

March 2021



Alabama
Commission on
the Evaluation of
Services

Correctional Education

Service Assessment

ALABAMA COMMISSION ON THE EVALUATION OF SERVICES



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March 8, 2021

Members of the Commission,

I am pleased to transmit this report, Service Assessment - Correctional Education, to the Commission. The evaluation examined the efforts of state agencies and the impact of education delivered to incarcerated populations in terms of recidivism, post-release employment, and program delivery.

The evaluation officially concluded on February 22, 2021. The Alabama Department of Corrections and the Alabama Community College System participated in stakeholder meetings and have provided their official response to the report.

I believe this report accurately reflects correctional education being delivered in Alabama, measured impacts of the existing system of delivery, and provides insight into the potential landscape of correctional education.

We very much appreciate the cooperation and assistance of the Alabama Department of Corrections, the Alabama Community College System, provider institutions and their staff. I respectfully request that they be given an opportunity to respond during the public presentation of the report.

Sincerely,

Marcus Morgan
Director





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Alabama Commission on the Evaluation of Services would like to express our sincere gratitude to researchers, practitioners, and professionals that assisted in this evaluation. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of the following organizations that contributed significantly to this report.

State Agencies

Alabama Office of the Governor
Alabama Community College System
Alabama Department of Corrections
Alabama Legislative Services Agency
Calhoun Community College
Coastal Community College
Gadsden State Community College
Ingram State Technical College
Wallace Community College – Dothan

States

Florida
Georgia
Iowa
Minnesota
Pennsylvania
South Carolina
Tennessee
Virginia
Washington
Wyoming

Organizations

Ashland University
Bureau of Justice
Correctional Education Association
National Conference of State Legislatures
Prison Policy
Vera Institute of Justice

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alabama has provided education and skills training in prisons under the well-studied premise that providing offenders with education and skills reduces their likelihood of returning to patterns of criminal behavior. The most recent available evidence suggests that participation in correctional education programming results in monetizable post-release outcomes, namely a reduction in recidivism and an increase in employability, although the monetized value of these benefits varies significantly. The results of research focused on recidivism and employability outcomes also varies, emphasizing the need to track these outcomes within the state of Alabama.

The Alabama Department of Corrections, Alabama Community College System, and some provider institutions stated that the goals of delivering correctional education are to reduce recidivism, increase public safety, and return a more productive citizen to society. However, there is no tangible evidence of collaboration between these agencies to track or analyze recidivism or employment outcomes. The Alabama Department of Corrections routinely performs recidivism studies of various cohorts released from their population but does not identify the specific cohort receiving correctional education prior to release. Data enabling this analysis is not provided by the Alabama Community College System or provider institutions. Moreover, neither the Alabama Department of Corrections nor provider institutions have an effective tool for the timely tracking of post-release employment measures.

ACES analysis shows a modest decrease in recidivism for education cohorts receiving Career Technical Education. And although post-release employment is not effectively being tracked for this population, three of the five provider institutions reported an increase in employment tracking efforts. One college reported having workforce development in place which included a full-time career placement representative, a re-entry director, and career coaches.

Determining the effectiveness of Alabama's correctional education programming is compounded by the disparities in delivery. The length and depth of courses offered to offenders is not standardized across the system nor is the availability of career technical education fields of study. Therefore, where an inmate is housed has the potential to impact participation rates, suggesting a portion of the interested population may not receive education

Map of ADOC Correctional Facilities where offenders can receive CTE programming.



prior to release. These disparities, combined with identified barriers, may contribute to the observed overall declining headcount and persistence rates. Since 2012, the fall to spring persistence rates have declined an average of 2.4% per year. Although additional analysis should be considered, both declines are worth noting and are driving the cost of delivery higher.

From the academic years of 2012 through 2018, provider institutions have consistently served between seven and nine percent of the total in-custody population. This overall flat trend of the population served indicates the need to examine Alabama's system as a whole, addressing standardization and an increase in recruitment and referral efforts.

Traditional education outcome metrics like persistence, retention, headcount, and credit hour production are necessary; however, for the distinct correctional education population, additional performance and outcome metrics are also necessary. Further analysis of the system should consider the overall collaboration within the correctional education system, specifically addressing data sharing necessary for impact analysis, barriers to the delivery and receipt of correctional education, and the impacts of the changing landscape.

The correctional education landscape will change. Proposals for new correctional facilities and introduction of Personal Education Devices combined with legislative changes will undoubtedly cause those delivering correctional education to adapt to these changes. If a complete group of correctional education stakeholders is not involved and working together, Alabama will run the risk of missing multiple opportunities to improve the delivery of correctional education. One of the biggest known changes in the current landscape is the relaxed regulations of Federal Pell Grant Funding set to start in the 2023-24 award year. Advanced planning and coordination will have the potential to bring in this previously time consuming and arduous funding stream to Alabama and lower the state's cost of correctional education.

CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION – A SERVICE ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this evaluation is to examine the impact of education delivered to incarcerated populations in terms of recidivism, post-release employment, and program delivery in Alabama. ACES worked with the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC), the Alabama Community College System (ACCS), and individual community colleges that provide education within a correctional facility to collect data and conduct the analysis found in this report.¹

Alabama has a long and storied history with correctional education. This includes being one of the first states to dedicate state funds to deliver education to incarcerated individuals and being the only state to dedicate an entire academic institution to serving the incarcerated. This has all been done under the well-studied premise that providing offenders with education and skills reduces their likelihood of returning to patterns of criminal behavior. However, Alabama has not conducted its own analysis of recidivism or maintained accurate post-release employment data on offenders who have been served through correctional education programs. Alabama also has significant disparities in delivery of education regardless of its history with statewide dedicated efforts.

Crime, education, and employability are intrinsically linked.ⁱ Studies linking educational attainment with overall incarceration rates show that as much as 70% of incarcerated individuals did not earn a high school diploma or its equivalent.^{2, ii} The effects extend beyond crime as well. Employment rates have historically shown that individuals without a high school diploma are twice as likely to be unemployed as those with a college degreeⁱⁱⁱ and are also more likely to be convicted of felony crimes.^{iv}

EDUCATION IN CORRECTIONAL SETTINGS

The review of research conducted as a part of this evaluation indicates significant differences in impact among populations and education type. These differences point to a need to identify and track Alabama-specific outcome measures and to the possibility of a future impact evaluation.

