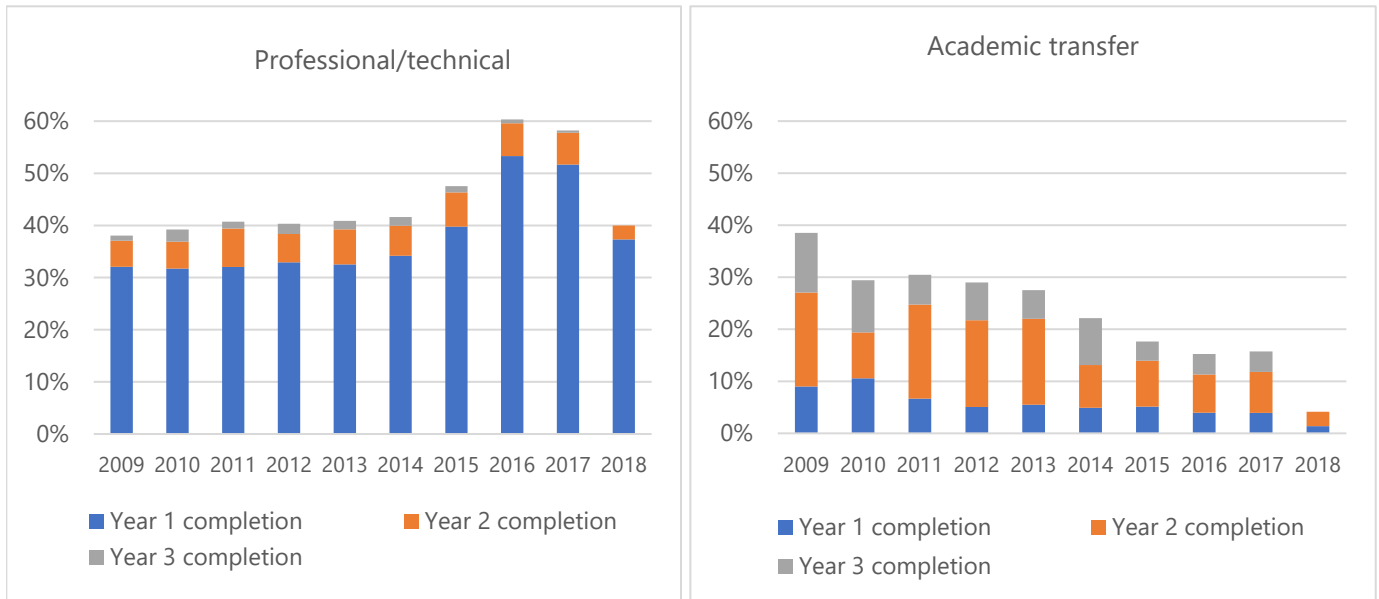
Cohort completion data included only those individuals who completed their degree program at the same facility as their initial enrollment.

Incarcerated students who completed their degree program were most likely to complete their program in their first year of participation. Exhibit 15 shows the percentage of students completing a degree within the first three years of participation by cohort.

Overall, completion rates remained relatively stable with the exception of the 2016 and 2017 cohorts which saw an increase in completion mostly in the first year of participation.

Exhibit 16

Rate of Completion within Three Years, by Cohort and Program Type



Note:

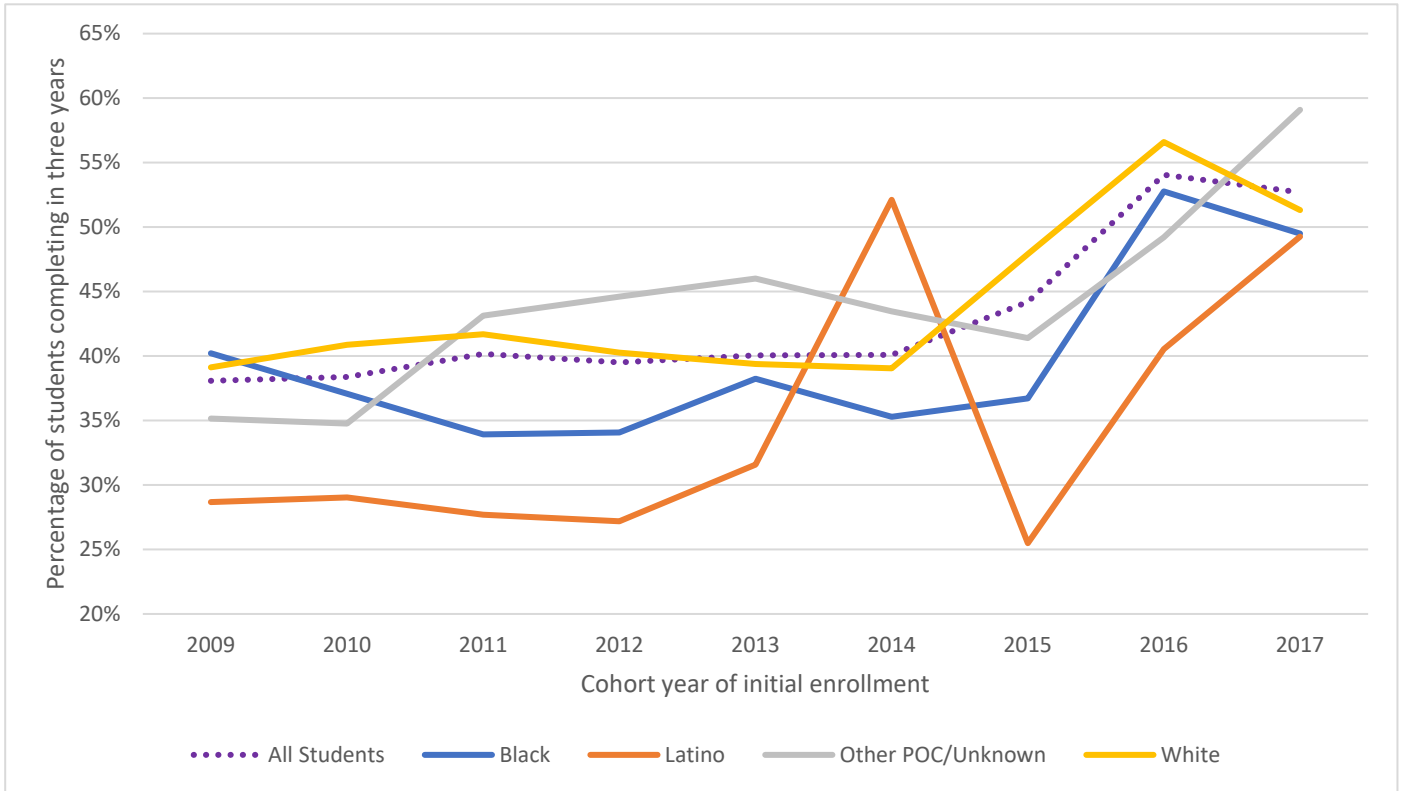
Cohort completion data included only those individuals who completed their degree program at the same facility as their initial enrollment.

