Partners and Pathways for Empowering Change

Windham School District’s
Review of
Achievement and Opportunity
The Windham School District (WSD) has been dedicated to empowering incarcerated men and women in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to transform their lives through academic and job training since 1969. In School Year 2016, many new initiatives and solutions were implemented to improve programming. Today, the WSD continues to make improvement a priority, resulting in some of the district's most innovative educational, job skills, life skills and workforce engagement programs. The WSD is charged with helping its students throughout Texas develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to successfully reenter local communities and job markets. To meet this goal, the WSD is joined by partners and stakeholders including the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP), the TDCJ and its Reentry and Integration Division, and a growing number of Texas business leaders and employers. In addition, volunteers, employers, families, public schools and community organizations serve as partners in this critical effort to change lives for the better. Partnerships and Pathways for Empowering Change: Windham School District’s Review of Achievement and Opportunity is an update of the most recent WSD program innovations, accomplishments and outreach taking place in coordination with stakeholders.

The WSD’s viable partnerships and educational efforts create second chances for brighter futures; however, effectively serving adult offenders with limited or non-existent academic experience presents real challenges. The typical student entering the WSD never experienced academic success, dropped out of public school in ninth or tenth grade, functions at the sixth grade level, has a history of low self-esteem and difficulty with relationships, and may never have held a job. Offering effective programming to overcome these challenges is an ongoing process.

The WSD recognizes its responsibility to constantly review programs and services for offenders to better prepare them for transition back into society. Continuing examination of all programs emphasizes efficiencies and effectiveness. This allows the WSD to successfully expand effective educational and vocational training programs while fostering strategic alliances with state agencies and private industries. In School Year (SY) 2015, the WSD served more than 60,000 offenders within the TDCJ. This number is expected to grow in SY16 by nearly 5,000 offenders. Program updates and growing partnerships allow the WSD to help greater numbers of offenders join the workforce, rebuild families, and avoid returning to prison.

Advancing the WSD to provide higher quality learning opportunities involves identifying and applying interventions that lead to a high probability of success. The WSD’s organizational priorities leverage research, analytics, and industry insights to help design and implement critical programs. This dynamic approach is business-led, people-driven, and responsive to the input of WSD stakeholders.

Correctional education and job skills training must be effective in helping students change their lives, and dedicated WSD professionals across the state are passionate about making this happen. Partnerships and Pathways for Empowering Change: Windham School District’s Review of Achievement and Opportunity will examine recent developments and accomplishments taking place within the WSD, including a look at research and the partnerships that support student success. Together, these alliances are helping offenders acquire academic, technical, and employable skills -- and also discover how their futures can be defined by something other than their pasts.

WSD Serves More Than 60,000 Offenders During a School Year
A Focus on Performance and Opportunity: Using Data-Driven Program Strategy

To achieve successful student outcomes

Central aspects of WSD’s academic, life skills, vocational, and workforce reentry services are recognizing and utilizing key data to drive programming and achieve desired outcomes for students. This includes collection and analysis of WSD data, as well as current research and job market information. National research, labor market analysis, and current studies provide data to support WSD program effectiveness.

Current national research supports the effectiveness of correctional education on reducing recidivism and increasing employment opportunities. According to a review from the RAND Corporation published in 2013\(^1\), offenders who receive educational and vocational training are less likely to return to prison after release and more likely to find employment than those who do not receive such opportunities. Key findings of this report include:

- **Correctional education improves offenders’ chances of not returning to prison.**
- Offenders who participate in correctional education programs had 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than those who did not. This translates to a reduction in the risk of recidivating of 13 percentage points for those who participate in correctional education programs versus those who do not.
- The odds of obtaining employment post-release among inmates who participated in correctional education were 13 percent higher than the odds for those who did not participate in correctional education.
- Providing correctional education can be cost-effective when it comes to reducing recidivism.

**Texas labor market analysis reflects a high demand for middle-skill jobs.** Middle-skill jobs, which require education beyond high school but not a four-year degree, make up the largest part of the labor market in the United States. All too often, key industries are unable to find enough sufficiently trained workers to fill these jobs. According to a report comparing jobs skills to job openings published by the National Skills Coalition\(^2\), 49 percent of job openings for the time period 2010-2020 will be middle-skill jobs. These positions create solid career opportunities for offenders to join the workforce post release. WSD is targeting training for these jobs by helping students earn nationally-recognized industry certifications.

**The WSD also collaborates with university researchers** to analyze WSD information for each of its programs, including performance-based information and data related to academic, vocational, and life skills programs. This data is analyzed to develop predictive models which are used to enhance program offerings and add programming as needed.