There are several different forms of education that may be delivered within correctional settings. The three basic categories of correctional education that fall within the well-researched scope of this evaluation are:

- Adult basic education (ABE)
- Career technical education (CTE)
- Post-secondary education³

¹ While this evaluation looked at data from ACCS in regard to ABE, each of the five schools providing both ABE and CTE were interviewed and provided records for the services they provide.

² ADOC inmate self-reported education levels from 2019 showed 47% of the in-custody population did not have a high school diploma, GED, or some college.

³ CTE can be considered either a career pathways program or post-secondary, but for the purposes of this evaluation post-secondary education refers to courses designed to culminate in an Associate Degree or higher.

Correctional Education in Alabama

In Alabama, ACCS receives an earmarked appropriation for the delivery of correctional education. Fifteen community colleges across the state deliver ABE programs and services. Funding for these programs and services are provided through state and federal appropriations specifically for Adult Education.

Five community colleges deliver CTE coursework, and funding for these programs is provided through the Prison Education appropriation within the state Education Trust Fund budget. CTE instruction is offered in ten correctional facilities.

Community colleges themselves fall under the purview of ACCS. ADOC, in conjunction with ACCS, authorizes educational institutions to deliver correctional education at approved facilities.

Eligibility Limitations

The colleges have different factors that create limitations to receiving CTE.

- A few programs require a high school diploma or GED to enroll.
- One college has a ten-year from release policy, where an inmate cannot be considered for CTE unless they are within ten years of possible release.
- One college reported the correctional facility not allowing students to receive more than two semesters of education.
- Only one college reported the use of career pathways in ABE and CTE when literacy tests were not met. All other colleges reported the use of literacy tests but not the use of career pathways as a means for gauging student readiness.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

ABE is a broad category of educational programming for secondary education that offers instruction in reading, writing, and math. This high-school level coursework prepares inmates to make an education functioning level gain, earn a high school diploma, or earn a certificate of high school equivalency. Additionally, special education services are available for K-12 students that are 21 and under where mandated.⁴

All offenders in ADOC custody are eligible for ABE if those offenders are located in facilities where ABE services are offered. Based on self-reported data, over half of the ADOC in-custody prison population in 2019 lacked the equivalent of a high school diploma.^v The average inmate education level for the entire population was the 10th grade. Since a high school diploma or equivalency is the basic requirement for entry level employment, the Federal Bureau of Prisons requires all federal inmates without a verified high school diploma or GED to attend adult basic education for a minimum of 240 instructional hours or until the diploma or GED is obtained, whichever comes first.^{vi} Alabama does not require offenders that lack a high school diploma or its equivalent to participate in ABE courses.

The field of correctional education research does not commonly distinguish between earning an educational component such as reading or math from earning a high school diploma or equivalency.^{vii,viii} For that reason, and the fact that research demonstrates education reduces criminal behavior because it improves an offender's ability to use and process information, this evaluation looked at the field of Adult Basic Education in comprehensively. Some research suggests that participation in any type of basic education is associated with recidivism reductions.^{ix} However, other studies have not found the same link to reduced recidivism.^x

CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION

CTE programs offer education and skills in a variety of vocations ranging from traditional fields such as welding, plumbing, and carpentry to more modern fields like drafting and design, logistics, and commercial food service. Common CTE programs require the completion of prescribed coursework to earn a credential in a vocation, certifying mastery of a vocational skill set.

CTE courses are only offered at ten correctional facilities across the state. Most offenders housed in those facilities are eligible to participate in CTE programs. All colleges report using a testing mechanism to determine literacy levels; however, due to the ability to benefit,⁵ most programs do not require a minimum literacy level to enroll.⁶

Research indicates that participation in CTE has a positive impact on recidivism outcomes.^{xi} However, studies are mixed on the overall impact of CTE on employment

⁴ Alabama uses the General Education Development (GED) exam for students to obtain a certificate of high school equivalency.

⁵ The Ability to Benefit is a federal provision allowing eligible students to enroll in coursework who do not have a high school diploma or equivalency but have the ability to benefit.

⁶ Ingram tests every student's minimum literacy level and requires a minimum literacy level score to begin a CTE program. If a potential student cannot reach the minimum required score, the student is referred to ABE for at least one semester.

related outcomes. But one well designed meta-analysis showed those participating in education are 28% percent less likely to return to prison within three years when compared to non-education participants.^{xii}

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Post-secondary education is traditional college coursework designed for the participant to earn an associate degree, bachelor's degree, or, in some states, a doctoral degree. Some of Alabama's community colleges provided associate degrees at one point, but they do not currently have any correctional education above CTE. However, Ashland University Correctional Education is coming to the North Alabama Work Center in the fall semester of 2021 through a contract with ADOC. Ashland University's students will participate in courses and communicate with professors through distance learning in programs that build toward associate and bachelor's degrees.^{xiii}

Research suggests that the more education an offender receives, the more their likelihood of recidivating drops.^{xiv, 7} See **Figure 1**

When inmates participate in educational programs, the recidivism rate drops significantly

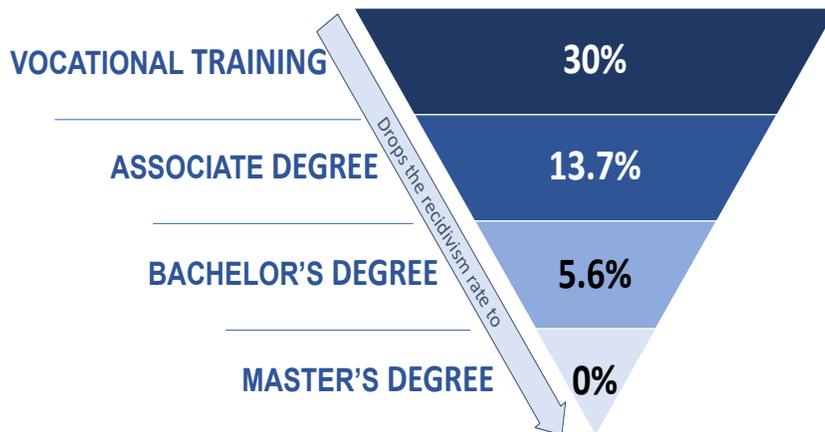


FIGURE 1: EMORY UNIVERSITY (2006)

COST OF DELIVERING CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

Decreasing CTE participation rates are driving up the cost of delivery. In order for Alabama to maximize the benefits associated with correctional education, providers must deliver education at a beneficial marginal cost. ACES calculated the break-even cost of delivery to be \$2,889 per participant per year.⁸ This was derived from a 7-year average (2012-2018) and means that for Alabama to have a positive return on its investment, the monetized benefits would need to exceed \$2,889 per participant.⁹ ACES analysis determined this cost to be consistent with the per participant costs found in some other states. Since 2012, however, that cost has increased 4% to \$2,994 per participant.