Exhibit 16 separates the completion rates by program type. Unlike professional and technical degree students, academic transfer students were most likely to complete their program in the second year of participation. These findings may explain why the year-2 retention rates were generally higher for academic transfer students than for professional/technical students. These findings are consistent with differences in program length such that technical/professional certificates have fewer course requirements for completion and are thus more likely to be completed in one or two years. In addition, programs that take less time to complete are less likely to be impacted by facility transfers.

Since our data were limited to completions within the same facility as initial enrollment, it is possible that individuals who were participating in an academic transfer program were more likely to be moved to a different facility in the middle of their program and they may have completed their degree programs in a different facility.

Exhibit 17

Three-year Completion Rate, by Year of First Enrollment and Race



Note:

Cohort completion data included only those individuals who completed their degree program at the same facility as their initial enrollment. In some cohorts, some Hispanic and/or Black students may be combined in the other POC/unknown category. See Appendix I for more details

Finally, we examined completion rates by race. Overall, the cohort completion rates for most racial groups increased over time. For most racial groups, the greatest increases in completion occurred between the 2014 and 2016 cohorts. The completion rate for 2017 showed a similar rate to the 2016 cohort but includes only two years of completion data instead of three. Thus, the actual trends for the 2017 cohort may be slightly higher than reported in this exhibit. The inconsistency in completion rates for the Latino population is driven in part by the suppression of small cell sizes.⁵⁵

Facility-level Trends

We received facility-level data for retention and completion by race. Not all facilities were open during our sample period and those that were open did not always have enrollees in each year of the sample period.

⁵⁵ See Appendix I for more information.

Exhibit 18

Enrollment and Three-year Completion Rate Comparison, by Facility

Facility	Number of first-time enrollees						Three-year completion rates*					
	2009		2019		Diff.		2009		2016		Diff.	
	% of DOC pop.		% of DOC pop.		% of DOC pop.		% completing		% completing		% completing	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Airway Heights Corrections Center	401	12.6%	76	2.6%	-325	-10.0%	401	34.7%	62	55.4%	-339	20.7%
Cedar Creek Corrections Center	0	0.0%	82	11.5%	82	11.5%	--	--	114	78.9%	114	--
Clallam Bay Corrections Center	282	23.8%	76	7.3%	-206	-16.5%	282	42.2%	65	21.5%	-217	-20.7%
Coyote Ridge Corrections Center	414	41.4%	181	5.4%	-233	-36.0%	408	55.9%	201	33.8%	-207	-22.1%
Mission Creek Corrections Center	15	4.3%	42	8.0%	27	3.7%	14	57.1%	6	0.0%	-8	-57.1%
Monroe Correctional Complex	0	0.0%	7	0.2%	7	0.2%	--	--	93	76.3%	93	--
Olympic Corrections Center	115	18.0%	26	4.4%	-89	-13.6%	115	22.6%	51	66.7%	-64	44.1%
Stafford Creek Corrections Center	270	10.0%	105	4.4%	-165	-5.6%	270	57.8%	144	40.6%	-126	-17.2%
Washington Corrections Center	118	3.3%	12	0.3%	-106	-3.0%	118	8.5%	244	91.4%	126	82.9%
Washington Corrections Center for Women	178	14.2%	77	4.5%	-101	-9.7%	178	65.7%	12	0.0%	-166	-65.7%
Washington State Penitentiary	685	23.2%	264	7.8%	-421	-15.4%	681	21.9%	310	32.9%	-371	11.0%

Notes:

Excludes counts from facilities that closed during the sample period (e.g., Pine Lodge Corrections Center), counts from unknown correctional facilities, and counts from facilities that did not have enrollees in at least four academic years in the sampling period (e.g., Larch Corrections Center).

Completion rates are calculated using the suppressed cohort sample while enrollment estimates are calculated using the full, unsuppressed data tables. Thus, estimates of 2009 enrollments may differ slightly.

[Exhibit 18](#) provides information on the number of first-time enrollees in 2009 and 2019 as well as the three-year completion rates for those who first enrolled in 2009 and those who first enrolled in 2016. Completion data were limited to the suppressed cohort datasets. [Exhibit 18](#) excludes facilities that closed during the sample timeframe (e.g., Pine Lodge Corrections Center), data that did not specify a correctional facility, and data from facilities that did not have at least four years of enrollment data (e.g., Larch Corrections Center).

Enrollment numbers decreased between 2009 and 2019 in all but one facility that had enrollees in 2009 (Mission Creek saw an increase in 27 enrollees between the 2009 and 2019 cohorts). Changes in completion rates varied, with four facilities showing an increase in completion rates between 2009 and 2016 and five facilities showing a decrease in completion rates. However, these completion rates may also be impacted by differences in transfer rates between facilities. Because our data were limited to completion at the same facility as initial enrollment, facilities that have greater rates of transfer to a different facility will be more likely to show low completion rates.

Due to the limitations in completion data and small sample sizes at the facility level, we were unable to reliably examine differences in trends by program type and race. Limited information on these trends is available in [Appendix I](#).

Section Summary

Overall, we found that people of color participate in correctional postsecondary education programs at a greater rate than White individuals. While national research found that Black, Latino, and other people of color account for about 66% of the incarcerated population and about 60% of those who enroll in or complete a postsecondary education program in prison,⁵⁶ we found that Black and other people of color accounted for 30% of Washington's incarcerated population, but Black and other people of color accounted for 38% of the incarcerated populations participating in postsecondary education.

Rates of year-over-year retention and completion once enrolled were similar across all racial groups, although Black and Latino students were slightly less likely to complete their degree programs. These findings were consistent for both professional/technical degrees and academic transfer degrees.

⁵⁶ Ositelu (2019).

IV. Challenges and Best Practices for Access and Completion

In this section, we identify potential challenges or barriers incarcerated individuals may face in accessing or completing a postsecondary program. We identify barriers or practices that are present in Washington, either statewide or in at least some facilities. We also discuss ways that these barriers could lead to disproportionate access to or completion of postsecondary programs. Finally, we identify useful practices that could promote postsecondary program participation and completion.

We identified relevant barriers and best practices through a review of national research literature related to correctional education programs (see [Appendix II](#) for a list of references). We also conferred with experts in Washington to understand what barriers and practices may be present in some or all of Washington's facilities.

We identified barriers and best practices in four general areas:

- program access and participation,
- persistence and completion,
- reentry, and
- program implementation, development, and administration.

In general, we found that the rate of postsecondary education participation for incarcerated students in Washington is higher than the national average. These successes may be related to a high level of coordination and collaboration between multiple agencies including DOC, SBCTC, and WSAC. However, students in

Washington may still face numerous barriers to accessing and completing postsecondary programs both while incarcerated and upon returning to their communities. These barriers may relate to funding, student eligibility, course-related factors, and program administration. Most of these hurdles occur at the state, facility, or course level, rather than the federal level, though federal changes, such as reinstating the Pell Grant program, could create further challenges for students in state prisons, given the more restrictive requirements for accessing Pell Grant funds.

Additionally, some barriers related to student eligibility and course characteristics can have larger impacts on students of color than White students. These differences may cause disparities in access or educational attainment that we cannot identify solely with aggregate, de-identified data. Finally, while several barriers to access and completion may exist in Washington, we find that DOC, SBCTC, and individual facilities and colleges have implemented numerous useful policies or practices that may eliminate many obstacles facing incarcerated students.