Texas Tech University recently performed analysis of WSD data for the 2016 Biennial Evaluation and Report of WSD Services\(^3\). Key findings include:

- Offenders who participate in WSD academic programs gain about 2 grade levels during their incarceration history for every 630 hours of classroom instruction, which is the equivalent of one WSD school year.
- The primary conclusion about the sample of students who received WSD services is that their academic achievement went up, their job skills increased, and they were better able to find and retain a job.
- WSD programs positively impacted employment and wage-earning levels of studied offenders.

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Learning for Life
Competency-based Literacy

Preparing adult learners for the workforce

Using competency-based instructional programs, partnerships with independent school districts, and designated courses for students age 21 and under, the WSD offers a wide range of academic instruction to help students prepare for job readiness and successful reintegration into society.

The WSD provides competency-based instructional programs designed to progress non-readers to emerging readers, improve literacy and numeracy skills of students functioning below a ninth grade educational achievement level (Adult Basic Education), and prepare students functioning above a ninth grade level for attainment of a high school equivalency (HSE) certification (Adult Secondary Education). By integrating employment-based learning and academic skill acquisition, WSD literacy programs assist students in becoming productive workers, family members, and citizens. Literacy teachers participate in training that targets skills needed to instruct adult students.

The WSD partners with independent school districts to offer eligible students an opportunity to earn a high school diploma. This programming has afforded WSD students additional avenues of success for post-release employment or postsecondary educational opportunities.

The WSD provides courses at designated campuses for students age 21 and under which are designed to enhance literacy, leadership, and employability skills. These programs are funded by the Title I, Part D, Subpart 1 grant. Students in these courses are concurrently enrolled in another academic or CTE course. Teachers who work with these students participate in specialized training to assist them in working with this youthful population.

Educating students who have special needs in a way that addresses their individual differences and promotes their educational success is a priority for the WSD. Individualized and monitored instruction, educational arrangement, adapted equipment and materials, and accessible settings are examples of interventions utilized to assist students with special needs. This helps them achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in school, at work, and in their communities.

English language learners (ELLs) are acquiring English language skills and learning content in English while acquiring academic and vocational skills. The WSD provides support for eligible students in English as a Second Language courses and in general literacy classes with appropriate accommodations.

Academic instruction is presented to students with the goal of preparing them to be successful upon release. All course work is aimed at productive levels of literacy and an eventual high school credential or HSE certificate. Instruction is always administered in meaningful employability and societal reentry contexts and not in isolation. The mission of the WSD is to provide students with the tools they need to succeed.
WSD Life Skills programs are designed to help offenders change criminal thinking patterns and develop the people skills essential for success with employers, family members, and communities where they will reside. Refocusing the offenders’ thinking processes empowers them to behave more responsibly, develop healthy relationships, and retain better paying jobs. While vocational and academic classes provide for work and functional needs of students, life skills classes help to ensure that the needs of the whole person are met. These classes provide prescriptive instruction designed to enhance cognitive skills and promote a healthy environment for positive attitudes and mindsets. The challenges of successful reentry into society and the life-long need for improved thinking habits make these life skills essential for anyone seeking a second chance in life. With this in mind, the WSD is implementing valuable revisions to the programs to keep them updated and relevant.
Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success (CHANGES) is a pre-release life skills program for offenders who are within two years of projected release and helps them re-integrate into society. It includes topics such as developing healthy relationships, living responsibly, drug education, and putting together a new start in life. The CHANGES curriculum was developed internally in 1995, and in 2009, it was modified to become CHANGES II and incorporated a cognitive component.

The Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP) teaches students to examine and change thinking that leads to criminal behavior. The course teaches students to meet their needs without trespassing on the rights of others. The CIP curriculum was created in 1996 with assistance from the National Institute of Corrections. Through cognitive intervention, students learn more appropriate thinking skills using instruction, role play, and exercises in interpersonal problem solving.

Research indicates that life skills and cognitive behavioral interventions promote a reduction in recidivism. Both of these programs are very popular throughout the district and are being offered on the majority of facilities.

To ensure a research-based best practices approach, along with built-in assessments, the WSD entered into a partnership with an independent consultant in the fall of 2014 to evaluate the Life Skills programs. This evaluation included a review of instructional design, exploring program limitations and identifying curriculum overlap.

Recommendations from the independent consultant included:

- **Update and align the curriculum;**
- **Incorporate a theoretically-based curriculum to improve student impact and system outcomes;**
- **Include an assessment component and**
- **Analyze data to guide decision making in the evolution of CIP and CHANGES.**

An examination of these recommendations resulted in the development of an action plan to accomplish WSD program revision objectives. Objectives included designing a theoretically-sound program with appropriate duration and intensity. This also incorporated a robust assessment instrument to assist with the identification, placement, and progress of students in the life skills programs.

