January, 2021

Abstract

The following report addresses specific questions as required by statute. The research team identified the following summations on selected subgroups.

- Those who participated in the Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP) were 16.2% less likely to recidivate than those individuals with no Windham School District (WSD) programs. Those who participated in CIP were also 22.2% more likely to obtain employment within one year of release and 16% more likely to retain employment for at least one year than those individuals with no WSD programs.
- Those who completed Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs were 25.5% less likely to recidivate than those individuals with no WSD programs. Those who completed CTE were also 16% more likely to obtain employment within one year of release and 16% more likely to retain employment for at least one year than those individuals with no WSD programs. In addition, over 80% of the individuals who completed at least one CTE program and were employed after one year, were employed in a job related to their training.
- Those who completed academic programming were 14.3% more likely to obtain employment within one year of release and 12.5% more likely to retain employment than those individuals with no WSD programs.
- Those who completed Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success (CHANGES) were 9.5% less likely to recidivate than those individuals with no WSD programs. Those who completed CHANGES were also 17.6% more likely to obtain employment within one year of release and 19.2% more likely to retain employment for at least one year than those individuals with no WSD programs.
- Those who completed multiple programs (two or more) were, on average, 19.5% less likely to recidivate than those individuals with no WSD programs. They were also, on average, 18.7% more likely to obtain employment within one year of release than those individuals with no WSD programs.
- WSD students displayed, on average, over two years of academic grade level progress in the areas of reading and math and over three years of academic grade level progress in language for every year of enrollment. *
- WSD students displayed a high rate of success in completion of High School Equivalency (HSE) attainment (formerly known as GED). Of the students eligible to take the HSE exam, WSD students had an 84% success rate. Some of the measured subgroups demonstrated over 90% success rates on the HSE exam.
- In conclusion, students who received WSD services improved in their academic achievement, their job skills and their ability to find and retain a job upon release.

*as measured by the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)

Part A - WSD programming and outcome measures

Introduction

The following report outlines the 2021 findings for Texas Education Code, Chapter 19, Sec. 19.0041, which requires a biennial evaluation and report assessing the effectiveness of Windham School District (WSD) programming. This report used data related to formerly incarcerated individuals who were released from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) in the 2015 and 2016 fiscal years (FY 15 and FY 16), which encompassed releases from 9/1/14 – 8/31/16. Previous program evaluation reports used data from one entity. To enhance the report two reliable entities were used to collect and analyze data. Texas Tech University College of Human Sciences Institute for Measurement Methodology, Analysis, and Policy (TTU), led by Dr. Eugene Wang, Ph. D., conducted an extensive analysis of WSD programming data as it related to releasees in this cohort. In addition to TTU's research, TDCJ Executive Services also provided extensive research and data for this project. As with any ongoing project, methodological improvements are ongoing; such is the case herein. The WSD utilized TDCJ internal source data in addition to TTU external data, to provide a more comprehensive picture of the release cohort for the purposes of this report. In addition to the enhanced data resources, using TDCJ data increased the validity of the data by ensuring WSD data was consistent with all TDCJ official release recidivism data. The consistency offered by the use of TDCJ source data across the two entities is also provided a valid and practical comparison of this specific cohort.

For reasons of uniformity and pragmatics, the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) methodology and definition of recidivism was used. The 2017 LBB's report to the 85th Legislature entitled, *Statewide Criminal and Juvenile Justice Recidivism and Revocation Rates,* stated, "Any individual adjudicated, readjudicated [sic], convicted, or reconvicted for at least a Class B misdemeanor within the three-year follow-up period was considered a recidivist for the adult and juvenile populations. For any adult who had more than one subsequent adjudication or conviction during the three-year follow-up period, only the first adjudication or conviction was counted in the calculation of the adjudication, readjudication [sic], conviction, or reconviction rate… To calculate the percentages for cohorts, the number of individuals with a characteristic are divided by the total number of individuals within the cohort for each fiscal year. To calculate the percentages shown for recidivists, the number of recidivists with a characteristic is divided by the total number of recidivists for each fiscal year." (pp. 44-45). This same time horizon standard is applied to all relevant sections hereafter.

The research methodology for this report employed current, statistically-sound processes available, expertise in behavioral outcomes research, and expertise with Texas adult correctional population data. The research teams utilized the most sophisticated software at their disposal to optimize the data mining process. Moreover, the familiarity with the complexities and nuances of correctional data provided by TDCJ was of significant benefit. Because of this expertise and increased access to data sources, the research team analyzed arrest records, wage data, more relevant and timely employment data, as well as other relevant data.

WSD programming and outcome measures were examined in the following areas:

1. Institutional Disciplinary Violations
2. Subsequent Arrests
3. Subsequent Confinements
4. The Cost of Confinement
5. Educational Achievement
6. High school equivalency examination passage
7. The kind of training services provided
8. The kind of employment the person obtains on release
9. Whether the employment was related to training
10. The difference between the amount of the person's earnings on the date employment is obtained following release and the amount of those earnings on the first anniversary of that date
11. The retention factors associated with the employment

WSD program attendance data were used to identify correlations between WSD programming and outcome measures. Program participation was comprised of those who attended and completed WSD programs.

Methodology:

The study focused on individuals released in FY 2015 and FY 2016. The data mining methodology used by the team factored for previously uncontrollable issues such as timing between arrests, reasons for re-arrest, crime(s) of reconviction, and violent/non-violent crimes to produce valid data that was issue specific. This report utilized TDCJ data for analysis of rearrest and recidivism for purposes of uniformity and expertise. In addition to uniform data between WSD and TDCJ, the expertise provided through familiarity of correctional data offered by TDCJ was well-suited for recidivism and rearrest. TTU data was used for analysis of other portions. TTU data mining extended beyond the scope of release data to track post release performance. This dichotomy resulted in a difference of sample size. TTU data focused on unique individuals; therefore, TTU identified 131,511 individuals. TDCJ data encompassed all releases, as such TDCJ identified 159,418 persons. The difference in the two release statistics is explained best through example. If an individual is released twice during the time period in question, said individual is counted twice in the TDCJ data. Conversely, TTU data recognized this individual once insofar as he/she is a unique individual. All rates were calculated based on the respective data source.

The resulting data was applied to the following subgroups: Career and Technical Education (CTE), HSE certificate (previously referred to as the GED®), and life skills classes (Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success (CHANGES) and Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP)).

As the report addressed post-release employment as the primary focus, the methodology practiced were purposeful and intentional and were shaped for this specific report. Data resulting from the resident's first release was selected to measure the outcomes. First release dates provide a more comprehensive and linear view of the educational experience while the individual was incarcerated. It is often difficult to assess when/how educational exposure is relevant to post-release outcomes. Consequently, a student's exposure to training may have occurred during a previous incarceration outside the parameters of a recidivist, yet the educational experience in question provided the backdrop for the measured outcome. Perhaps the most effective way to illustrate this line of reasoning is through a hypothetical example. A student may have taken a CTE course in Construction Carpentry during a previous incarceration. If said student returned to TDCJ after the 3-year period, he/she is not considered a recidivist, though. After the most current sentence is satisfied, said individual may find a job in the construction field. The applicable training did not occur during the most recent release period, but the training he/she obtained prior to the first release was critical to job placement. This same line of reasoning holds true across all WSD program areas, although none may be so readily apparent as CTE training.