Program Access and Participation

In Washington, various challenges and useful practices exist related to program access and participation ([Exhibits 19-21](#)). Many funding barriers center on Pell-eligibility requirements. However, the majority of programs in Washington are funded through DOC contracts rather than through Pell Grants or tuition-based models.

Increasing access to need-based aid, though likely useful in many contexts, may not increase access as much in Washington given its current funding model. Because the state requires DOC to pay the cost of participation including books, materials, and supplies for any high school diploma or GED program, any vocational program that is required for work within the facility or in the community, and any other education program required as part of an individual's reentry plan,⁵⁷ students have less dependence on federal or state aid to pay for

these programs. Reinstating the Pell Grant could change the funding structure for postsecondary correctional education programs. The implications for student access may depend on Pell Grant generosity relative to the average per FTE funds allocated through DOC contracts.

Additionally, some of the challenges to accessing funding associated with Pell Grant eligibility (noted in [Exhibit 19](#)) will likely become greater concerns for incarcerated students in Washington.

Exhibit 19

Program Access and Participation – Funding

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities in Washington)

Challenges

- *Access to funding tied to time to release and/or restricted for those serving life without parole or a death sentence*
- *High cost of courses*
- *Need-based aid or tuition assistance access restricted*
- *Allocations linked to recidivism or outcomes rather than academic success*
- *Cannot currently be in default for a student loan or owe money on a grant (Pell)*
- *Funding sources or allocation incentivize rapid enrollment of large numbers of students (could also be come concern with Pell)*
- *Individuals convicted of certain crime types restricted from accessing aid (Pell – modified in 2021)*
- *Must have high school diploma or GED (Pell)*
- *Required FAFSA documentation and completion can be difficult to complete or verify (Pell)*
- *Selective service registration required (Pell until 2021)*
- *US citizenship or valid "alien" number required (Pell)*

Best practices

- *Provide the opportunity and support to rehabilitate a loan through the Department of Education*
- *Remove regulations on incarcerated individuals getting need-based aid*
- *Tuition and fee waivers for incarcerated students*

⁵⁷ [RCW 72.09.460](#).

As detailed in [Exhibit 20](#), incarcerated individuals in Washington may face challenges in accessing postsecondary programs due to academic and justice-related characteristics. While some behavior-related restrictions may be necessary to guarantee the safety of faculty and students, some research recommends

tying student eligibility to academic performance only.

We also identified numerous barriers tied to both funding and program eligibility. For example, both funding and the ability to participate in programs are limited or unavailable for those serving longer sentences.⁵⁸

Exhibit 20

Program Access and Participation – Student Eligibility

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities in Washington)

Challenges	Best practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Minimum placement or standardized test scores (at least for some courses)</i> • <i>Cannot have prior course withdrawals or incompletes</i> • <i>Admissions practices discourage or exclude students who need additional support or resources (including pre-college-level coursework, social or psychological support, or learning accommodations)</i> • <i>Eligibility tied to time to release and restricted for those serving life without parole or a death sentence</i> • <i>Limitations in the number of correctional programs allowed concurrently (i.e., cannot participate in correctional education because participating in another correctional program)</i> • <i>Work assignment prioritized over education programs</i> • <i>Restrictions or incentives based on good behavior</i> • <i>Individuals convicted of certain crime types restricted</i> • <i>Must be below certain risk level</i> • <i>Age restrictions, particularly only available to younger students</i> • <i>Must have high school diploma or GED</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Assist students who may be exiting a facility in the middle of class to help them avoid incompletes</i> • <i>Frame education programs as part of rehabilitation/reentry not an extra elective or incentive</i> • Prevent exclusion based on non-academic characteristics • Tie aid, rather than program eligibility, to non-academic characteristics • Standardize eligibility rules across all facilities to reduce facility or staff discretion • Require educational programming for all individuals

⁵⁸ Shorter sentences can also present a challenge to interested students because they may not have enough time to complete a course or program.

Though we do not directly identify any challenges related to program access or participation that would disproportionately impact students of color, eligibility requirements tied to both funding and participation could indirectly lead to inequitable access. These requirements often correspond to student characteristics that can differ between individuals from different backgrounds. While evaluating differences in individual characteristics that could indirectly lead to inequitable access is beyond the scope of the current study, we note that if racial differences exist among justice-involved individuals, then these disparities could have repercussions for incarcerated students of color.

For example, research indicates that Black individuals may receive longer sentences than White individuals.⁵⁹ Funding and student eligibility are often tied to time to release, and those who have longer sentences may be restricted from accessing funding or enrolling in a postsecondary program. Racial disparities in sentence length could then result in greater access to postsecondary programs for White individuals relative to Black individuals.

Incarcerated individuals may also choose not to enroll in postsecondary programs if they do not know about potential programs or the course offerings do not provide them with desired or useful skills (Exhibit 21).

Exhibit 21

Program Access and Participation – Course Offerings

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities in Washington)

Challenges	Best practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Program offerings are not available in the community making it impossible to complete program post-release</i> • <i>No systematic recruitment or admissions process or lack of information about programming</i> • <i>Programs limited to trades-based or skill-based programs and degrees</i> • Courses do not align with local or state labor market or are obsolete • Failure to inform students about courses taught by credentialed instructors vs. peer instructors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Make information about programs widely available on bulletin boards, closed-circuit TV, announcements, student handbooks</i> • <i>Develop advisory committees that include business leaders and others to advise on course offerings for incarcerated students</i>

⁵⁹ For example, see Knoth, L. (2021). *Examining Washington State's sentencing guidelines: A report for the Criminal Sentencing Task Force* (Doc. No. 21-05-1901). Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy; United States Sentencing Commission. (2017). *Demographic differences in*

sentencing: An update to the 2012 Booker Report. Washington, DC: United States Sentencing Commission; and MacDonald, J., & Donnelly, E. (2017). Evaluating the role of race in sentencing: An entropy weighting analysis. *Justice Quarterly*, 36(4), 656-681.

In Washington, DOC and SBCTC staff implement practices intended to align course offerings with state or local labor markets and advertise during recruitment periods, though individuals who enter a facility in between recruitment periods may have less information about available programs and access to information about postsecondary programs is likely to vary across facilities.

Persistence and Completion

Exhibits 22-24 detail potential challenges that could limit a student’s ability to persist in or complete a postsecondary program. Barriers related to persistence and completion often concern course or instructor quality, access to course materials, and support services to promote student learning. Thus, helpful practices generally relate to improving course offerings and resources, training for faculty, and developing student supports.

Exhibit 22

Persistence and Completion – General

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities in Washington)

Challenges	Best practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Facility transfers or punitive removal from class interrupt coursework or program progress</i> • <i>Students not prepared for college-level coursework</i> • Few direct incentives for students to complete the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hold enrolled individual in facility until completion of credit-bearing coursework</i> • <i>Develop standards and practices that account for transfers and ensure that transfers will not adversely affect program completion or future standing</i> • <i>Tie degree completion to sentence reductions</i> • <i>Offer and support developmental courses to ensure college readiness</i> • Formally recognize student achievements • Eliminate funding for most multi-entry/multi-exit classes or programs (exceptions are development, GED, or basic skills courses) • Tie funding to contact hours rather than enrollment so reimbursements require students to attend class

Two notable state policies correspond with challenges in [Exhibit 22](#). First, facility transfers represent a major challenge to program completion. Those who are transferred during a program may find that their new facility does not offer the same program hindering progress. Even when the new facility includes the same course, students may have difficulty catching up or reintegrating into a course at a different facility. Furthermore, because enrollment and funding can be tied to whether students complete their coursework, transfers can impact future eligibility for aid or enrollment both while incarcerated and upon release.