The CIP and CHANGES curriculum is currently being re-written in consultation with Dr. Robert Morgan, a nationally-recognized expert and Chair of Psychology at Texas Tech University. Dr. Morgan specializes in forensics and correctional psychology. Implementation of the revised programs will begin in September 2016. This program evaluation and revision reflects WSD’s desire and commitment to employ a contemporary and dynamic approach to Life Skills programming.
Responding to legislative leadership, the Windham School District expanded educational opportunities for offenders this July by offering summer school courses. Classes were focused on giving offenders skills and certificates supporting employability and successful reentry into society. Courses included workplace skills, financial literacy, parenting skills, and personal wellness. Soft skills lessons within these course offerings enhance job readiness and career potential. Classes were voluntary and open to all minimum custody offenders in the general population, and instructors included WSD teachers and other staff, public school teachers and retired educators. Courses were offered at 46 TDCJ units during the three-week initiative, and there were more than 8,100 course enrollments by more than 6,600 offenders.

To develop customized school courses for the correctional environment, the WSD partnered with Acceleron Learning, a Texas-based company specializing in development of digital lectures and planning tools for practical life skills. WSD worked in collaboration with Acceleron Learning to produce “Conduits for Corrections”, an educational series consisting of 30 video modules and related tools focused on the reentry needs of incarcerated individuals. Other summer course offerings were selected from WSD staff proposals and current WSD classes.

My summer school class brought me back to basics on a lot of things I had forgotten and never studied before: employment skills, dress codes, work policies, workplace ethics. I can definitely use this information when I am released. Studying the work environment was most beneficial to me, especially how to speak, dress, and understand body language. I’d advise other offenders to sign up for this class. It’s eye-opening. It covers fundamental information and can be used to help one be more productive in life. I’m hoping Windham summer school will take place every year.

Gilbert A.
Beto Unit
WSD staff-developed courses included:

- Computer Basics
- Introduction to Graphic Design
- Entrepreneurship
- Anger Management
- Coping Skills

Current WSD courses included:

- OSHA – 10-hour safety course
- Parenting – two-week course

Acceleron Learning courses included:

- Workplace Skills
- Financial Literacy
- Career Planning

Workplace Skills Modules included:

- A Lasting First Impression
- Navigating the Workplace
- You & Your Manager
- Conflict Management

Workplace Skills Modules included continued:

- Time Management
- Organizing & Planning
- Critical Thinking
- Problem Solving
- Communication Skills
- Job Transitions

Financial Literacy Modules included:

- Banking 101
- Budgeting Basics
- Smart Shopping
- Lending & Debt
- Saving Your Money
- Insurance Basics
- Affordable Housing
- Affordable Transportation
- Child Support & Care
- Investing in Your Future
Career Planning Modules included:

- Classroom Success
- Exploring Careers
- Education & Training
- Job Search Process
- Resume & Application
- Interview Skills
- Documents You’ll Need
- Rights & Responsibilities
- Looking & Acting Sharp
- The Entrepreneur Option

Offenders who successfully completed a summer course received a certificate of completion which may be used to demonstrate reentry preparations to the Texas BPP. The WSD communicated the summer school course offerings to the Institutional Parole Officers and the Texas BPP for program awareness and understanding of the training provided to students. This will allow parole considerations to include an offender’s voluntary participation in summer school.

The WSD’s Summer School initiative proved to be highly successful in expanding educational opportunity and capacity for men and women incarcerated in TDCJ. Combined student attendance hours for Summer School exceeded 123,000 hours, and almost 33 percent of the offender participants had not been previously served by the WSD during SY 2016. The support and cooperative effort of the TDCJ-Correctional Institutions Division was essential to this successful outreach effort.
The WSD’s Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs create employment pathways that help offenders develop job skills, technical knowledge, academic rigor, and real-world experience for high-demand careers. Many offenders have not experienced successful employment prior to incarceration, but CTE provides practical, relevant, hands-on opportunities for them to change this pattern. CTE students are trained to prepare for high-demand jobs, productive futures and successful reentry into society. The WSD collaborates with certification and licensing agencies, universities, workforce groups, and course-related industry employers to offer courses that meet recognized industry standards. CTE courses are aligned with aggressive employment initiatives and specific training leading to industry-recognized certifications to help students develop viable skills and join the workforce.