For the 2018 academic year, 182 less individuals were served than in 2012. But on the whole, the 1,647 participants served in 2018 represent 7.9% of the ADOC in-house population at the end of the year. In the 2012 academic year, that rate was 7.2%. This

⁷ The analysis and findings that follow are based mostly on the delivery of CTE or how ABE works in conjunction with CTE for those colleges. Findings specific to ABE are noted where applicable.

⁸ Cost was calculated using an estimated marginal cost of delivery based upon annual expenditures provided by the colleges.

⁹ A participant is defined as using an unduplicated headcount for a single academic year.

APAEP

Although Auburn University was not part of this evaluation, it is the only college that currently offers a degree option to offenders in Alabama. Through the Second Chance Pell Initiative, the Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project offers face to face college-level classes to students as they work toward a Bachelor of Science degree. Pell grant awards fund 1/3 of the tuition expenses. The remainder of the tuition is funded through grant sponsorship and philanthropic gifts.

means that CTE programs are serving roughly the same percentage of the overall in-house population despite the declining participation numbers. **See Figures 2 and 3**

FIGURE 2: The **unduplicated headcount** and credit hour production in correctional education is declining since a peak in 2015.

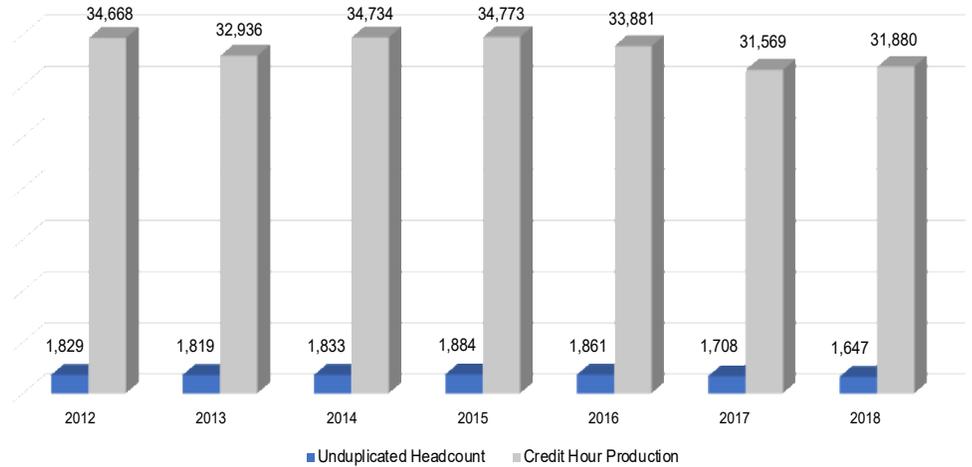


FIGURE 3: Despite declining participation rates, **provider institutions have served a slightly larger portion of the ADOC in-house population** each year.

ADOC End of Year In-House Population	Percentage of ADOC In-House Population Served (Year)	For-Credit CTE Participants Served
25,299	7.2% ('12-'13)	1,829
24,813	7.3% ('13-'14)	1,819
24,191	7.6% ('14-'15)	1,833
23,328	8.1% ('15-'16)	1,884
21,213	8.8% ('16-'17)	1,861
20,087	8.5% ('17-'18)	1,708
20,953	7.9% ('18-'19)	1,647

The overall flat trend of the population served indicates a potential need to increase recruitment and referral efforts for CTE programming. This was a barrier to education noted by all of the colleges during structured interviews.

CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION PERSISTENCE, RETENTION, AND CAPACITY

ACES analyzed other traditional education metrics tracked systemwide like persistence, retention, credit hour production, and completions. Overall, persistence rates¹⁰ and credit hour production paralleled that of the declining participation rates.

¹⁰ The persistence rate is reflected in the percentage of inmates that enroll in classes in both the fall and spring semesters of an academic year.

Alabama's Investment

In Fiscal Year 2021, Alabama appropriated \$13,500,000 for correctional education. When compared to the amounts allocated or spent by 12 other states that responded to requests for information, Alabama ranked 4th with a per inmate average of \$521.*

*Rates were calculated using the most recently provided year of appropriation, allocation, or expenditure with closest corresponding correctional population for the state.

Falling Retention

ACES analysis indicates that persistence rates have declined at a rate of 2.4% a year since 2012. This indicates that retention of students is also contributing to the rising cost of delivery.

While these performance metrics provide insight into the delivery of correctional education, they do not address some of the important outcomes trying to be achieved.

The most recent available evidence suggests that participation in correctional education programs results in monetizable post-release outcomes, namely, reducing recidivism and increasing employability. The monetized value of these benefits varies significantly among states, and the lack of Alabama-specific outcomes creates a large degree of uncertainty on expected benefits.

The monetized benefits of correctional education can range from \$930 for ABE to \$18,801 for CTE. Even among states, the benefits can vary significantly. In Minnesota, ABE was determined to not impact recidivism and therefore the benefits were relatively small at \$930. In contrast, benefits in the state of Washington were estimated to be \$12,680 for ABE because of its impact on recidivism. Disparities like these demonstrate the importance of actively monitoring outcome metrics within the correctional education population in Alabama.

It's important to note that different research and jurisdictions identify varying degrees of success with recidivism and employability. Therefore, ACES cannot reliably estimate Alabama's specific return on investment without Alabama-specific outcome measures.

DISPARITIES AND BARRIERS

Disparities in the delivery of correctional education create unequal opportunities for offenders. Disparities in the delivery of CTE can be found in the depth of coursework, program choice, and credentials. These varying factors, largely driven by where an offender is housed, lack a level of consistency that impacts both colleges and offenders.