Importantly, Washington State does allow for, and facilities do initiate, holds for those participating in education programs, though such holds are not always granted.⁶⁰

Second, Washington directly ties student participation and completion to early release to incentivize participation. Individuals can earn early release days by participating in education programs in prison, and they may also be denied early release days if they refuse to participate.⁶¹

As discussed previously, some practices may not succeed within Washington's system. For example, North Carolina eliminated most funding for multi-entry/multi-exit classes and ties funding to contact hours rather than enrollment to motivate attendance and program completion. While this approach can address some causes of low completion rates, it could also reduce funding for workforce programs as compared to Washington's current funding model.⁶²

⁶⁰ DOC Policy Number 500.000. [Education and vocational program in prisons](#).

⁶¹ [RCW 72.09.130](#). Research indicates potential adverse effects of tying educational attainment to behavior or time served. For example, staff may perceive education only as a privilege to be earned or withdrawn, while incarcerated individuals may value the reduction in time served rather than their education. For example, see Pryor, M., & Thompkins, D.E. (2013). The disconnect between education

and social opportunity for the formerly incarcerated. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38(3), 457-479.

⁶² North Carolina ordered community colleges to eliminate most multi-entry/multi-exit courses to address completion issues. Literature noted that it could negatively impact funding for these courses. See Contardo, J., & Tolbert, M. (2008). *Prison postsecondary education: Bridging learning from incarceration to the community*. Paper presented at the Reentry Roundtable on Education, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York, April 1.

Support networks can be integral to student success, and we identified both challenges and useful practices in place in Washington facilities (Exhibit 23). We find that without specific state policies surrounding support services for incarcerated individuals, barriers and practices tend to vary across facilities. For example, facilities with more robust programs or prison-based reentry navigators might have expanded access to instructors, advisors, and other resources for students incarcerated in those facilities.

We also find that some challenges cannot necessarily be easily eliminated because DOC might have conflicting priorities such as protecting the incarcerated population and staff. For example, the lack of individual instructor or advisor time may limit an individual's ability to get focused attention and support. However, policies that limit in-person, private meetings can also protect the safety of incarcerated individuals or staff.

Exhibit 23

Persistence and Completion – Support Networks and Peers

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities in Washington)

Challenges	Best practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of one-on-one time with instructor</i> • <i>Student access to support services or other resources is limited to designated class time</i> • <i>Lack of access to qualified academic advisors or staff with understanding of special needs or accommodations</i> • <i>Lack of collaboration with resources on main campus</i> • <i>Difficulty hiring, training, and retaining incarcerated teaching assistants</i> • <i>Classes that include both incarcerated and non-incarcerated students favor non-incarcerated student learning</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Provide ample information to students about learning objectives, expectations, deadlines, etc.</i> • <i>Preference in-person courses as they provide direct student/instructor interaction</i> • <i>Integrate current students and alumni as peer mentors, teaching assistants, and facilitators</i> • <i>Have academic advisors who serve current and former incarcerated students</i> • <i>Allow students regular access to advisors, tutors, teaching assistants, and/or faculty</i> • <i>Offer student success courses or other soft skills development along with other course offerings</i> • <i>Submit grades and other feedback in similar manner and frequency as done with non-incarcerated students</i> • <i>Require advisors to meet with each student regularly to discuss education, develop individualized plans, and assess need for accommodations as part of DOC/CTC agreements</i>

Exhibit 24 identifies course-related barriers and practices that can impact student persistence and completion. Course offerings can limit student access to particular programs as noted in Exhibit 21, but they also have significant implications for student progress. Courses that do not transfer or accumulate toward a degree will limit a student's ability to earn a certificate or degree, though this barrier only applies to some courses and programs in Washington. Many Washington facilities offer courses with credits that will transfer across facilities and into the community and accumulate toward a certificate or degree, though without a consistent, state-wide system to ensure that courses will transfer or satisfy degree requirements, there is variation in available programs across facilities.⁶³

Access to computers, software, and internet service represent substantial and consistent challenges for incarcerated students (Exhibit 24). Washington has made various strides in addressing these barriers. In 2019, the Washington State Legislature directed DOC and SBCTC to develop a plan for creating secure Internet connections in facilities in an effort to expand postsecondary opportunities.⁶⁴

A secure internet pilot program was implemented at the Washington Corrections Center for Women in collaboration with Tacoma Community College, with students and faculty reporting encouraging benefits of the program.⁶⁵ DOC also highlights efforts to provide offline laptop computers for use by students.⁶⁶ Currently, however, incarcerated students often do not have access to secure Internet, hindering their coursework.

Several course-related barriers could have disparate impacts on students of color. Instructors may lack experience teaching students from diverse backgrounds and that lack of cultural responsiveness or skill in engaging students of color may discourage continued participation (Exhibit 24).

Relatedly, studies noted the potential challenge in recruiting or retaining faculty of color who may have experiences that could be of value when engaging with students of color.⁶⁷ Helpful practices that could reduce potential inequities include providing specific and continued training relevant to the incarcerated student population and establishing a diverse community of instructors.

⁶³ For example, see the variation in courses with students participating in Seibert (2020).

⁶⁴ [Second Substitute Senate Bill 5433, Chapter 397, Laws of 2019](#).

⁶⁵ Sinclair, S., & Armbruster, D. (2019). *Use of secured-internet to expand postsecondary education opportunities to enhance*

public safety - 2019 report to the legislature. Olympia, WA: Washington State Department of Corrections.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ For example, see Erzen, T., Gould, M.R., & Lewen, J. (2019). *Equity and excellence in practice: A guide for higher education in prison*. St. Louis, MO: Alliance for Higher Education in Prison and San Quentin, CA: Prison University Project.