CTE course completion has been shown to reduce the chance of reincarceration. While learning vocational skills, offenders can earn industry-recognized certifications that increase chances for employment after release. According to a recent study (Wang et al., 2016), those who had an industry certification had a 22.5 percent lower recidivism rate. With this in mind, WSD ensures that all CTE courses allow an offender the opportunity to earn one or more applicable industry certifications or licensures. Many of these certifications provide offenders the opportunity to qualify for TDCJ jobs in prison operations and prison industry positions. These pre-release opportunities give offenders on-the-job experience and training to strengthen their skill-sets and employability.

CTE programming was expanded during SY15 to allow some offenders with shorter sentence lengths the opportunity to acquire and/or enhance job skills, and this practice has continued throughout SY16. This expansion included course offerings with industry certifications in the Telecommunications Connectivity field. Students have the opportunity to learn and develop skills involving Copper and Fiber Optic Network Cabling, Audio/Video Systems, and Energy Management Systems. As a result, the number of CTE (vocational) course completions and industry certifications has increased.

The WSD’s initiative to teach OSHA and Construction Fundamentals as stand-alone courses has also expanded vocational service capability. This initiative gives offenders with shorter sentence lengths the opportunity to earn industry certifications. In addition, the initiative shortens the number of hours required to complete a full-length CTE course, further expanding the number of students served in construction-related courses.
The WSD continues to expand avenues for growth in CTE programming, including the addition of training with ShopBot®, which prepares students for middle-skill STEM jobs. STEM jobs are those within the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. **WSD is also continuing to expand avenues for growth through revisions of the custodial technician class and inclusion of The Conduits® program by Acceleron Learning.**

- ShopBot® training involves a digital fabrication tool used for precisely cutting, carving, drilling, or machining products from various kinds of materials. Software is used to design parts on a computer, and the computer controls the cutter to precisely customize parts. The addition of the ShopBot® tool to Auto CAD and Cabinetmaking classes allows students to develop an additional skillset, which is readily transferrable to other machine operating formats. The ShopBot® course provides middle-skill STEM training resulting in a Computer Numeric Control (CNC) certification. This training is adaptable to students at all skill levels.
• TDCJ operations and TDCJ industry jobs provide students the opportunity to utilize this training and obtain on-the-job experience, which translates to employability upon release.

• A revised custodial technician class is also planned for implementation to provide students skills required to enter the building maintenance/cleaning industry. This training is particularly important for students with cognitive limitations.

• The Conduits® program by Acceleron Learning will also be incorporated into CTE programming. Conduits® is an interactive, video-based program in which the instructor and student examine various facets of the job search process. It is designed to address the soft skills necessary to attain and keep a job. WSD worked in collaboration with Acceleron Learning to develop, test, and implement the program, which was successfully used in the WSD Summer School in 2016.

Some CTE courses may result in licensure, such as a Texas Commercial Driver’s license. WSD tracks the number of district students who released during the preceding 10 years who have completed a district vocational training program that allows for an opportunity to apply for a certificate or license from a state agency. WSD also tracks the number of certificates on licenses awarded.

WSD Offenders Applied For and Received Licensure: Most Previous 10-Years Release Cohorts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>Earning License</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HVAC</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electrical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Truck Driver</td>
<td>94%</td>
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The WSD and the TDCJ continue to work together to provide job experience and valuable training certifications to offenders who are working within the TDCJ during their incarceration. These training opportunities include the Work Certification Program, On-The-Job training (OJT), and apprenticeship programs.

The TDCJ provides an offender Work Certification Program, offering offenders the opportunity to earn a certificate for demonstrating diligent participation in a full or part-time job assignment. Offenders who proficiently perform essential job functions on a continuous six-month basis receive a certificate.

In partnership with the TDCJ, the WSD coordinates OJT and apprenticeship programs. These two job skills training programs are integral components of WSD vocational training. In addition to job training and experience, offenders have the opportunity to develop positive and constructive work habits to improve employment potential within prison and upon return to their communities.

OJT combines work experience and standardized training in approved occupations for a minimum of six months under the supervision of a TDCJ employee. OJT’s purpose is to provide credible training to offenders in job assignments that meet OJT certification criteria. While the goal of OJT is to teach essential workplace proficiencies, the program also instills aspects of the workplace culture and performance expectations. Many of the OJT occupations also have the potential to transition into an apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships are designed to prepare individuals for occupations in skilled trades and crafts and are registered with the United States Department of Labor. An apprenticeship offers a combination of rigorous and relevant on-the-job learning with classroom instruction on the theoretical and practical aspects of the occupation. Upon satisfactory completion of an apprenticeship program, the participant is awarded a nationally-recognized Apprenticeship Completion Certificate. The apprenticeship training platform provides opportunity for participants to develop a career vocation, professional ethics, and self-confidence based on accomplishment. The WSD is collaborating with the TDCJ to expand the program to cultivate a more robust, nationally-recognized job training opportunity for offenders.