Data mining also dealt with course completion *vs.* course participation. Although many students complete WSD programs, there are also many who never finish a course (these students are often referred to as non-completers). The reasons for these non-completions are numerous, and often out of the student's control. These non-completers display program exposure in varying degrees. For instance, some students may only have a minimal number of hours in a CTE course while other non-completers may have over six months in a course, but were unable to finish. Therefore, it is highly speculative and therefore, unreliable, to assume participation without completion provided insufficient knowledge and/or experience for post-release success. In order to reflect all WSD program enrollees, completion data and participation data were used. These two distinct achievement groups were separated in order to reflect dosage impacts.

This report also specifically addressed post-release employment, which extends beyond recidivism. Recidivism is often viewed as a cost-avoidance issue. Post-release employment, in addition to being arguably the best indicator of successful reentry and reintegration, is a positive economic contribution for the individuals who were formerly incarcerated, as opposed to strictly a cost-avoidance occurrence. This positive economic contribution speaks directly to a shared mission of WSD and TDCJ: successful assimilation upon release. Formulas to determine the re-circulation of a dollar are complicated and often vary in results. Economists' opinions differ as to how much a single dollar earned contributes to a local economy. Some economists have long espoused one dollar earned re-circulates as much as seven times (Wilkin, 1944). More recent studies indicated that a dollar may circulate as few as 1.41 times (May, 2007). There are countless other models and results that attempted to determine the impact a dollar earned has on any given economy. All results indicated however, that one dollar earned typically generates more than one dollar toward positive economic contribution. Therefore, successful post-release employment not only positively impacts recidivism, but the positive economic contributions of the released individual are undeniable. In essence, this report approached post release employment not only as a cost avoidance issue, but also a positive economic contribution perspective. This report attempted to capture the success and positive contribution of WSD participants as they assimilate after their release from the TDCJ.

As with any analysis, there are certain limitations and assumptions that merit consideration. The same was true for this report. Arguably, the most significant assumption involved the level of educational achievement. Educational achievement has been shown to influence behaviors and outcomes of residents in numerous studies. Most notably the RAND Corporation, arguably the premiere public policy research and analysis institute in the nation, addressed the value of educational achievement for incarcerated individuals in its 2013 Annual Report:

> Researchers found that participating in correctional education programs reduced the rate of reincarceration by 13 percentage points and may improve inmates' odds of obtaining employment after release. They also found that correctional education is cost-effective— every dollar invested in these programs, on average, saves taxpayers as much as $5 in incarceration costs (p. 29).

These findings further emphasized the need for delivery of educational services to individuals who would receive optimal benefit. Resultantly, those residents who have not achieved a HSE inherently present as higher risk students (NOTE: the term "risk" in this report, unless otherwise noted, refers to educational risk, not security risk. In general, an at-risk student for WSD follows the guidelines as outlined by the Texas Education Agency to the extent possible). In simple terms, higher risk students are the ones who need the educational services provided by WSD the most. This fundamental thought gives an overarching perspective to all question responses insofar as residents who have not participated in any WSD programs, in general, have not displayed the need for services.

Another significant assumption dealt with a "control" group. Typically, the target population (in this case, WSD students) is compared to a similar group who did not experience the variable (in this case, WSD programming). Since the WSD student is identified as a high-risk student based on his/her demographics, there is not a readily available compatible comparison group. To account for this comparison difficulty, the research team employed a method known as Propensity Score Matching (PSM). This technique, established as methodologically sound and valid, served the ensuing analysis well. Essentially, PSM established several baseline characteristics (age at first arrest, race, and days served for current offense to name but a few). Each formerly incarcerated individual who was identified in this cohort as a WSD student who had completed a program was assigned a "score." These former students were then "matched" based on the baseline characteristics with a non-WSD student sharing the same baseline characteristics - a process known as the “nearest neighbor technique” (Coca-Perralon, 2006). This established the pseudo-control group for this report, with a one-to-one pairing. Terminology in this report often referenced to “matched” and “non-matched.” This nomenclature simply referred to the two populations resultant of the PSM process, thereby establishing the control group element against which the target population was measured. PSM was employed for many data elements, but the PSM findings may not be presented on all questions where sample size would have a direct impact on the statistical significance. For example, PSM matching was used primarily for post-release employment analysis in this report. PSM allowed for case-specific and relevant data, thereby post-release employment data had a high degree of confidence through this methodology. As the number of individuals who participated in WSD programming was significant, the number of individuals who could be “matched” in the PSM may seem disproportionately small, which leads to one of the inherent limitations of PSM. As readily seen from the previous explanation, one of the limitations of PSM was the inherent exclusion of those individuals who could not be “matched.” Specific to this report, this inherently excluded a statistically-significant population utilizing the PSM model, simply because the individuals determined to be in need of WSD programming are at a risk level so significant that a match is not available. In efforts to provide a more comprehensive view of the cohort, TDCJ source data was used, thus providing more clarity as well as a higher degree of transparency. For purposes of uniformity and transparency, rearrest and reincarceration analysis were conducted through the use of TDCJ source data, which encompassed the entire cohort. The volume, as well as the presence of a homogenous comparison group, allowed for more reliable data in this instance. The term “rate” was used throughout the report and was determined as the percentage difference between the groups being compared.

In addition to PSM, the research team employed many other sophisticated data mining practices including random sampling, decision trees, classification trees, and whole group comparisons. Arguably the most noted additional practice employed in this report was odds/ratio methodology. Odds/ratios were used to predict the job retention probabilities for the cohort. Odds/ratio identifies the association between an outcome (in this case job retention) and exposure (in this case, the various conditions of the cohort (i.g. resident type, education, gender, etc.)). The association is expressed as a likelihood of an outcome rather than a recording of an outcome. In other words, odds/ratio is used as a “predictor of” rather than a “recorder of” phenomenon. This methodology goes beyond recording an outcome, it established a predictability factor to the relationship between WSD programming experiences and the likelihood of post-release success. These aforementioned techniques may be further explained in the applicable sections in order to provide context to the results.

Another significant assumption dealt with the respective sample sizes. Because of the enhanced data access, these sample sizes were robust. The volume of the sample sizes provided more data, making the trends more reliable and the predictors more accurate. In specific reference to WSD, these large sample sizes gave a more relevant and accurate picture of the effects of its programs involving released persons from a 2-year cohort, thereby providing a type of multi-dimensional and linear picture.