Exhibit 24

Persistence and Completion – Course-related

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities in Washington)

Challenges

Course offerings:

- *Differences in course offerings across facilities and in the community whereby courses unavailable or credits do not transfer as individual moves through the system*
- *Credits do not accumulate toward degree*
- *Funding under Pell reinstatement might limit expensive program such as welding*
- *Laws prohibit degree receipt while incarcerated*
- *Course topics limited by fear of unrest or triggering individuals*

Course materials:

- *Lack of regular access to high-quality books, journals, or campus library*
- *Lack of regular or any access to internet or computers*
- *Lack of funding for needed school supplies (likely a larger issue with Pell reinstatement)*

Best practices

Course offerings:

- *Offer only courses with credits that can transfer to other facilities and/or the community (pre-college-level courses excepted)*
- *Develop centralized system with representation from educational and correctional systems that reviews and approves course offerings to ensure consistent offerings across facilities and in the community*
- *Streamline pathways where credits can accumulate towards transferable degree*
- *Ensure stackable course offerings (courses that build upon each other in a sequential manner)*

Course materials:

- *Digitize resources for students; faculty or other staff provide research articles*
- *Provide students with all basic school supplies and materials at no cost*
- *Partner library within facility with external academic library and provide access to library professionals to students*
- *Provide offline databases*
- *Develop and maintain own library system*
- *Collaboratively develop standards and practices concerning storage and distribution of program supplies and document and disseminate practices to affected staff and administrators*
- *Provide access to computers, offer network-based or secure internet portals*
- *Dedicated, qualified staff person within prison to address technological limitations and computer literacy*

Exhibit 25

Reentry

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities or colleges in Washington)

Challenges	Best practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Funding needs outside of prison not addressed as part of the prison education funding/release plans</i>• <i>Course quality variation between facility education and community education</i>• <i>Restrictions on peer support when interactions between incarcerated individuals are limited</i>• <i>Resistance to matriculation of formerly incarcerated students</i>• <i>Lack of connection between academic and reentry-related service providers</i>• <i>Lack of student support services for students about to reenter or formerly incarcerated individuals</i>• <i>Lack of housing supports</i>• <i>Students required to disclose incarceration history</i>• <i>Individuals who require wages to secure housing, food, etc. must preference employment over education</i>• <i>Parole policy or officer's preference employment or other requirements over continuing education</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Connect programs in prison to programs outside of prison so credits transfer and vocational/workforce training is reentry-relevant</i>• <i>Align in-prison jobs with coursework to provide apprenticeship/externship experience</i>• <i>Academic programs collaborate with reentry programs and community partners and other support services (e.g., housing, employment.)</i>• <i>Ongoing educational assessments to judge progress and assist with post-release educational plans</i>• <i>Use existing resources for nontraditional students</i>• <i>Create navigators to support formerly incarcerated individuals</i>• <i>Develop partnerships between housing authorities and colleges (such as Tacoma Housing Authority and Tacoma Community College partnership)</i>• <i>Allow formerly incarcerated individuals to interact for education purposes</i>• <i>Require educational programming as part of parole or probation and allow enough time to complete</i>• <i>Dedicated staff who can assist formerly incarcerated individuals on main campus</i>• <i>Create reentry specific housing</i>

Reentry

Washington's reentry model utilizes many valuable practices as detailed in [Exhibit 25](#). The reentry navigators located both within the prison system and the community help individuals develop education plans that they continue upon release; connect students with other resources or services that are critical to successful reintegration; and assist students in transferring their coursework to colleges in the community.

In addition, postsecondary education programs, particularly the professional/technical education paths, are connected to jobs that are relevant to post-release employment opportunities. In addition, these programs may be linked to in-prison jobs available to incarcerated persons in order to strengthen their experiences with using skills gained in the classroom.

Where available, these partnerships assist formerly incarcerated individuals to establish stability in the community that may allow them to continue pursuing postsecondary education opportunities after release.

Individuals in Washington may still face significant barriers in continuing their education upon release, with barriers around housing and peer supports identified as particularly challenging in Washington. Washington's DOC has a robust reentry system that partners with community organizations to assist individuals with transitional services, but these resources vary by location.

Similarly, while reentry navigators funded by SBCTC are available in some locations, not every CTC has a reentry navigator available and most public colleges and universities also do not participate in the reentry navigator program. Individuals who complete an academic associate degree while incarcerated may lack access to the information and resources necessary to help them enroll in a four-year college to continue their pursuit towards a bachelor's degree.

As in previous sections, the barriers and challenges identified during the reentry process may not directly cause group differences in persistence or completion for formerly incarcerated students. However, the location of campus reentry navigators could result in limited access to resources for those students who return to communities without navigators. Formerly incarcerated individuals in communities without these navigators (such as Yakima County) may be less likely to continue their educations in the community.

Program Development, Implementation, and Administration

Finally, we considered barriers and best practices for program development, implementation, and administration in [Exhibit 26](#). Washington's robust correctional education infrastructure already involves significant collaboration between DOC and SBCTC administrators and other stakeholders, coordination between facility and college staff, and reentry services. These relationships provide a wide support network to provide training and oversight as well as administrative support for correctional staff and education providers.

However, we find that challenges still exist, particularly with respect to physical resources needed to administer postsecondary courses and infrastructure to monitor and evaluate program performance. Institutional policies may limit the number of individuals who can participate in a correctional program due to security and safety concerns. In addition, incarcerated students may be prohibited from accessing resources that could support their educational programming such as access to the Internet to participate in distance-based learning opportunities.

Most recently, with the passage of Second Substitute House Bill 1044 in 2021, Washington State is working to address gaps in resources for incarcerated persons with learning disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and cognitive impairments.⁶⁸ The implementation of these policies will address key challenges identified in national literature (see [Exhibit 26](#)).

Finally, increasing the data infrastructure for postsecondary education programs may assist agencies in advancing the development and administration of correctional education opportunities. Limitations in the CTC and DOC data prevent either agency from being able to report on the status of correctional education participation, retention, and completion quickly and comprehensively over time. Reliable and accessible data is also critical to facilitating successful transitions into community education programs following release from incarceration.

⁶⁸ [2SHB 1044](#).

Exhibit 26

Program Development, Implementation, and Administration

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities in Washington)

Challenges	Best practices
<p>Program staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Lack of buy-in from correctional staff</i>• <i>Disconnect or lack of coordination between correctional and educational program leadership and staff</i>• <i>Outside campuses unable to fund dedicated staff positions</i>• <i>Insufficient financial and/or professional support for program staff</i>• <i>Program leaders and key staff lack the time and/or resources for professional development and support activities</i>• <i>Lack of training and support for program leadership, staff, and instructors</i>• <i>Lack of buy-in from college/university administrators (e.g., view program as a service project rather than integral; faculty expected to donate time; programs developed primarily as revenue source)</i>	<p>Program staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Hold regular meetings and cross-training between faculty, correctional staff, reentry staff, and administrators from DOC and colleges to develop strong relationships and shared goals</i>• <i>Facilitate discussions about postsecondary education that include stakeholders from DOC, reentry, higher education institutions, legislators, and others</i>• <i>Have educational institutions provide administrative support to faculty for budgeting, financial aid, registration, and advising in a manner similar to non-incarcerated students</i>• <i>Provide educational opportunities to correctional staff at low or no cost</i>• <i>Provide basic training for correctional staff</i>• <i>Develop specialized workgroups that include various stakeholders</i>• <i>Add responsibilities of correctional staff related to educational programming (e.g., setting up classrooms, coordinating movements) to agreements between higher education institutions and DOC to acknowledge work of correctional staff in implementing educational programs</i>• <i>Standardize program offerings (regularly scheduled admissions tests, steady course offerings, routine graduations) to ease burden on correctional staff</i>• <i>Establish agreements about provision of resources, transfer of college credits, and admission of qualified students</i>• <i>Develop a leadership team and hold regular meeting to resolve challenges and support implementation</i>

Exhibit 26 (Cont.)