DISPARITY IN CREDENTIALS AND PROGRAM CHOICE

A combination of factors has made provider institutions focus efforts on providing short term certificates (STCs) for each semester completed.¹¹ The system is grounded in theories of *self-worth* and *self-efficacy* and also ensures that if an offender is released before completing a program, they have something to show potential employers that demonstrates some foundational knowledge and skill.^{xv} However, with the shifting focus to STCs, only one provider institution currently offers its students a Certificate of Completion in their vocation, which signifies to prospective employers a level of mastery.

Offender housing also impacts which programs are available for participation. Because the majority of recruitment efforts for correctional education occur once an offender is located at a facility, the choice of programs may play a role in overall participation. Currently, an offender housed at Ventress Correctional Facility has only two CTE program options, HVAC and Small Engine Repair. Meanwhile, Fountain Correctional Facility, a facility with a similar bed population, offers seven programs when fully staffed to offenders housed there.

Demand for specific programs across the system indicates that program choice is a factor in participation. There are 20 CTE programs offered to offenders and even more non-credit programs offered at some locations, but not all programs are offered at all

¹¹ A short-term certificate is an award signifying the completion of prescribed coursework between nine to twenty-nine semester credit hours.

Benefit-Cost Analysis

ACES uses an econometric model to conduct benefit-cost analysis of services. The model estimates the benefits Alabama can expect if services have the same impact found in previous evaluations, i.e., reduction in crime or increased wages. For each service analyzed, separate projections of benefits that would accrue to participants, taxpayers, and other societal benefits are calculated. These estimated benefits can be expressed as a break-even cost of delivering a service, or as a benefit-cost ratio when average annual cost of delivery is known.

Benefit-cost analysis can only speak to the cost-effectiveness of the service. It does not analyze other important goals, such as institutional security and staff safety, or higher-level goals such as equity, justice, fairness, and innovation. Nevertheless, benefit-cost analysis is a powerful tool to help make informed choices when employing scarce public resources.

locations (See Figure 4). Interviews with the schools showed that some programs are always at full capacity. For example, welding and barbering are programs that maintain full classes across the facilities that offer them. This indicates that program choice plays a significant factor in correctional education participation, and a lack of choice likely impacts participation as well.

FIGURE 4: Listing of correctional education programs by school and facility where they are offered

College Programs	Calhoun		Coastal		Gadsden		Ingram State				Wallace (Dothan)	
	Limestone	Fountain	Fountain	St. Clair	Bibb	Donaldson	Frank Lee	WR	Staton	Tutwiler	Easterling	Ventress
Air Conditioning & Refrigeration			✓									✓
Auto Body Repair		✓					✓					
Auto Mechanics		✓					✓			✓		
Barbering		✓				✓						
Cabinetmaking		✓					✓				✓	
Carpentry	✓					✓						
Cosmetology										✓		
Diesel												
Mechanics									✓			
Drafting & Design												✓
Electrical Technology	✓			✓					✓			✓
Horticulture	✓											
HVAC						✓			✓			✓
Industrial Systems Technology								✓				
Logistics									✓			
Masonry						✓			✓			✓
Office Administration											✓	
Plumbing		✓							✓			
Small Engine Repair		✓										✓
Upholstery										✓		
Welding	✓	✓		✓					✓			✓

BARRIERS

Better communication and collaboration between ADOC, ACCS, and provider institutions could reduce barriers to the delivery and receipt of correctional education. The barriers that provider institutions and offenders face are not unique to the delivery of correctional education. Some barriers are inherent to the system and population but lack meaningful mitigation efforts. Other barriers are less inherent and might be overcome with more collaboration between ADOC, ACCS, provider institutions. Many barriers like low self-esteem and prison environment cannot be easily overcome. However, others like literacy levels and lack of referrals present opportunities where better communication and collaboration between ADOC, ACCS, and provider institutions may develop into workable solutions.

Table 3: The barriers most frequently raised by the provider institutions during structured interviews

College	Competing with Work Release	Educational Devices / Internet	Inmate Transfers	Recruitment and Referral	Literacy Levels	Security
Calhoun	●	●	●	●	●	
Coastal	●	●	●	●	●	●
Gadsden	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ingram	●	●	●	●		●
Wallace-Dothan	●	●	●	●		●

An example of an inherent barrier is the competition with a work release assignment. The opportunity for an offender to earn money and time outside of an incarceration setting through a work release assignment operates as a perverse incentive to the offender.^{xvi} Because there are few work releases in the state where CTE education is offered, offenders that choose work release when the opportunity is available cannot start or complete valuable education coursework.

Another barrier is the transfer of inmates to other facilities during educational programming. According to ADOC, inmate transfers should not occur unless there is a security or health related issue to the participant. However, every college noted this as a major barrier, indicating that transfers occur for more than those reasons. Another problem with this barrier, is *withdrawal due to transfer* is not uniformly tracked by ADOC or provider institutions. This makes it difficult to determine the degree to which this barrier exists and further limits the ability to develop recommendations for overcoming this barrier.

Overcoming barriers may require systemic changes. Examples from Iowa and Michigan offer perspectives on how those states are attempting to overcome some inherent barriers.¹² Other examples could come from provider institutions or ADOC. One college noted the desire to hold some CTE classes at night to service individuals participating in work release. These represent some solutions to reducing barriers, however, solutions should be implemented when data demonstrates a problem exists.

¹² Some provider institutions are exploring the availability of apprenticeships for their students. One college is currently seeking approval from the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship for HVAC and Diesel Mechanic programs.

Apprenticeships

In recent years, the state of Iowa has developed and expanded its apprenticeship programs to overcome the perverse incentive that work release creates. Through its apprenticeships, Iowa combines paid hands-on employment with traditional education in programs such as carpentry, welding, plumbing, and electrical trades. These paid apprenticeship programs offer offenders the immediate wages they seek while building their knowledge and skills in an employable vocation. This system provides an added benefit of connecting offenders to employers through their correctional education.

Vocational Villages

The state of Michigan has developed a unique setting to overcome traditional barriers. Participants are housed together in the same unit to offer a productive environment where students engage in educational discussions during non-class time, eat together, and attend other programs and leisure time activities.