In addition to the aforementioned assumptions, since a significant percentage of the cohort had at least one WSD course completion during the current incarceration, comparisons between the various subgroups of program participation may/may not have reflected homogenous characteristics. Attempts to isolate impacts against a disproportionate non-WSD group may have displayed trends but may not have displayed definitive conclusions. This assumption further substantiates the need for sophisticated data collection methods such as PSM and odds/ratio methodology.

Although there may be other assumptions and limitations, these few conditions gave a brief, yet necessary, foundational understanding to provide better context to the findings hereafter. The selection rationales, coupled with the sophisticated research methodology, clearly indicate WSD and the research teams have attempted to glean the most relevant and substantive results possible. In doing so, it was the belief that the outcomes herein provided the most accurate and comprehensive picture of WSD programs as they relate to formerly incarcerated individuals.

Programmatic Information

WSD programs may be grouped into three primary areas: 1. Academic (includes all Literacy classes), 2. CTE (includes full-length and short/specialized courses), and 3. Life Skills (only includes CIP and CHANGES). These three program areas will be discussed in greater detail in various report sections; however, the framework for WSD programs is important in that the data often differs from program area to program area.

Academic:

WSD academic programs are required by both policy and statute for eligible residents who have not attained a high school diploma or HSE. As such, these residents are not placed in academic programs by choice. Mandated attendance, in this instance, often carries a certain degree of attitudinal inherency; consequently, every resident may not necessarily want to attend school.

WSD academic programs are conducted in an open enrollment manner. The number of students in academic programs differs daily because new students may be enrolled every day. These factors, discretely and collectively, may contribute to the disparity in data.

WSD also provides supplemental academic programs at designated campuses for students under age 22. The Lead & Achieve Academy is designed to enhance literacy, leadership, and employability skills. Students in these courses may be concurrently enrolled in another academic or CTE course. These programs are funded by the Title I, Part D, Subpart 1 grant, known as Title 1.

As the academic level of each program is varied widely, there are commensurate achievement criteria for each. For example, a student enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) who is just learning the basics of the English language, is not held to the same completion standard as a high-achieving student on the cusp of a diploma or HSE.

Life Skills:

WSD's life skills programs, Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success (CHANGES) and Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP) serve unique resident concerns through an affective, or thought process, approach. As such, there are certain assumptions associated with this type of program that stem from the address of the thought patterns of the resident(s).

The CHANGES program targets residents whose anticipated release date is within two years. Participation in the CHANGES program satisfies a mandatory condition of parole release known as FI-3R. This program requires that eligible individuals within two years of release be enrolled in the course, which typically spans three months. The enrollment pattern generally allows for three to four cycles in a school year. The enrollment pattern for CHANGES is an open enrollment; therefore, the population of each class is fluid. As a pre-release program, the CHANGES program addresses various areas that may present unique challenges for the individual as he/she prepares for life outside of prison. For many residents, this program provides insight into a world not seen for many years. The program makes no distinction in academic ability level, so there may be students on the 1st grade reading level in the same class as students who have college degrees. This wide disparity of student ability levels offers opportunities for a variety of proven differentiated instructional techniques. Some of the effective techniques employed by the classroom teachers in the CHANGES program include peer tutoring, small group tutoring, and individual tutoring.

The CIP directly addresses criminal thinking patterns and seeks to "re-channel" the thought process behind criminal behavior. This course generally spans three to four months. Much like CHANGES, there is little, if any, distinction in ability level. In fact, the course functions best with a wide diversity of abilities, ethnicities, and other social identifiers. CIP is an intense course wherein students are encouraged to think through behaviors and the consequences of those behaviors. By doing so, the student is facilitated to realize the outcomes of his/her behaviors. The students take a pre-test and post-test, known as the Criminal Sentiment Scale, to evaluate the changes in individual thought processes from the outset of the course to the end of the course. This course also serves as a required component of the Gang Renouncement and Disassociation (GRAD) program and taught in that instance in the GRAD environment.

Career and Technical Education:

WSD offers over 40 Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses, at multiple TDCJ facilities. Not every course is offered at every facility due to various space, demand, and expense limitations. The course offerings are intended to fit the profile of the host facility (i.e. shorter courses at facilities that house individuals with shorter sentences). There are certain realistic and pragmatic issues that may preclude some residents from participation. For example, residents with a history of DWI convictions cannot take a truck driving class. WSD and TDCJ personnel work closely together to determine appropriate CTE placement for residents. The intent of this rigorous screening placement goes to the core of TDCJ's and WSD's mission: public safety.

All CTE courses are competency based and focus on relevant job skills. Students who complete these courses are often placed in related TDCJ jobs on facilities throughout Texas. The CTE courses are open enrollment, meaning the enrollment pattern allows students to enter at random points in the course. CTE students who do not have a high school diploma or an HSE must be concurrently enrolled toward such as the schedule and class availability allow. CTE courses encompass formal classroom knowledge; as such, these courses typically require a requisite educational attainment level. This recommended educational attainment level is not necessarily absolute and differs with the occupational area.

Full length CTE courses for this cohort typically met six hours a day for six months. Since not every trade is offered on every facility, CTE students often temporarily transfer facilties to take various courses. This transfer process is coordinated through WSD and TDCJ. As such, students must be transferred to custody-based compatible facilities. Residents housed at state jail and Substance Abuse Felony Punishment (SAFP) facilities do not typically transfer for CTE purposes since the sentence length on these types of facilities is much shorter. The number of short courses is currently fluid, as WSD expands this arena on a continual basis based on job market analysis and trends.

CTE courses also afford students the opportunity to attain industry recognized certification regardless of course type. For example, the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) is widely-recognized in construction related areas to be the common competency standard. WSD offers multi-level industry certification through NCCER in numerous CTE courses. To illustrate this process, potential employers will know with confidence that formerly incarcerated individuals have ably demonstrated the skills necessary to perform the related tasks in the same manner as a potential employee who was not incarcerated. There are multiple additional entities (e.g., Automotive Service Excellence [ASE], *ServSafe*) through which industry certification is offered - each intended to provide WSD CTE students enhanced opportunities for post-release employment.