Program Development, Implementation, and Administration

(Italicized bullets are challenges or practices that are present at some or all facilities in Washington)

Challenges	Best practices
<p>Physical space and resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Institutional security concerns prioritized over correctional education that can limit in-person classes or access to educational materials and technology, restrict movement to and from classroom, and impede communication with other students or instructors</i>• <i>Not enough classroom space</i>• <i>Restrictions on access to resources such as computers for online-education programs</i>• <i>Lack of assistive technologies for those with learning disabilities, physical impairment, or traumatic brain injuries</i> <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Key programmatic decision-making performed by individuals who lack academic or professional experience or expertise</i>• <i>Lack of program funding that prevents developing organizational infrastructure to support operations</i>• <i>Lack of information about “what works” or which program components are most effective</i>• <i>Lack of strong Board of Directors or Advisory Board to fundraise, perform strategic planning, or support program</i>	<p>Physical space and resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Use correspondence/distance-learning courses</i>• <i>Provide access to dedicated classroom and study space</i>• <i>Eliminate restrictions on internet-based courses and resources</i> <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Develop Board comprised of active and engaged stakeholders, with appropriate resources, time, and expertise and include former students when possible</i>• <i>Equalize appropriation per FTE for incarcerated and non-incarcerated students</i>• <i>Advance data collection to evaluate programs and outcomes and identify formerly incarcerated students on campuses to provide supports</i>• <i>Broaden research to include effect of correctional education and program components on student outcomes beyond recidivism</i>• <i>Diversify funding streams</i>• <i>Create space for college and facility administrators to share lessons learned</i>• <i>Incorporate serving incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students into equity-related efforts</i>

Section Summary

Overall, we found that incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals in Washington who are interested in continuing or furthering their postsecondary educations can face many challenges in attempting to do so. These challenges can concern funding, student eligibility, course-related factors, individual college or facility practices, and state and federal policies. Addressing such diverse challenges can require broad or similarly varied practices, many of which Washington has implemented or is currently considering. While many of the challenges identified in this report align with challenges WSAC identified for the general CTC population in their 2021 Strategic Action Plan, there are some unique challenges that incarcerated populations face, and the ultimate policy actions needed to address these changes may vary for the incarcerated population and the general postsecondary education populations.

Indeed, DOC and SBCTC have been collaborating for many years to provide postsecondary certificate and degree programs to incarcerated individuals. These agencies already implement many useful practices that support access to and completion of postsecondary correctional education programs. In some instances, we also found that policies that create challenges to the successful completion of postsecondary programs exist to support other competing interests related to operating a secure facility.

We did not find that Washington's policies *directly* contribute to disproportionate enrollment or completion opportunities for incarcerated students of color. However, we find that some policies, particularly those related to student eligibility factors, could indirectly contribute to inequities.

The next section discusses opportunities for future research that could potentially identify specific program successes and opportunities for improvement.

V. Opportunities for Future Research

In this section, we discuss additional research that could further explain patterns of postsecondary educational attainment among incarcerated students in Washington.

First, access to additional administrative data would allow for a better assessment of potential disproportionality in access and completion, an examination of continued participation and completion in the community following release from incarceration, and an evaluation of whether post-secondary programs reduce recidivism following release from incarceration.

Specifically, individual-level data from SBCTC and DOC would allow researchers to track participation in and completion of postsecondary education programs and admissions in and out of DOC facilities through the life course. The current study was unable to assess factors related to persistence following release, such as whether or not release in a county with a reentry navigator was related to an increased likelihood of post-secondary enrollment in the community. This study was also limited to retention and completion within the facility of first enrollment. Facility transfers were identified as a significant challenge in the review of national literature. Identifiable, individual-level data would allow researchers to better assess whether and how facility transfers impact retention and completion for Washington's incarcerated populations.

In addition, data from WSIPP's Criminal History database could be used to analyze whether different types of participation in correctional postsecondary education programs have an impact on the likelihood of recidivism. Completion of a rigorous evaluation of the effects of correctional postsecondary education on recidivism would allow for an examination of the costs and benefits to Washington State for their investment in these programs.

Expanded access to individual-level data in both education and DOC databases would allow for a better examination of disproportionality in participation and completion of correctional postsecondary education programs. For example, these data would allow researchers to establish a consistent racial classification method so that the DOC population could be directly compared to the general CTC population. In addition, individual-level data would allow researchers to isolate and minimize the effects of external factors that may be suppressing or masking the presence of racial disproportionality. For example, this report compared the racial distribution of the full DOC population to the racial distribution of incarcerated students. However, not all individuals incarcerated in a DOC facility were eligible to participate in these programs, and rates of eligibility may vary by race. With individual-level data, the research could examine whether disproportionality is present when analyzing only the eligible DOC population.

In 2021, the Washington State Legislature passed Second Substitute House Bill 1044 which includes a directive to WSIPP to examine postsecondary education programs using individual-level data.⁶⁹ In addition to expanding upon the analyses in this report, future studies will examine post-release enrollment and completion trends in the community for formerly incarcerated individuals and will examine whether participation in postsecondary education while incarcerated reduces the likelihood of recidivism post-release. A preliminary report is expected in October 2024 and a final report is expected in October 2027.

Second, additional surveys or outreach to facilities and/or incarcerated persons could help identify perceived or actual barriers and best practices not identified in this report. The current report drew largely upon the findings from research conducted across the country and may not sufficiently capture barriers and best practices that exist in Washington State. Even within the current national literature, there is a lack of surveys in which incarcerated persons are able to provide detailed information about their interest in, access to, and participation in postsecondary education programs.

Well-designed surveys administered consistently to staff across DOC facilities could identify important differences between facilities with regards to their practices for outreach and case management, selection into programs when the number of applicants exceeds the number of available program slots, and methods for retention of students over time.

⁶⁹ [2SHB 1044](#).

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Appendices

Postsecondary Program Participation and Completion Patterns among Individuals Incarcerated in WA State Prisons

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I. Supplemental Tables and Analysis

Race Data and Suppression

Analyses of retention and completion for this report were limited by the need to suppress aggregate data when the number of individuals from a particular racial group within a facility was less than ten. Counts for Asian-American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students were generally too small to report when disaggregated by facility and year. Thus, we combined these racial groups in all cases into a category that captures “other people of color (POC).” This category was also combined with those who report no race.

There were also instances where Black and Hispanic populations were suppressed. As noted in the main report, we observed fewer than ten Black students enrolling in a professional-technical program about 30% of the time; and fewer than ten Black students enrolling in an academic transfer program over 50% of the time. In cases where we observed any Hispanic/Latino students participating in a professional-technical program in the cohort dataset, we found that about 60% had fewer than ten students. For associate transfer programs, approximately 90% of cases have fewer than ten students. Thus, for most cases where we observed Hispanic/Latino students, we included those students in the “other POC/not reported” category.

Exhibit A1 shows the percent of observations (facility and program type years) where data for a particular race had to be suppressed. For instances where the number of White individuals was less than ten, the students were removed from the dataset prior to being sent to WSIPP. In all other instances, observations were combined into a single “other people of color/unknown” racial group.⁷⁰

The collapsing of racial categories makes it difficult to construct valid and reliable estimates by race that may be compared across years. Even when estimates were reported at the aggregate level and not by individual facilities, estimates for Latino and Black students may be biased. For example, if three facilities in 2009 had counts of Hispanic/Latino students less than ten, then the aggregate estimates for 2009 will have the Hispanic/Latino students from those three facilities collapsed into the “other POC/unknown” category while Hispanic/Latino students from all other facilities would still be coded as “Hispanic/Latino.”