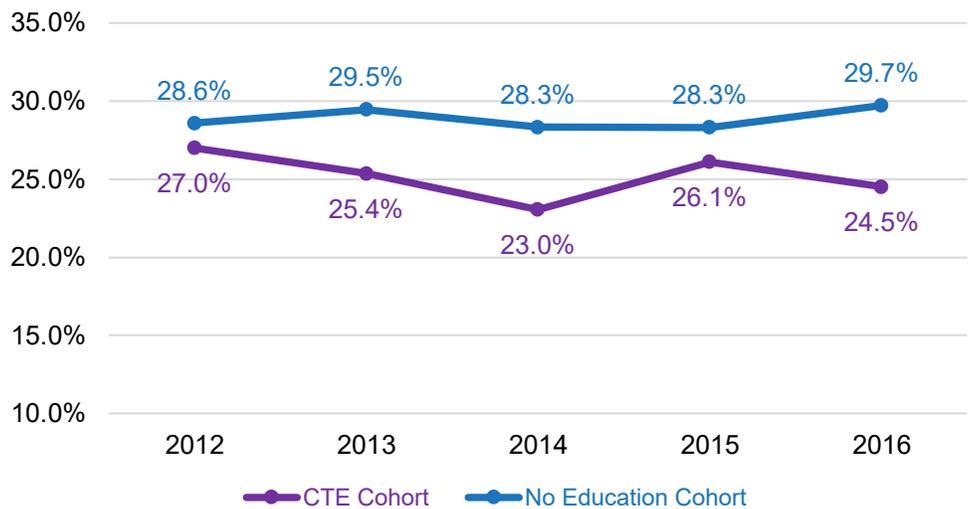
Prisoners have full days of training and classroom instruction intended to mimic a typical workday outside prison walls and receive state and nationally recognized certifications in their trade.

CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION AND RECIDIVISM

Lack of coordination and data-sharing has prevented ACCS and ADOC from routinely monitoring recidivism of offenders who participate in correctional education. Though all agencies and organizations stated that the goals of delivering a quality correctional education are to reduce recidivism, increase public safety, and return a better individual to society, there is no real evidence of agency collaboration on these specific outcomes. Annually, ADOC performs a recidivism study of various cohorts released from their population. The study looks at offenders released from ADOC jurisdiction in a calendar year and determines whether they returned to the ADOC jurisdiction during the three years following release. ADOC has been unable to create education cohorts because data has not been shared between ACCS or the provider institutions and ADOC. Without this important outcome being continuously tracked and monitored, it is difficult to determine what impacts education or institutional decisions have on offenders receiving education.

ACES was able to conduct a simple three-year reincarceration recidivism analysis using data sets provided by ADOC and the provider institutions.¹³ See Figure 5

FIGURE 5: Offenders that **earn at least 1 award in a CTE program while incarcerated** are less likely to return to ADOC jurisdiction within three years of release **than offenders who do not receive any correctional education prior to release.**



The analysis shows reductions in recidivism for offenders that earn an STC in a CTE program prior to release. In total, the 346 offenders in the CTE Cohort accounted for 430 return trips to ADOC jurisdiction during the study period.¹⁴ Although rates demonstrated overall success, there are significant variances when other variables

¹³ Recidivism was calculated if an offender returned to ADOC jurisdiction within three years of their release. This measure was provided by ADOC for all offenders released during the specified years. The 'No Education Cohort' does not include offenders that were sentenced and released from a Community Corrections Program because those offenders were never able to be served by the provider institutions.

¹⁴ A recidivating event was only counted the first time an offender recidivated after a release. All subsequent recidivating events are counted in the number of trips of the cohorts.

such as age, race, gender, program, and time prior to release are factored into the analysis. (See Appendix II) These variances among populations and programs demonstrate the need for continued tracking year-over-year.

CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The impact of correctional education on the post-release employment and wages of offenders in Alabama needs to be evaluated. Even though some research indicates that earning a post-secondary degree while incarcerated directly results in increased total hours worked and increased earned wages for multiple years,^{xvii} other studies have found that educational programs do not increase post-release employment rates.^{xviii} Due to the varying evidence around correctional education, from technical training to degrees conferred, Alabama needs a better understanding of education's impact on this population during incarceration and post-release.

ADOC and provider institutions do not have an effective tool for the timely tracking of post-release employment metrics. The provider institutions report being prohibited from tracking post-release employment through follow-up communication with offenders and indicated a lack of desire from inmates to update employment outcomes after leaving the prison setting. Currently, there are no existing interagency agreements to track post-release employment, leaving Alabama with no state-specific data regarding employment status, hours worked, and wages earned to tie back to the programs received.

Post-release employment has the potential to impact recidivism because it helps focus post-release time and efforts on pro-social activities, which helps reduce engaging in criminal behavior.^{xix} Moreover, the longer returning citizens spend unemployed, the more likely they are to recidivate.^{xx, xxi, xxii}

Understanding correctional education's effectiveness on strengthening Alabama's post-release employability is important because there were 11,449 offenders as of December 2019 with an average age of 40 and a sentence of ten years or less.^{xxiii} The colleges interviewed indicated a desire to increase both pre-release and post-release activities to help students enter the workforce upon release. To better impact Alabama outcomes; ACCS, provider institutions, and ADOC need to collaborate on post-release employment strategies, relationships, and goals. Without developing and tracking the proper outcome metrics on employment and wages, it will be difficult to determine which efforts prove successful.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The proposal for new correctional facilities and the introduction of Personal Education Devices (PEDs) combined with recent and potential legislative changes creates a changing landscape for the delivery of correctional education.

As plans are being made for new programming space and repurposing existing facilities, stakeholders from the provider institutions, ACCS, and ADOC should work together to reduce disparities and barriers and increase collaboration and data sharing. While exact details are still not defined, correctional complexes that combine housing, medical, and programming space within its design have the opportunity to reduce many of the barriers that work against successful delivery and completion of correctional education programming.

Employment Efforts

Though post-release employment has not been effectively tracked for this population by the colleges, three colleges reported increasing employment efforts and one college reported having workforce development in place that includes a full-time workforce development representative, two full-time career placement representatives, a re-entry director and a career coach all assisting with the goal of increasing community support for hiring ex-offenders and increasing hard and soft skills for marketability.

Disparity in Data

ADOC and provider institutions do not routinely or uniformly collect, maintain, and analyze correctional education data. This evaluation presented the difficulties in collecting data for analysis across the system. Difficulties included disparities in the collecting, matching, and reporting of data. The lack of consistent data tracking across the system is problematic when determining when potential issues are isolated events or systemwide disturbances.