Question Responses

1. Institutional Disciplinary Violations

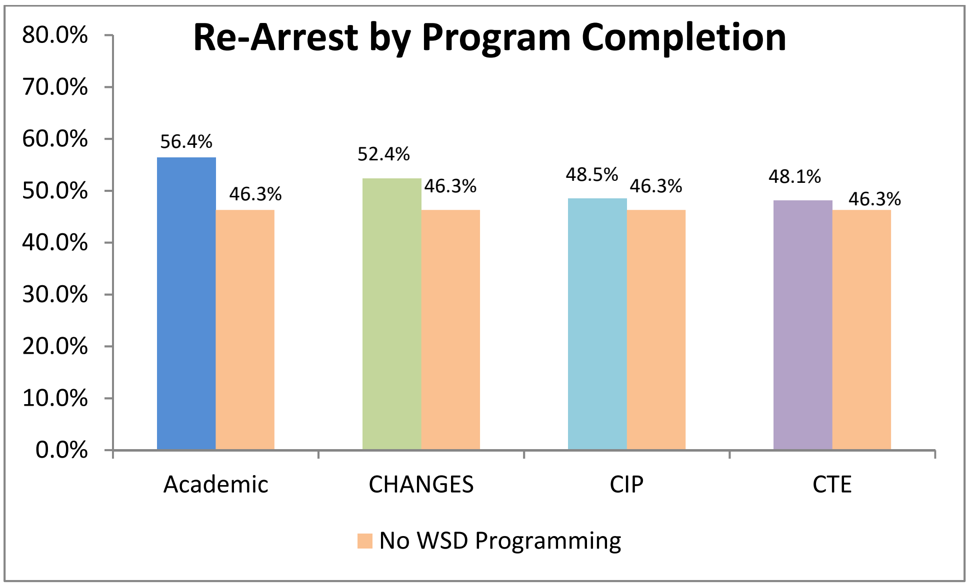
Although institutional disciplinary violations are not directly related to re-entry experiences, the resident disciplinary profile is relevant to the mission of WSD. Disciplinary violations within TDCJ are divided into two primary categories: major disciplinary violations and minor disciplinary violations. By definition, major discipline violations are regarded as more serious. As a result, this type of violation often carries a privilege sanction, such as a loss of days previously earned as credit toward sentence length (commonly referred to as "good time"), and/or a reduction in time-earning status, and/or a demotion of classification status. The disciplinary data collection was based on an annual cumulative history. As behavior often evolves and program length differs, the annualizing of the data was the most appropriate collection method. Moreover, annualizing the data provided a much more consistent reflection. In short, every person in the cohort was reviewed using the same time horizons, thereby making the group much more homogenous and the measurements more valid. Arguably the most notable assumption with regard to the disciplinary violations was that all disciplinary violations throughout the resident's history were included in the data collection. Secondly, there was an underlying assumption that certain disciplinary violations apply exclusively to school; therefore, residents not enrolled in school were not subject to these specific disciplinary violations. The institutional disciplinary results reflected the median and the mean for residents throughout his/her cumulative incarceration. By calculating the median, the skewed results (commonly known as outliers) were mitigated. The information regarding institutional discipline produced data regarding major disciplinary incidents, minor disciplinary incidents, and time lost (reported as days lost).

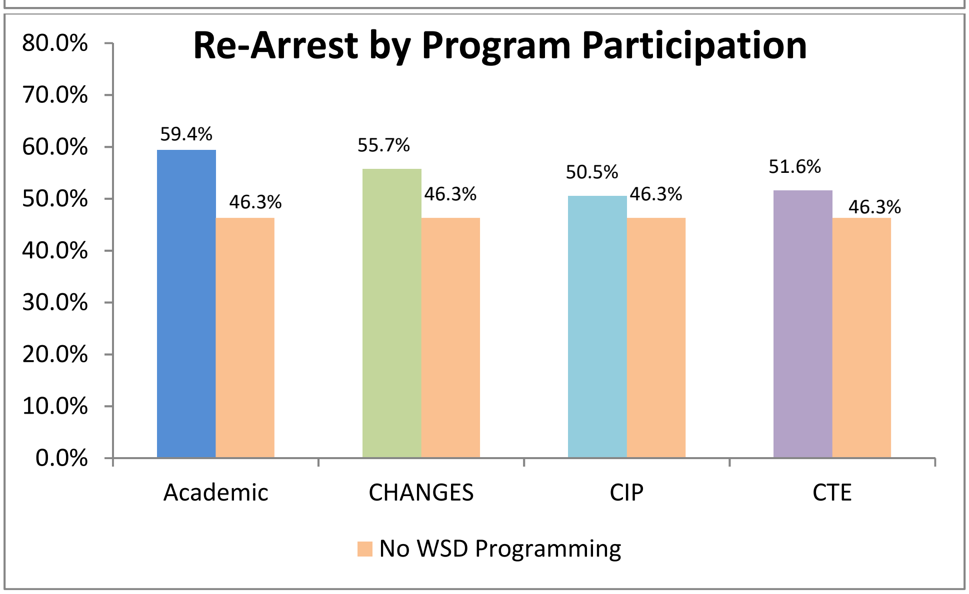
The TTU research team found no relationship between institutional disciplinary incidents, either major or minor, and WSD participation. The team deduced the low frequency of incidents was the probable reason for the relationship absence. The annualized median for minor disciplinary incidents reflected 0.8 incidents throughout the incarceration period(s), thus illustrating the low frequency. Major disciplinary annualized median incidents reflected 0.0 incidents throughout the incarceration period(s), making the major disciplinary incidents throughout a resident's incarceration(s) statistically insignificant. The standard error of measurement for both types of disciplinary infractions reflected a high degree of reliability, thus validating the results.

2. Subsequent Arrests

Statistical Analysis:

The entire cohort (unmatched) of 159,418 presented a robust population. The cohort reflected that 50.3% were rearrested within the 3-year period. When examining specific program data respective to rearrest, it is noteworthy that participation and/or completion in CHANGES, CIP, and CTE revealed a much lower rearrest rate than that of general academic programs. The relationship between re-arrest and reincarceration may be further explored in subsequent question(s). Further detail of the various subgroups identified some distinct points of comparison regarding re-arrest rates as depicted in the following graphs.





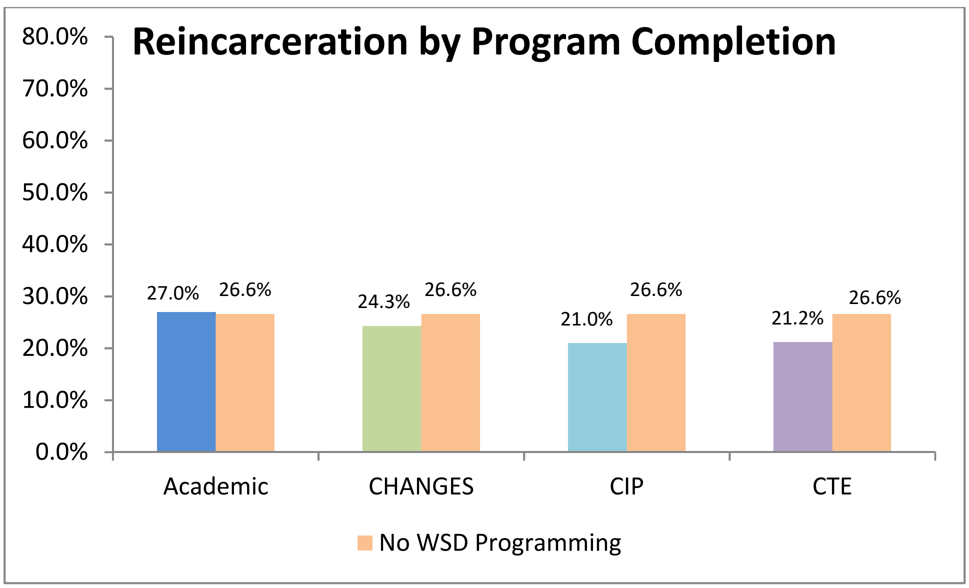
Re-arrest Summary:

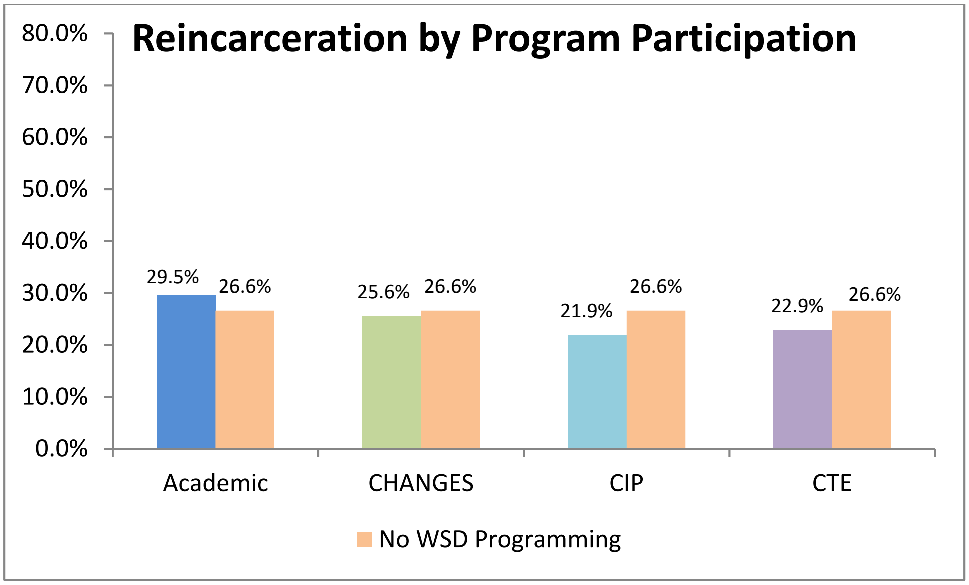
Data revealed that completion of a WSD course is of significant merit. Not surprisingly, data reflected a positive outcome related to the course completion relative to course participation without a completion. The life skills programs (CIP and CHANGES) intend to re-shape thought patterns of an individual who is incarcerated. These programs reflect a more positive relationship to rearrest than academic programs, suggesting the life skills programs experienced a degree of measured success in this regard. In addition, CTE programs strive to equip releasees with marketable job skills. Those individuals who completed and/or participated in CTE programs reflected a positive relationship to rearrest when compared to academic programs. It is important to note that academic programs may/may not reflect an immediate positive impact regarding re-arrest when viewed in isolation. The academic program, however, serves as a foundation for the other programs by providing students with the necessary tools to receive the optimal benefits of additional WSD programs.

3. Subsequent Confinements (Re-Incarceration)

Statistical Analysis:

When viewing the entire cohort, individuals who completed and/or participated in WSD programs displayed a lower recidivism rate than individuals who did not receive WSD services in all areas except academic. It is important to note, as mentioned earlier, that academic programs may not reflect an immediate positive impact when viewed in isolation. The following graph illustrates that those individuals who completed WSD programs trended toward a positive relationship regarding re-incarceration. Releasees who completed a CTE or CIP course were re-incarcerated at a significantly lower rate than the other program areas. Data reflected that those who completed WSD programming were reincarcerated at a lower rate than those who did not complete a program.





The relationship between rearrest and reincarceration presents an opportunity for further comparison. The continuous thread was that recidivism outcomes appear to be categorically better for WSD completers and/or participants than rearrest outcomes. There are further suggestive impacts of this data when viewing recidivism as an outcome in comparison to rearrest as an outcome.

Re-incarceration Summary:

Releasees who participated and/or completed WSD programs displayed clear indicators as to the positive impacts of the respective program. Moreover, those who completed the respective program showed clear indicators as to the positive significance of program completion. The data revealed a positive relationship between specific skills acquisition and attempts to re-shape the thought processes of the student through CTE and CIP classes, respectively.

Arguably, the most notable factor for consideration in these areas goes back to the profile of a typical WSD student. Those individuals who received WSD program services while incarcerated represented a very high-risk group.

4. Cost of Confinement

The LBB currently calculates the cost of confinement for correctional institutions. The WSD's cost per day, \$9.97 for FY2016 (the cohort on which this report was based), was reported by the LBB in the Uniform Cost Report to the 85th Texas Legislature.

5. Educational Achievement

The differences between a typical public-school student and the typical WSD student extend beyond the obvious age and setting differences. WSD structures its classes into three basic Literacy levels, which roughly correlate to public school grade levels: Literacy 1 (roughly correlates to public school grade levels 1-5 (grade school)), Literacy 2 (roughly correlates to public school grade levels 6-8 (middle school/junior high)); Literacy 3 (roughly correlates to public school grade levels 9-12 (high school)). The academic level is reported on grade level and month of the grade level. A student who reflects a score of 8.6 in reading has demonstrated commensurate skills of a typical student in his/her 6th month of the eighth-grade year. The Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is administered on one of four different levels; each measures ability appropriate skills. The TABE is widely accepted in adult education settings throughout the nation and has been established as a valid test. Therefore, the TABE yields academic results with a high degree of confidence.

The research team analyzed numerous TABE results of the cohort. Each student must had taken at least two valid tests in order to measure progress from one test episode to another. These results were broken down to measure initial reading, math, language, and composite scores in yearly/monthly increments (0.0-0.9, 1.0-1.9, etc.). This methodology allowed visibility of multiple factors that somewhat individualized scores. The team's results were reported as median scores to mitigate outliers.

Due to the broad ability level, making a single and all-encompassing statement about academic progress is difficult. For example, a non-reader who learns to read may progress multiple grade levels quickly while a student who has a very high TABE score may be deficient in only one area of math and show little progress. Moreover, there is a compression factor to consider. For instance, a student who displays very high academic skills has minimal room for improvement, while a student who displays low academic skills has room for improvement. The patterns and trends that emerged however, are consistent across all ability levels. Language scores showed the highest level of improvement. The median grade level improvement for the cohort in language was 3.0 years. In simple terms, that score represents the number of grade levels a student advanced during the year. In this case, the student reflects three years of academic growth during a single school year. Math and reading also reflected multiple grade level improvements (2.4 and 2.3 grade levels, respectively). Composite scores, which measure the overall progress in all three areas, reflected a 2.4 grade level improvement. The tight clustering of the subject areas in relation to grade level improvement strongly suggest a quality, balanced academic delivery system is used by the WSD.

6. High School Equivalency Examination Passage

WSD requires students to display a proficiency level in all areas of the TABE for eligibility for HSE testing. The content on the HSE test is commensurate with the required proficiency display. Given that many students do not attain the requisite proficiency level, there are many students who do not attain an HSE before release due to length of sentence. Consequently, determination of optimal paths to the HSE is critical to student success. These predictors were one of the focal points of TTU's research.