⁷⁰ Suppression limitations applied only to the analyses of retention and completion using the cohort datasets. For annual enrollment using the snapshot data, we received aggregate counts and did not have to suppress beyond the collapsing of Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, multi-racial, and not reported into a singular other people of color/unknown category.

These suppression standards likely underly some of the instability in racial estimates for retention and completion. Specifically, the completion trends for Latino students reported in the main body were more unstable than the completion estimates for other races. This may be driven by heterogeneity in the year-over-year race categories. The amount of Black and Latino students in the “other POC/unknown” category varies between years and the number of facilities represented in the Black and Latino categories in each year will also vary.

Suppression was particularly problematic when trying to compare trends for academic transfer programs. Nearly all of the observations for Latino students were collapsed into the other POC/unknown category and over half of the observations for Black students were collapsed into the other POC/unknown category. In addition, over a third of the observations for White students were removed because the cohort of academic/transfer enrollees in a particular facility for a given year was less than ten.

Exhibit A1

Percent of Observations with Fewer than Ten Enrollees, by Race

Racial group	Professional/technical	Academic transfer
American Indian/Alaskan Native	71.4%	100.0%
Asian Pacific Islander	96.1%	100.0%
Black	28.0%	53.3%
Latino	61.2%	88.0%
Multiracial	53.2%	100.0%
White	8.6%	36.1%

Notes:

Observations represent unique facility-program-years. For example, Monroe Correctional Complex—professional/technical – 2009, Monroe Correctional Complex—professional/technical – 2010, Monroe Correctional Complex—academic transfer – 2009, Monroe Correctional Complex—academic transfer – 2010 etc.

Due to these inconsistencies, we do not feel it is appropriate to present findings of retention or completion by program type and by race. To the extent possible, we hope to address these limitations in upcoming studies authorized by the 2021 Washington State Legislature in Second Substitute House Bill 1044.⁷¹

Facility-Level Data

A total of 14 facilities were included in our dataset. For 2009 and 2010 cohorts there were also an additional 360 students associated with an “unknown correctional facility.” Two of the facilities in our dataset—Ahtanum View Corrections Complex and Pine Lodge Corrections Center—closed in 2010. In addition, we received data for Larch Correction Center for only three years. Monroe Correctional Complex did not have any records prior to 2016. For facility-level analyses, we excluded records from Ahtanum, Pine Lodge, and Larch. We also excluded records not tied to a particular correctional facility.

⁷¹ 2SHB 1044.

Using the snapshot dataset, we were able to report the varying numbers for enrollment and completion in each academic year, by facility. [Exhibit A2](#) shows the number of individuals enrolled and the number of individuals who completed in each academic year, by facility.

Exhibit A2

Total Annual Enrollment and Completion, by Facility – Snapshot Dataset

	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.
Airway Heights Corrections Ctr	160	38	485	112	591	115	40	6	0	0	1819	441
Cedar Creek Corrections Ctr	--	--	--	--	--	--	813	154	627	126	--	--
Clallam Bay Corrections Ctr	--	--	913	189	--	--	--	--	78	20	--	--
Coyote Ridge Corrections Ctr	38	1	2022	485	243	37	388	59	545	99	64	9
Mission Creek Corrections Ctr	--	--	--	--	1802	362	--	--	0	0	75	19
Monroe Correctional Complex	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Olympic Corrections Ctr	--	--	--	--	241	35	2173	509	225	54	530	116
Stafford Creek Corrections Ctr	187	28	--	--	38	10	369	56	1898	419	--	--
Washington Corrections Ctr	--	--	--	--	546	104	260	36	604	109	--	--
Washington Corrections Ctr for Women	975	173	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	359	88
Washington State Penitentiary	142	6	64	8	334	55	83	24	76	12	946	229

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.	Enroll	Comp.
Airway Heights Corrections Ctr	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Cedar Creek Corrections Ctr	228	47	179	57	--	--	449	127	120	11
Clallam Bay Corrections Ctr	24	2	82	18	202	56	--	--	344	44
Coyote Ridge Corrections Ctr	543	96	293	58	355	50	495	105	401	75
Mission Creek Corrections Ctr	1689	441	--	--	699	206	159	34	--	--
Monroe Correctional Complex	--	--	--	--	178	56	--	--	--	--
Olympic Corrections Ctr	150	38	134	38	--	--	--	--	1147	235
Stafford Creek Corrections Ctr	287	54	275	79	--	--	--	--	--	--
Washington Corrections Ctr	--	--	1735	559	272	102	171	32	--	--
Washington Corrections Ctr for Women	60	8	96	16	1595	479	--	--	303	36
Washington State Penitentiary	503	69	870	195	195	33	1467	384	233	32

Note:

These tables use the snapshot datasets, and thus represent the total number of individuals enrolled and the total number of individuals who complete a postsecondary education program in each academic year.

We also analyzed the number of enrollees and completion rate using the cohort dataset. [Exhibit A3](#) presents the number of individuals initially enrolled in each cohort as well as the percent of those in each cohort who completed their postsecondary program within three years of their initial enrollment. As with the analyses in the main report, the completion records were limited to those who completed in the same facility as their initial enrollment.

Exhibit A3

Cohort Enrollment and Completion, by Facility – Cohort Dataset

	2009 Cohort			2010 Cohort			2011 Cohort			2012 Cohort		
	Enroll		Completion	Enroll		Completion	Enroll		Completion	Enroll		Completion
	N	N	%	N	N	%	N	N	%	N	N	%
Airway Heights Corrections Ctr	401	139	35%	191	83	43%	236	77	33%	247	75	30%
Cedar Creek Corrections Ctr	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	99	71	72%	121	95	79%
Clallam Bay Corrections Ctr	282	119	42%	163	61	37%	184	56	30%	125	31	25%
Coyote Ridge Corrections Ctr	408	228	56%	349	166	48%	264	162	61%	315	171	54%
Mission Creek Corrections Ctr	14	8	57%	59	17	29%	17	13	76%	23	16	70%
Monroe Correctional Complex	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
Olympic Corrections Ctr	115	26	23%	43	31	72%	83	44	53%	96	43	45%
Stafford Creek Corrections Ctr	270	156	58%	189	135	71%	362	178	49%	335	142	42%
Washington Corrections Ctr	118	10	8%	39	7	18%	131	10	8%	62	2	3%
Washington Corrections Ctr for Women	178	117	66%	177	65	37%	88	52	59%	145	65	45%
Washington State Penitentiary	681	149	22%	547	116	21%	419	100	24%	457	121	26%