By regulating and standardizing the collection and analysis of important correctional education data, Alabama can begin building processes that work to inform and enhance the overall delivery of correctional education.

Personal Education Devices

Alabama has started deploying PEDs that have free educational content for ABE and some vocational training. Through recognizable platforms like Kahn Academy Lite, Lantern, and Tyro, offenders can access content across the ABE spectrum as well as college credits, life skills, and personal finance tools.

The introduction of PEDs provides an opportunity to increase educational attainment and reduce some program expenses. PEDs are handheld tablets that provide incarcerated individuals with resources to build life skills and achieve educational goals, among others. In January of 2021, Alabama began the roll out of PEDs in two major correctional facilities, with all other correctional facilities having access within a few months. The goal of having PEDs is to provide a statewide comprehensive correctional communications system with access to programming aimed at reducing recidivism and increasing correctional facility security and efficiency. Important for Alabama is that PEDs offer ABE coursework and some vocational coursework at no cost.

Additionally, PEDs allow interested correctional education providers to upload their own content which affords incarcerated individuals the ability to experience uninterrupted coursework and the ability to learn outside of dedicated classroom time. Ashland University intends to use this platform to deliver correctional education at no cost to the agency or incarcerated individuals. Even though these devices have some cost-reducing advantages, the current PED provider has quoted at least one college a cost of \$100 per semester per student to upload their content to the devices.

Flat participation rates indicate a need to increase recruitment and retention efforts. Central to the successful delivery of correctional education is the successful recruitment and retention of students. Interviews with multiple states and leading organizations showed two approaches are at the forefront of increasing participation in educational programming: mandated participation and incentivized participation.

MANDATED PARTICIPATION:

A high school diploma or its equivalent is the standard for most entry level jobs and for entering post-secondary education. Therefore, the Federal Bureau of Prisons requires that all federal inmates lacking a verified high school diploma or equivalent to attend an adult literacy program.^{xxiv} Several states also require certain offenders to participate in educational coursework while incarcerated.^{xxv} While requirements vary by state and demographics, common themes do exist:

- ABE is required for offenders without a high school diploma, GED, or basic educational functioning level.
- GED or high school equivalency may not be required, but a minimum number of instructional hours are required that can range from 15 hours per week to 360 hours in total.

INCENTIVIZED EDUCATION:

EARNED-TIME

Another recommendation to increase education enrollment is incentivizing education. A common approach is incentivizing education through earned-time credits. Prison earned-time incentives allow decision makers to determine the programs and activities that inmates can participate in to reduce time from their total sentence. Decision makers can also determine the degree to which inmates can earn time off. As of 2019, 25 states offer some type of incentive to complete educational programming for GED/HS diploma and 20 states offer incentives for participation in and or completion of vocational programming. While Alabama does offer opportunities for good time and earned time credits, it currently does not incentivize participation or completion in correctional education.

Although many states participate in earned-time incentives, there are some significant differences between states on eligibility and the amount of incentive that can be earned. The maximum amount of time earned ranges from a hard cap of 360 days to moving maximums based on sentence length (ex. 5 days per month and 100 days per year). Other states limit who can benefit from incentives based on classifications and criminal history.¹⁵ According to NCSL, “[t]he typical range for a one-time credit is between 30 days and 120 days. In Arkansas, for example, inmates are eligible for one-time credit of 90 days for completion of educational, vocational and substance abuse programs.”^{xxvi}

EDUCATION PAY

A new but far less utilized incentive approach is pay for participation. In these instances, states pay students who participate in educational programming a nominal hourly rate, typically less than \$0.50 per hour of instructional time. Pennsylvania limits this incentive to ABE, but also combines it with a stipend upon successful completion of a high school equivalency credential. Wyoming takes a graduated approach where a student is paid \$0.35 an hour for ABE courses and \$0.45 per hour for post-secondary courses.

Interviews with states show that incentivizing education programs has a positive impact on program enrollment. States also caution that once a mandate or regulation is in place, programs will need to be prepared for potential increases in enrollment and completion.

Alabama should consider how to maximize the use of upcoming available Federal Pell Grant dollars as a way to deliver CTE programming at a lower cost.

The passage of the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 significantly reduced limitations to the use of Federal Pell Grant funding for incarcerated individuals.^{16, xxvii} These changes offer the opportunity to use federally available funds for college and career coursework in prisons. As recently as 2016, Alabama had over 6,000 Pell-eligible offenders that would not be released within the next year.^{xxviii}

Since provisions of the bill will not be in effect until the 2023-24 award year, Alabama should take steps now to maximize the use of those funds when they become available.

The changing landscape provides multiple opportunities to reduce barriers, standardize delivery, incentivize education, reduce costs, and begin tracking performance measures and outcomes. With that being said, the opportunity could be missed if a complete workgroup of correctional education stakeholders is not involved in the shaping of this landscape.

Ashland and Pell Grant

Ashland University’s program costs are generally covered through Federal Pell Grant dollars for those individuals that qualify. Ashland University maintains a dedicated staff to assist incarcerated individuals with successfully gathering information needed to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and admissions procedures. This staff allows Ashland to operate its correctional education program largely through the use of Pell Grant dollars.

The college also offers academic support, and upon release, students are encouraged to continue their education through the university’s online re-entry program. The online re-entry program has a full-time re-entry director to assist students with transitioning back into the community.

¹⁵ Massachusetts does not allow habitual offenders to earn time via programming.

¹⁶ The Federal Pell Grant Program provides grant money to low-income students to promote postsecondary education. Individuals can apply for a Pell grant by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

APPENDIX I: NON-CREDIT COURSEWORK

The evaluation did not look at the delivery of non-credit programs being delivered at Ingram State Technical College. Ingram has established 12 non-credit programs for offenders including opportunities at L.I.F.E. Tech and the Alabama Therapeutic Education Facility. Programs provide offenders opportunities to earn trade-specific skills, including but not limited to, Commercial Driver's License (CDL), obtain OSHA safety certification, or learn skills in software coding.

Since 2012, Ingram has served over 5,000 participants through its non-credit business and industry related programs. The table below shows a list of these programs currently offered by Ingram.