Decision trees were able to path the data along race/ethnicity characteristics, age ranges, programmatic options, student type profiles, and facility type. This level of detail provided distinct patterns regarding HSE pass rates. Data encompassed over 24,000 students measured against the outcome of an HSE. Overall, 20,633 students (approximately 84%) in the cohort attained an HSE while incarcerated.

Several factors impacted HSE passage. The team noted that irrespective of these multiple phenomena, HSE pass rates primarily increased for students who had a TABE composite score of at least 7.8 and had experienced at least 11 years of education. For example, students who met these two conditions displayed HSE passage rates of 95%-99% (rate differs based on demographic profile(s) of students). These correlations hold true across race and classification type and are more pronounced for younger students. That overarching profile serves as a backdrop, of sorts, for further analysis.

Students who were housed on Institutional Division, Transfer, and SAFP facilities tended to perform at a higher HSE passage rate than their state jail counterparts under the same hours-of-instruction paradigm. In general, students younger than 26 years of age tended to attain HSE passage at a higher rate than students over 36 years of age. Additionally, students who received at least 40 hours of WSD instruction realized greater success on the HSE than students who had fewer than 40 hours. The team also was able to determine a positive relationship when academic programming was coupled with additional programming, regardless of the additional program type, regarding the HSE pass rate.

7. The Kind of Training Services Provided

CTE training programs are designed to offer basic occupational skills in a multitude of areas, often known as career pathways or clusters. WSD currently offers training in over 40 CTE programs. Many students complete CTE programming in more than one course.

The number of courses offered has changed throughout the years, as well as the nature of the CTE training programs. The comprehensive data mining methodology produced a wide range of CTE programs that were offered throughout the years, as the cohort showed participation and/or completion in CTE training in courses other than those currently offered. The average number of participation hours differed greatly from course to course. There was a significantly large standard deviation in all courses, indicating that the participation hours of each and every course were widely dispersed. This large standard deviation makes it difficult to make single assumptions about the CTE training experience in and of itself. Subsequent question responses discuss these courses as they relate to post-release outcomes. Even though the history of these courses is voluminous and diverse, the courses can be generally categorized in training pathways or "clusters."

WSD historical CTE courses include these career pathways or clusters:

- Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources
- Architecture & Construction
- Arts, A/V Technology & Communications
- Business Management & Administration
- Health Sciences
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Human Services
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
- Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

Many CTE programs also offer additional certification known as third-party industry certification. This industry certification requires knowledge and skills consistent with the workforce outside of prison. By offering this industry certification, the individual is better able to compete for jobs post-release. Industry certification is discussed in greater detail and context in subsequent sections of this report.

8. The Kind of Employment the Person Obtains on Release

The research team identified 20 types of employment obtained by formerly incarcerated individuals upon their release. The data was based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes. Data was available for 90,253 released individuals. The employment categories and the associated percentage of all individuals employed in these categories follows:

Job Description	**Number of Releasees**	**Percentage (%)**
Accommodation and Food Service	19,411	21.04%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	27,223	29.51%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	933	1.01%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	791	0.86%
Construction	10,403	11.28%
Educational Services	88	0.10%
Finance and Insurance	362	0.39%
Health Care and Social Assistance	2,489	2.70%
Information	373	0.40%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	196	0.21%
Manufacturing	9,370	10.16%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	1,486	1.61%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	3,875	4.20%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,753	1.90%
Public Administration	194	0.21%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	753	0.82%
Retail Trade	6,635	7.19%
Transportation and Warehousing	2,739	2.97%
Utilities	57	0.06%
Wholesale Trade	3,122	3.38%
Total	**92,253**	**100%**

9. Whether the Employment was Related to Training

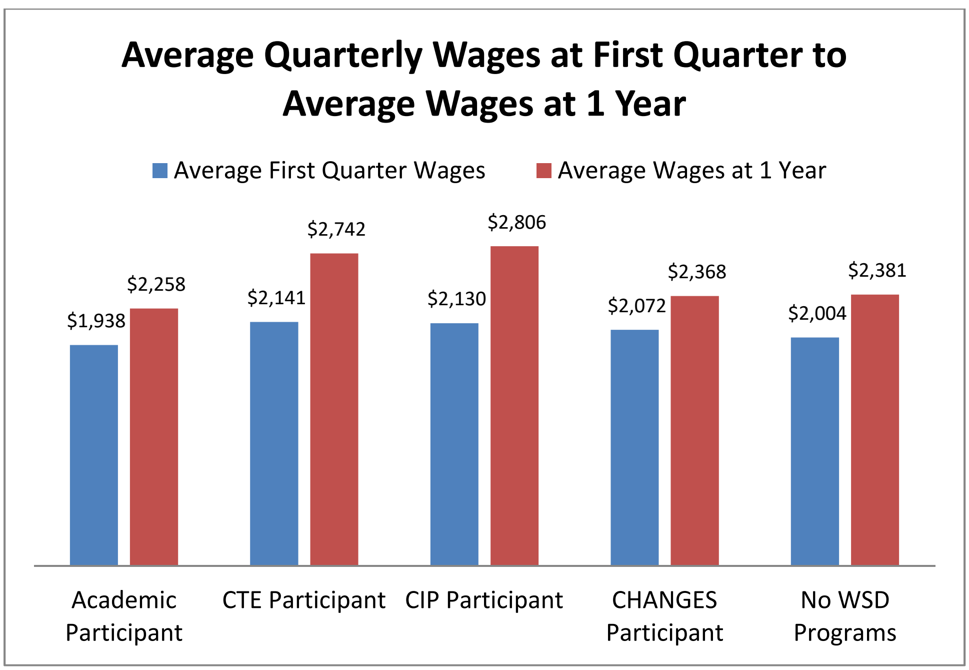
To extend the post-release employment discussion, the next area looks at whether the released individual obtained employment related to his/her training experience while incarcerated. By doing so, the relevance and effectiveness of correctional training programs (i.g. WSD CTE training programs) can be better evaluated. This type of data was valuable not only to measure past post-release outcomes, but also to serve as valuable predictive data, thereby impacting future programming options.

The TTU research team examined former WSD CTE students* who were employed within a year of his/her release. These individuals were then crossed-matched with data from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The two data sources (WSD and TWC) were then paired using NAICS codes of WSD CTE courses and NAICS codes of employers. The NAICS codes are used, essentially, as the common denominator between WSD CTE courses and post-release employers. These codes provided high reliability using a common evaluation factor. In total, 8,927 individuals were identified as fitting the CTE participation criteria and employment criteria. Of those 8,927 individuals, it was determined that 7,192 (80.56%) were employed in a position related to his/her CTE training as provided by the WSD. In simpler terms, approximately eight out of every 10 individuals who completed at least 60 hours of CTE training through the WSD obtained employment upon release that was related to his/her training.

*participation is based on a minimum of 60 hours of instruction in a WSD CTE course.