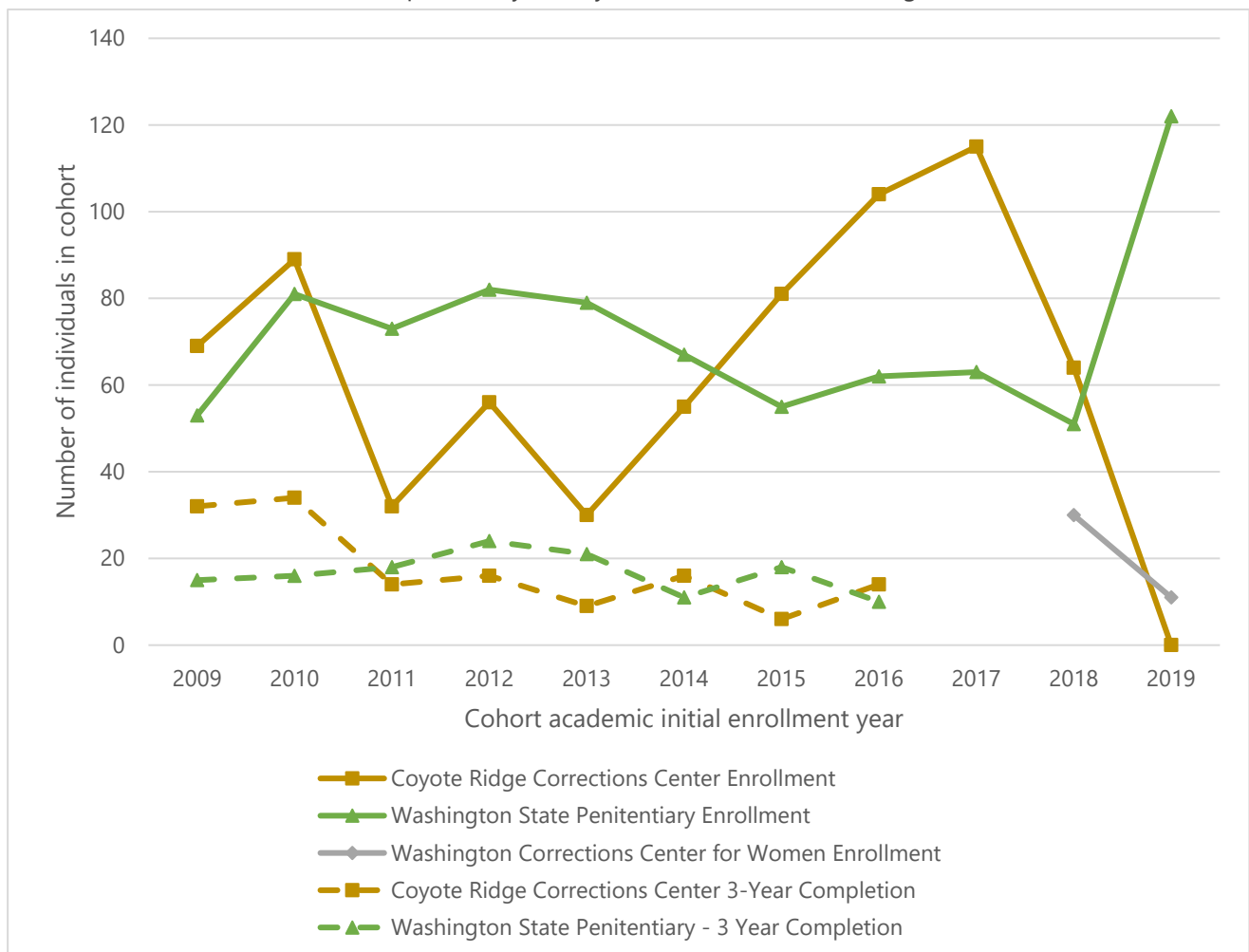
	2013 Cohort			2014 Cohort			2015 Cohort			2016 Cohort		
	Enroll		Completion	Enroll		Completion	Enroll		Completion	Enroll		Completion
	N	N	%	N	N	%	N	N	%	N	N	%
Airway Heights Corrections Ctr	225	45	20%	130	63	48%	82	57	70%	56	31	55%
Cedar Creek Corrections Ctr	137	115	84%	140	117	84%	124	106	85%	114	90	79%
Clallam Bay Corrections Ctr	125	24	19%	101	30	30%	81	29	36%	65	14	22%
Coyote Ridge Corrections Ctr	244	142	58%	230	114	50%	251	98	39%	201	68	34%
Mission Creek Corrections Ctr	31	19	61%	33	16	48%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%
Monroe Correctional Complex	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	0	0	0%	93	71	76%
Olympic Corrections Ctr	53	22	42%	77	10	13%	39	16	41%	45	30	67%
Stafford Creek Corrections Ctr	271	120	44%	237	99	42%	219	101	46%	143	58	41%
Washington Corrections Ctr	80	7	9%	34	1	3%	0	0	0%	244	223	91%
Washington Corrections Ctr for Women	102	50	49%	100	39	39%	24	15	63%	0	0	0%
Washington State Penitentiary	517	171	33%	467	132	28%	395	115	29%	310	102	33%

Note: These tables use the cohort datasets, and thus represent the total number of individuals enrolled in the first cohort year and the total number of individuals who complete a postsecondary education program within three years following initial enrollment. Completion was limited to those who completed their program in the same facility as their initial enrollment. Three-year completion data was available only through the 2016 cohort.

Only three facilities were included in the data for academic transfer programs. Overall, the results presented in Exhibit A3 were consistent with the findings for the professional/technical degree programs as those populations largely accounted for the combined aggregate statistics. Exhibit A4 presents the total number of individuals enrolled in an academic transfer program in each cohort and the number of individuals in each cohort who completed their program within three years. Completion data are presented for the 2009 – 2016 cohorts. Importantly, Washington Corrections Center for Women did have enrollees in academic transfer programs from 2015-2017. However, the number of individuals enrolled did not meet the minimum sample size threshold by race to be included in our dataset. A total of 53 students were excluded from our analysis because the number of individuals in their cohort who were Black, Hispanic, and other people of color, or who were White was not greater than ten.

Exhibit A3

Cohort Enrollment and Completion, by Facility for Academic Transfer Programs – Cohort Dataset



Note:

This figure uses the cohort datasets, and thus represents the total number of individuals enrolled in the first cohort year and the total number of individuals who completed a postsecondary academic transfer program within three years following initial enrollment. Completion was limited to those who completed their program in the same facility as their initial enrollment. Three-year completion data was available only through the 2016 cohort.

Analyses of racial disproportionality between facilities were affected by the same suppression concerns outlined above. In addition to differences in year-over-year differences in suppression, facility-by-facility comparisons within the same year may be biased by differences in facility enrollment and the subsequent need to collapse Black and/or Hispanic students into the other POC/unknown category. Because we were unable to report racial bias estimates that would allow for valid and reliable year-over-year comparisons between and within facilities, we do not present racial disparity analyses by facility for this report. To the extent possible, we hope to address these limitations in upcoming studies authorized by the 2021 Washington State Legislature in Second Substitute House Bill 1044.⁷²

⁷² [2SHB 1044](#).

II. References

Section IV of this report includes a summary of the findings from a review of national research literature related to correctional education programs. The studies we reviewed included identification of potential challenges or barriers to postsecondary education participation, retention, and completion as well as some policies or best practices that can address these barriers. This section provides the citations of studies that were included in our review and that informed the information provided in Section IV.

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