PROGRAM	LOCATIONS
Building & Construction	LIFE Tech
Carpentry	ATEF/LIFE Tech
Commercial Truck Driving	Draper/Main
Electrical	LIFE Tech
Forklift Operation	ATEF
Horticulture	LIFE Tech
HVAC	ATEF
OSHA General Safety	ATEF/Bibb/Draper/LIFE Tech/Main/Tutwiler
Plumbing	ATEF
Small Engine Repair	LIFE Tech
Swift Coding	Draper/Main/Tutwiler
Welding	ATEF /LIFE Tech



APPENDIX II: RECIDIVISM STATISTICS

Variable Category	Recidivism Variable	2012			2013			2014			2015			2016		
		Recidivists	Total Releases	Recidivism Rate												
	Overall	44	163	27.0%	70	276	25.4%	62	269	23.0%	83	318	26.1%	87	355	24.5%
CTE Program	Air Cond/Refrig	3	5	60.0%	2	11	18.2%	3	18	16.7%	4	10	40.0%	6	16	37.5%
	Auto Body Repair	1	11	9.1%	0	13	0.0%	1	13	7.7%	6	21	28.6%	6	20	30.0%
	Auto Mechanics	3	14	21.4%	2	14	14.3%	1	8	12.5%	2	10	20.0%	3	12	25.0%
	Automotive Technology				0	1	0.0%	1	3	33.3%	3	10	30.0%	4	9	44.4%
	Barbering	2	11	18.2%	10	21	47.6%	4	25	16.0%	7	27	25.9%	8	24	33.3%
	Cabinet Making	1	1	100.0%	1	8	12.5%	0	6	0.0%	5	8	62.5%	3	16	18.8%
	Carpentry	4	11	36.4%	5	14	35.7%	1	10	10.0%	2	12	16.7%	1	17	5.9%
	Commercial Food Service	0	1	0.0%	1	5	20.0%				0	2	0.0%			
	Commercial Sewing	0	4	0.0%	0	2	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	1	2	50.0%			
	Cosmetology	2	14	14.3%	2	10	20.0%	2	12	16.7%	6	12	50.0%	2	22	9.1%
	Design Drafting Technology	1	5	20.0%	3	21	14.3%	6	20	30.0%	5	21	23.8%	1	15	6.7%
	Diesel Mechanics							2	5	40.0%	1	4	25.0%	0	9	0.0%
	Electrical Technology	1	15	6.7%	6	19	31.6%	2	12	16.7%	6	23	26.1%	4	17	23.5%
	Furniture Refinishing				1	6	16.7%	1	2	50.0%	4	8	50.0%	3	6	50.0%
	Horticulture	4	9	44.4%	9	21	42.9%	1	11	9.1%	2	14	14.3%	5	11	45.5%
	HVAC	0	1	0.0%	1	7	14.3%	4	11	36.4%	3	8	37.5%	4	15	26.7%
	Interior Design	2	7	28.6%	2	10	20.0%	0	4	0.0%	0	1	0.0%	0	1	0.0%
	Logistics													0	3	0.0%
	Masonry	6	10	60.0%	3	16	18.8%	6	16	37.5%	5	18	27.8%	5	21	23.8%
	Office Administration	0	2	0.0%	1	5	20.0%	3	13	23.1%	3	14	21.4%	1	9	11.1%
Plumbing	4	9	44.4%	2	9	22.2%	4	12	33.3%	1	12	8.3%	0	6	0.0%	
Small Engine Repair	0	6	0.0%	2	8	25.0%	0	8	0.0%	2	17	11.8%	4	19	21.1%	
Upholstery	4	10	40.0%	2	10	20.0%	2	11	18.2%	2	13	15.4%	3	5	60.0%	
Welding	6	17	35.3%	15	45	33.3%	18	48	37.5%	13	51	25.5%	24	82	29.3%	
ACES Crime Category	Assault	2	18	11.1%	6	21	28.6%	4	21	19.0%	7	34	20.6%	7	21	33.3%
	Drugs/Other	18	59	30.5%	24	94	25.5%	16	84	19.0%	32	111	28.8%	35	141	24.8%
	Homicide	2	6	33.3%	3	18	16.7%	2	18	11.1%	5	16	31.3%	8	20	40.0%
	Property	11	28	39.3%	8	60	13.3%	17	62	27.4%	20	70	28.6%	19	74	25.7%
	Robbery	6	34	17.6%	21	57	36.8%	18	62	29.0%	14	57	24.6%	15	63	23.8%
Sex Offense	5	18	27.8%	8	26	30.8%	5	22	22.7%	5	30	16.7%	3	36	8.3%	
Race/Gender	AA Females	1	7	14.3%	5	13	38.5%	4	17	23.5%	4	9	44.4%	4	11	36.4%
	AA Males	21	78	26.9%	34	125	27.2%	27	125	21.6%	37	141	26.2%	49	170	28.8%
	W Females	7	15	46.7%	5	26	19.2%	8	29	27.6%	11	43	25.6%	14	43	32.6%
	W Males	15	63	23.8%	26	112	23.2%	22	97	22.7%	30	124	24.2%	20	131	15.3%
College	Calhoun	5	34	14.7%	10	41	24.4%	17	60	28.3%	18	62	29.0%	10	67	14.9%
	Coastal	4	10	40.0%	4	19	21.1%	4	23	17.4%	9	22	40.9%	4	30	13.3%
	Gadsden	2	7	28.6%	2	10	20.0%	2	7	28.6%	1	6	16.7%	6	10	60.0%
	Ingram	26	94	27.7%	45	173	26.0%	34	151	22.5%	44	188	23.4%	55	206	26.7%
	Wallace-Dothan	7	18	38.9%	9	33	27.3%	5	28	17.9%	11	40	27.5%	12	42	28.6%



AGENCY RESPONSE: ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

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Jimmy H. Baker
CHANCELLOR

March 1, 2021

Alabama Commission on the Evaluation of Services
11 South Union Street, Suite 207
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Commission,

Alabama's community colleges are committed to providing meaningful pathways to a better life for all of our state's citizens. Nowhere is this mission more important than within the state's correctional system. Nationally, studies consistently show that education and skills training significantly reduces the likelihood of an individual returning to prison.

The Alabama Community College System (ACCS), as the state's largest provider of correctional and post-correctional education, is committed to working alongside the Department of Corrections to improve our lines of communication and expand our offerings to help ensure that incarcerated students who leave our classrooms are prepared to be productive, employed members of society.