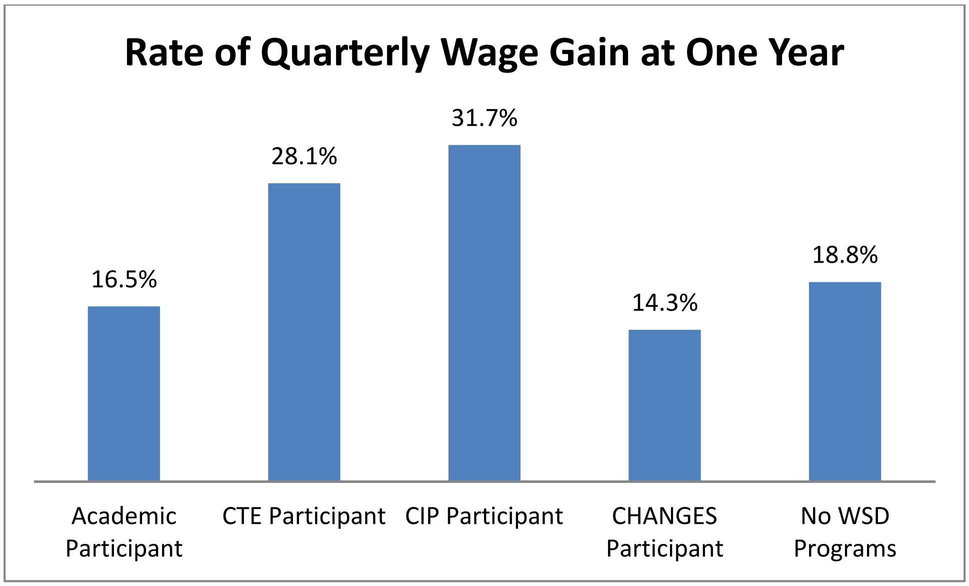
10. <u>The difference between the amount of the person's earnings on the date employment is obtained following release and the amount of those earnings on the first anniversary of that date</u>

Obtaining employment upon release presents unique challenges for an individual who was formerly incarcerated. Moreover, sustaining employment is equally challenging, if not more so, than obtaining initial employment. Numerous studies have found positive correlations between sustained employment and lowered reincarnation. Analyzing wage data, employment information, and time horizons is integral to program evaluation as well as forecasting future WSD programming. The research team used the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) employment data as the source for verifiable wage information. While every effort was made to collect all relevant data available, two considerations must be recognized in the data collection process. First, employers have different reporting requirements based on the number of employees. Although the statistical impact of these different requirements was believed to be minimal, there was a likelihood that the facts and figures herein may vary. Secondly, an assumption can be made that not all wages earned by an employee are reported to TWC. The TTU research team viewed those meeting the one-year time horizon independently by WSD program participation and in aggregate. The following graph provides a visual representation of the individual program's respective initial employment wage rates and the anniversary date wage employment rates.

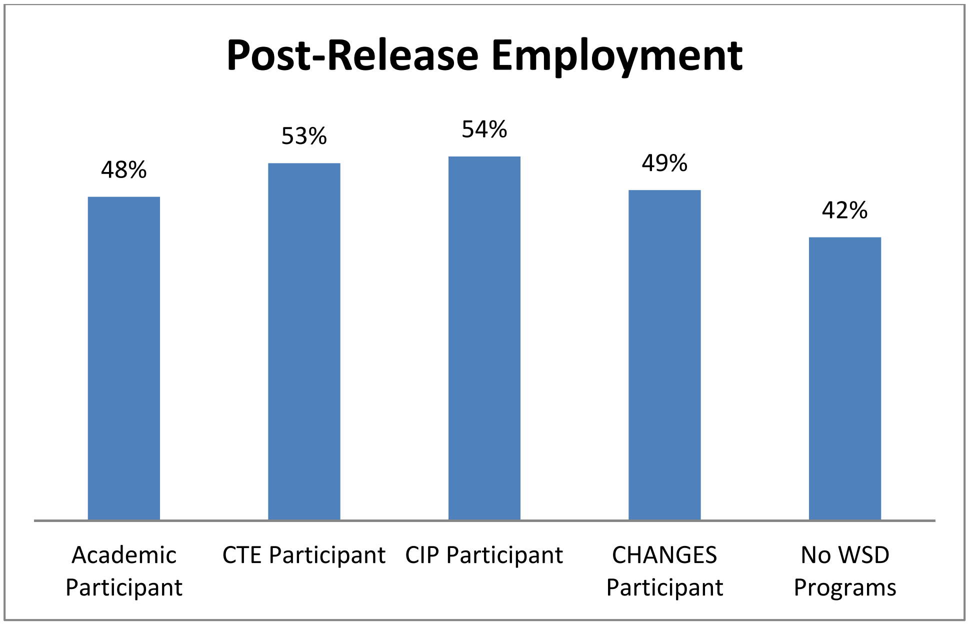


The overall average first quarter salary of those individuals in the entire cohort who met the one-year anniversary time horizon was $2,023 monthly. Those same individuals demonstrated an annual wage increase, on average, of $403. Simply stated, individuals within the release cohort who were employed within one year saw an average wage increase from $2,023 to $2,426. Individuals who participated in and/or completed CIP experienced on average a one-year wage increase of at least $676. Individuals who participated in a CTE course reflected a one-year wage increase of $601.

The resultant data reflected that those released individuals who obtained post-release employment within one year and participated in WSD programs were employed at a slightly higher initial wage than those individuals who had no WSD exposure. Analysis of wage increase rates on the anniversary date, however, can be measured with the available data, and that analysis yielded interesting results. These rates of wage increase were significant in that they construct a linear picture of the post-release employment experience. The rate of first-year wage increase is depicted by program in the graph below.



Of the individuals in the cohort, 46% of those obtained employment within one year of release. In comparison, individuals who had no WSD participation, however, obtained employment at a 42% rate. Conversely, regardless of program type, individuals who participated in WSD programs and who obtained employment within one-year reflected at least 48% attainment rate. Additionally, depending on the specific program, some of the programmatic subgroups reflected well over 50% employment attainment. The two most apparently successful program exposures were CIP and CTE. Both of these programs are specifically targeted to help formerly incarcerated individuals assimilate. CIP attempts to re-shape thinking, thereby ameliorating the soft skills necessary for employment success, and CTE provides job skills directly related to employment success. These two specific programs reflected employment in over 52% of the cases. Specific wage data is also critical in the evaluation of post-release employment.



The information presented above illustrates three salient points with respect to post-release employment and WSD programs:

- Those formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in WSD programs experienced a greater wage increase rate at the one-year anniversary than those who did not participate in WSD programs. Compensation consultant Towers Watson forecasted (as stated in a September 8, 2014 *USA Today* article) that in 2014 (a year that might realistically encompass this cohort), annual pay raises were anticipated at a 3% average. The yearly wage rate increases reflected by WSD participants could easily be viewed as commensurate to persons who were not incarcerated annual employee wage increase rates after one year of continual employment.
- Formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in WSD programs obtained initial post-release employment at a higher rate than those who did not participate in WSD programming (ranging from 48% to 54%). As seen above, approximately 42% of the releasees who did not participate in WSD programs obtained initial employment.
- In general, WSD participants obtained employment more often. This positive relationship better provides an optimal framework for the former student to avoid re-incarceration. Research has demonstrated that a positive employment history is a prime indicator that a formerly incarcerated individual will not return to prison. This positive work history is often reflected as a cost-avoidance. Perhaps, more importantly, a positive work history provides a better opportunity for the individual to assimilate more effectively.

