



1. Why Public Higher Education?

Public higher education is a key – though often overlooked – criminal justice partner. The benefits of high-quality higher education accrue regardless of origin, of course, and both public and private universities can be incalculably valuable. But the impacts of mass incarceration are vast, and the public higher education system offers our only chance to scale an effective response.

In California, over eight million residents are estimated to be living in the community with an arrest or conviction record. We have 35 prisons and 58 county jails, and approximately 700,000 Californians are estimated to be in prison, in jail, or under criminal justice supervision on any given day. The system is enormous, but it has met its match: our public higher education system, with 114 community colleges serving over two million students, 10 University of California (UC) campuses, and 23 California State University (CSU) campuses, is equally immense.

Our community colleges in particular are critical partners, and they remain the primary point of entry for most incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. The colleges are “open access,” meaning they must enroll any student over 18 who can benefit from instruction. They are already addressing many of the challenges faced by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students including lack of college-readiness and food, housing, and financial insecurity. They are located in all our neighborhoods, accessible to everyone including those who have been incarcerated. They are located close to every state prison, and 90% of the state’s jail inmates are less than ten miles from a community college. Building the partnerships takes commitment, but the foundation is already there.



The Chancellor’s Office & the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

“With 114 community colleges, if we can pull it off here, any other state ought to be able to pull it off as well.”

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Higher education is a proven solution. It will not alone solve the ills of mass incarceration, but it can and should be reaching incarcerated and formerly incarcerated potential students, welcoming them on campus, and supporting them through to credential, degree, transfer and employment. If we achieve this, we will all be better for it.