We welcome and encourage discussion related to mandated and incentivized participation in correctional education and will be ready to assist with any increased need that may come from additional participation in these life-changing programs.

While we have not yet had the opportunity to engage with Alabama's PEDs provider, Securus, we are optimistic that a meeting will occur in the near future. Given the preliminary nature of our engagement with this effort, it is simply too soon to agree on any cost-estimate for this service. The ACCS believes strongly in the use of technology to improve and expand correctional education programs and is open to efforts that improve course delivery and student services.

While the majority of ACCS colleges provide either adult basic education or career and technical education at correctional and post-correctional facilities across the state, Ingram State Technical College is uniquely positioned with its distinct mission of providing job training solely to incarcerated adults. With the expertise of serving this unique community for more than 50 years, the ACCS looks forward to working alongside state leaders to adapt and progress corrections education alongside Alabama's changing prison landscape.

Sincerely,

Jimmy H. Baker
Chancellor



AGENCY RESPONSE: ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



KAY IVEY
GOVERNOR

State of Alabama Department of Corrections

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JEFFERSON S. DUNN
COMMISSIONER

March 1, 2021

Alabama Commission on the Evaluation of Services (ACES)
Attention: Mr. Marcus Morgan, Director
64 North Union Street, Suite 749
Montgomery, AL 36130

Re: Draft Report of the Evaluation of Correctional Education

Dear Mr. Morgan:

Thank you for the work that your team conducted with the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) and the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) in the evaluation of correctional education. Education is indeed the pathway to improved outcomes in not only civilian life, but also for inmates who reside in the ADOC and return to communities across the state. Well-funded and properly designed studies have demonstrated such. As you know, approximately 95% of ADOC inmates will return to civilian life, many sooner rather than later.

Enhanced data capture, establishment of appropriate metrics, analysis, and sharing of the results are certainly areas that will provide our agency and our stakeholders the ability to direct resources and activity for improved outcomes.

Your analysis outlined the need for clear identification of barriers. We certainly understand this - our efforts are aimed at mitigation strategies that will improve results. Specifically, incentivizing education is an important key to connecting our population with the correct educational component. The individual must have a desire to be educated to be successful. The ADOC has worked closely with key stakeholders to develop a proposed bill during the current legislative session to incentivize formal education and evidence-based risk reduction strategies. Further, our classification and assignment of inmate protocol is routinely assessed to create this incentive in the form of lower security level placement, where appropriate, upon successful inmate completions.

Expanding capacity to deliver education is important, as are the many other areas mentioned in this letter of response, all leading to more inmate students taking advantage of educational opportunity. Limitations consistent with aging infrastructure and the previous philosophy that did not include classroom prioritization has led to lacking space for delivery, an issue being addressed in the new prisons as you mention in the evaluation report.

Multi-agency involvement such as connection with the Bureau of Pardons and Paroles and the Alabama Department of Labor (DOL) is a force multiplier for connecting inmates who are leaving our system and re-entering the job market. For example, the ADOC, along with Ingram State Technical College (ISTC) and the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship (AOA) are making steadfast progress in creating formal apprenticeship programs, recognized by the DOL as valuable employment pathways. Innovations such as apprenticeships are clear examples of our desire to identify deficiencies, provide solutions, and make the transition easier for those inmates leaving our system.

Carefully conducted research will be paramount to effectively analyze the recidivism-education correlation, and particularly causal relationships. There is a plethora of complexities that impact an individual's future contacts with the criminal justice system and return to an incarceration setting, such as substance abuse, mental health, cognitive behavioral issues, prosocial values, support systems for housing, vocation, and the like. For these reasons, it is suggested that Figure 5 on page 12 of your report, and its associated narrative, not be used in this analysis. The information provided implies not only correlation, but perhaps causation, with no controls in place for rival factors, of which there are plenty. The table and narrative fall short of research design requirements for such an implication.

In-person education is essential. Technology innovation, including the use of Personal Education Devices (PED), should be a mechanism utilized to augment the diverse and emerging pathway of education. The dollar figure mentioned on page 14 of your report as the cost of college per semester per student has not been discussed with the ADOC. The ADOC has scheduled a presentation by the vendor providing the PEDs to the postsecondary entities, and the associated costs will be discussed thereafter.

Mandated participation efforts suggested in the analysis will need to be synchronized with ongoing litigation, particularly the *Braggs* federal court case, and specifically in relation to Americans with Disability Act related issues.

I suggest being very careful with references to monetization. It is necessary to distinguish between taking advantage of financial opportunities such as funding from the State General Fund/ Education Trust Fund, grant opportunities, and programs such as reauthorization of Pell grants (currently in the form of 2nd Chance Pell funding) versus the sharing of finances from the existing PED contract with Securus, Inc. Adversaries on the national scene utilize such an argument in opposition to this effective tool of educational technology, which is entirely incorrect.

The indication in the Executive Summary that there has been no communication and collaboration between the educating entities and the ADOC is nonfactual. There are numerous examples of just the opposite, including an abundance of direct and communications meetings with the Chancellor's office and ADOC Associate Commissioner of Plans and Programs, involvement in postsecondary Advisory Boards and Foundation Board, 2nd Chance Pell collaborations leading to enormous successful outcomes which include meetings in Washington D.C. with Congressional members of our state on several occasions since its genesis in 2016, close collaboration between ADOC and ACCS for federal grant opportunities, and the like.



Draft Report of the Correctional Education

The Education Incentive Time Legislation that we are advancing for consideration includes coordination efforts among many entities to reduce recidivism, including the ADOC, Bureau of Pardons and Paroles, Department of Mental Health, Administrative Office of the Courts, Office of Prosecution Services, Office of the Attorney General, Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, Association of County Commissioners, Probate Judges Association, Sheriff's Association, Criminal Judges Association, Department of Public Health, Office of the Governor, District Attorneys Association, Drug Abuse Task Force, Crime Victims Compensation Commission, and advisory groups deemed appropriate by the committee.

In conclusion, I am proud of the effort that our ADOC team, ACCS, and other stakeholders have made relative to the advancement of prisoner education within the ADOC. The enhancement and prioritization of inmate education is one of the four overarching agency goals established in the ADOC's Strategic Plan 2019-2022 and is also an area I am personally very passionate about. Thank you again for all of your work on this evaluation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jefferson S. Dunn", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jefferson S. Dunn
Commissioner



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