In summary, the TTU research team found that WSD participants demonstrated positive employment and wage-earning experiences upon release and through the first year of release. These positive patterns were consistent with research and exhibited profiles of releasees who do not return to prison with positive outcomes.

11. The Retention Factors Associated with the Employment

To extend the previous question response, the research team lastly examined employment retention. For the sake of consistency, the anniversary date established previously was used as the time horizon to frame employment retention. Also, in similar methodology, a decision tree model was used to analyze post-release employment retention. This method is a sound research practice used to identify multiple predictors. By identifying these characteristics as outcomes, WSD is better able to tailor its programs to be consistent with the outcome findings.

Overall, approximately 46% of the cohort were employed post-release. Of those releasees whose one-year employment could be accurately evaluated, several identifying characteristics surfaced in the data. Not surprisingly, the primary common factor for employment retention was the wage at initial employment. Those individuals whose initial wage was at least $1,332.00 monthly displayed the highest employment retention at the one-year anniversary. The second most common characteristic of those who retained employment for at least one year was the educational experience. Those individuals who had received at least 11 years of education also displayed high job retention outcomes. With these two significant factors as overarching data mining parameters, the decision tree model also revealed other characteristics that appear to be of importance. Those individuals who had never been residents of a state jail appeared to have higher employment retention outcomes than their counterparts. Additionally, releasees whose most current period of incarceration exceeded 756 days (approximately 2 years) showed positive employment retention outcomes. African American releasees displayed the highest employment retention of all other races when those individuals experienced the same wage, education, and housing criteria. Age at release also appeared to be of consideration in employment retention. In general, older releasees (over 42) retained employment more often than younger releasees (under 42).

The decision tree model analysis of the initial employment retention factors provided valuable information in preparation of released persons to positively re-enter the workforce. Moreover, this data can also be used as baseline data for future analysis.

Part B - Program Changes

This program evaluation indicated that Windham School District (WSD) is meeting its statutory goals to:

1) Reduce Recidivism;
2) Reduce the cost of confinement;
3) Increase the success of former inmates in obtaining and maintaining employment; and
4) Provide an incentive to inmates to behave in positive ways during confinement or imprisonment.

The research team's findings indicate that WSD programming has a positive relationship to many post-release experiences.

- Re-incarceration data exhibited a positive relationship for residents who completed or participated WSD programs.
- Program completion and participation data reflected a positive relationship to program and outcome measures for the report.
- Data indicated exposure to more than one WSD program reflected positive post-release experiences in employment and wages.
- Over 80% of the individuals who were employed held jobs related to his/her Career & Technical Education (CTE) training while incarcerated.
- Academic progress for WSD students reflected substantial growth in all tested areas.

WSD evaluated its programs and the following changes have been made:

- WSD educators were given opportunities to enhance their personal teaching strategies, use of computer-assisted learning resources, reading curriculum strategies, and efforts at developing leadership characteristics in their students through staff development events.
- WSD conducted Motivational Interviewing training that provided principals, student advisors and diagnosticians the tools to work with resistant learners. This strategy has aided in recruitment and retention of students.
- During the 2019-2020 academic school year, WSD formed a curriculum committee to review and select materials to be used in the transition from the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) 9/10 to TABE 11/12. This committee, which was comprised of academic teachers and principals from across the state, selected updated math, reading and language materials for classroom use, beginning with the 2020-2021 academic year. WSD's academic curriculum incorporates employability skills and labor market research, integrating academic and CTE programs through concurrent enrollment and enabling students to set goals for employment upon release.

- WSD established a standard high school diploma program at the Matthew Gaines High School at the Ferguson Unit in October of 2020. This program establishes a method for eligible incarcerated students to earn a high school diploma and an industry-recognized certification in an environment that meets the needs of the learner.
- Title I campuses incorporated a model change in order to increase the number of students served and to offer additional academic supports. The new method allows flexibility by offering three methods of instruction: co-teaching, small group targeted instruction, and specialty classes. Title I teachers assist campus staff with ensuring that all eligible students are enrolled and receiving supplemental services.
- WSD partners with various Texas school districts to provide a Family Literacy program that is designed to help incarcerated parents with educational needs to become effective, supportive, active partners in the education of their children with the goal of eliminating generational incarceration and increasing student growth of both the parent and child. Components include academic, career and technical education and parenting skills classes for the incarcerated parent, participation in parent-teacher conferences via conference call with school districts in which their children are enrolled, and opportunities to practice and apply appropriate classroom and parent-child activities that will occur virtually and through visitation in the future.
- WSD, in collaboration with TDCJ, implemented distance learning and on-site hybrid models of instruction to support students continued growth during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The WSD expanded educational opportunities for residents by offering additional Elective Personal Enrichment Courses (EPEC) for year-round school. New course offerings are focused on raising children to thrive and exploring careers. Classes are voluntary and open to eligible members of the incarcerated population.
- WSD Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP) curriculum for Intermediate Sanction Facility (ISF) clients was revised and enhanced to implement real world learning experiences. An employability and career focus has been incorporated which includes developing job interviewing skills, lessons on resume writing, and job search strategies and resources. Incoming clients participate in career assessment inventories to determine personal skills and interests for certain jobs/careers. Clients are also provided with community resource information which includes financial aid opportunities for college and CTE programs.
- CTE programming continues to focus on and expand third-party industry certification opportunities for residents. These industry certificates provide WSD CTE students enhanced opportunities for post-release employment. All courses were reviewed and, where possible, revised to add additional industry related certifications.
- An ongoing comprehensive review of the CTE course curriculum resulted in expanded opportunities for CTE students.
- WSD has increased CTE course offerings since 2016, currently offering 55 CTE courses,
    - All course offerings are designed to better equip the student with more current and more capable training while he/she is incarcerated to make the post-release employment process more effective.

    - In addition, licensing regulations are discussed with students on how to apply for their licensure and licensure application process.
- WSD is actively building partnerships and career connections with industry professionals to create successful employment opportunities for former residents.
- WSD, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, and the Texas Workforce Commission formalized their commitment to collaboratively address training, occupational licensing, and employment needs of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals through a detailed memorandum of understanding.
- WSD partners with the TDCJ in providing employment related expo events. These events make residents aware of employment and reentry services, along with continued education opportunities. These events allow students to meet with potential employers and learn firsthand about workforce needs and employment options.

The *WSD Biennial Evaluation and Report* (TTU) report can be viewed in its entirety at www.wsdtx.org.