The value of the WSD/TDCJ job skills training and certification structure is best defined by its seamless accessibility to offenders. Participants can access job training opportunities at any level. Marketable skills and job experience can be acquired within each program individually and certainly enhanced if the offender elects to take advantage of more than a single job skills training opportunity. The Work Certificate, OJT, apprenticeship, and CTE programs combine to create the conditions and structures necessary for the WSD and the TDCJ to administer effective job skills training.
Returning to the community from prison is a complex transition for most offenders, as well as for their families and communities. Reentering the workforce is also a daunting challenge for these individuals. Criminal records and time spent away from the labor market due to incarceration are barriers to employment. In response to these critical needs, the WSD is strengthening workforce and reentry efforts to help offenders overcome employment challenges.

The WSD’s workforce and reentry initiatives mitigate the effects of incarceration by seeking and promoting strong community alliances with agencies and organizations dedicated to employment readiness. The WSD is actively building partnerships and career connections with industry to create successful employment opportunities for ex-offenders. These connections are a critical component of the WSD workforce effort.

To this end, the WSD partners with the TDCJ to provide opportunities for offenders to gain valuable information prior to release. Service Provider Expos are hosted by the WSD within TDCJ facilities to bring offenders together with community service providers and volunteer organizations. These events allow organizations to provide current information to assist offenders in successfully transitioning back into their communities.

Career Expos are also being hosted in TDCJ units to bring offenders together with potential employers. The goal of these events is providing current information to help soon-to-be-released offenders successfully transition into viable employment. The WSD and the TDCJ work in unison to provide information and organizational representatives who will communicate current employment trends and opportunities to offenders at these events. Community participation is steady and offender interest remains high as these events are being held year-round throughout the state.

The WSD Workforce and Reentry Initiative In Partnership with Industry

Strengthening community and industry partnerships while providing offenders with effective employment and reentry information

Working closely with the TDCJ Parole Division officers and TDCJ Reentry and Integration staff, WSD staff assists in every way possible to ensure that WSD-trained students are given every opportunity to find gainful and fulfilling employment upon release. The WSD has also formed successful industry partnerships to connect offenders with prospective employment prior to and upon release.

These partnerships include:
- Zachry Group
- The Industrial Company
- Willbros
- Patriot Erectors
- Alterman Electric
- William Brothers
- Yantis Construction
- Quinco Electrical
- Steves and Sons, Inc.
- Hotel Indigo-San Antonio
- Greater Texas Landscape Services
Advancing correctional education requires that we reflect on prior successes, remain attentive to the present, and employ innovative approaches based on research and best practices. These are the keys to helping thousands of incarcerated men and women begin new careers and better lives.

The strategies applied by the WSD have broadened the scope of opportunities for these offenders and underscore our goal to properly align academic education and life skills training with job readiness training. The WSD has worked diligently to maintain its focus on efficiency, quality, and equity while leveraging each opportunity to the advantage of stakeholders. Creating sustainable success, however, is dependent on our ability to anticipate obstacles, adapt to a changing educational environment, and expand and strengthen our partnership efforts.

To maintain a vibrant and prolific correctional education service, we must continually examine our potential and sharpen our focus. Informed goal-setting and long-range planning based on identifiable needs are key processes to developing a blueprint for success. Moving forward, there will be new opportunities to explore, allowing new solutions to emerge. Recognizing those opportunities and preparing strategies to connect potential with desired outcomes necessitates a strong collaborative effort.

The WSD values and appreciates its longstanding relationships with elected officials, the TDCJ, and the Texas BPP. These collaborations are essential as we navigate ongoing changes and innovations in correctional education. The WSD also values its partnerships with volunteers, employers, families, community organizations, and others. These partnerships strengthen the support framework necessary for offenders transitioning from incarceration into communities. We are building a coalition of partners sharing common interests and concerns. This can provide us with forums and resource avenues to positively impact families, communities, the workforce, and the economy.

Research presents compelling evidence that correctional education for adults lowers reincarceration rates and increases post-custody employment, and wage earning. These outcomes are truly substantial. From a societal perspective, we benefit from improved family relationships, safer communities, and a reduction in criminal behavior. From a fiscal perspective, we gain from an increase in contribution to the labor force and economic growth. The advantages of correctional education establish a model of opportunity and help direct our narrative as we move forward.
Thanks to our supportive partners and stakeholders, the Windham School District is positively impacting families, communities, the workforce and the economy.