

Report to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia

Virginia's Correctional Education Programs

2025



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JLARC director

Hal E. Greer

JLARC staff for this report

Tracey R. Smith, Senior Associate Director

Drew Dickinson, Chief Legislative Analyst, Project Leader

Tess Hinteregger, Senior Legislative Analyst

Hannah Garfinkel, Senior Associate Legislative Analyst

Scarlett Saunders, Senior Associate Legislative Analyst

Jessica Sabbath, Managing Editor

Information graphics: Nathan Skreslet

Contents

Summary	i
Recommendations	ix
Chapters	
1. Virginia's Correctional Education Programs	1
2. DOC's Adult Basic Education Program	11
3. Career and Technical Education Programs	29
4. Postsecondary Educational Programs at DOC Facilities	43
5. Supporting Educational Program Access and Effectiveness	53
Appendixes	
A. Study resolution	67
B. Research activities and methods	68
C. Agency response	77
D. Educational programs in local and regional jails	80
E. Inventory of education programs in DOC facilities	86
F. Additional information on DOC CTE programs	91
G. Recent trends in GED subject test pass rates among DOC inmates	93

Summary: Virginia’s Correctional Education Programs

WHAT WE FOUND

Providing educational programs in a correctional setting is challenging

The unique security demands and staffing challenges of a correctional environment impact the delivery of educational programming. Consistent programming requires enough correctional officers (COs) to manage inmate movement to and from classrooms, prevent the unsafe use of or access to certain classroom equipment, and de-escalate conflicts arising in classrooms. However, the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) faces a critical, longstanding CO shortage, with 1,534 vacancies as of July 2025, and some facilities having CO vacancies of more than 30 percent. Insufficient security personnel or security incidents—like the inmate attacks on several Wallens Ridge State Prison COs in 2025—can lead to security lockdowns and, therefore, class cancellations. Security requirements can also limit which classroom materials and IT resources can be used for instruction.

Furthermore, inmates often have mental health or substance use disorders that mandate treatment, which take precedence over classroom attendance and limit their ability to participate in educational programming fully. DOC staff also must strategically select which inmates can be placed in a classroom together to prevent potentially disruptive conflicts.

Despite these challenges, correctional education programs appear to be effective at improving post-release outcomes (e.g., higher employment and wages, lower recidivism), based on national research and Virginia-specific analysis.

DOC assessments show that about 40 percent of inmates need educational programming to reduce their likelihood of reoffending

DOC policy specifies that one of the purposes of its programming, including educational programming, is to reduce inmates’ recidivism risk, and national research indicates an association between educational program participation and reduced recidivism. DOC uses the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) assessment to estimate each inmate’s recidivism risk level and evaluate their educational or vocational programming needs. In February 2025, about

WHY WE DID THIS STUDY

In 2024, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission directed staff to review Virginia’s correctional education and vocational training programs. Staff were also directed to review the educational programs in Virginia’s jails and consider the feasibility and effectiveness of expanding such programming.

ABOUT VIRGINIA’S CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

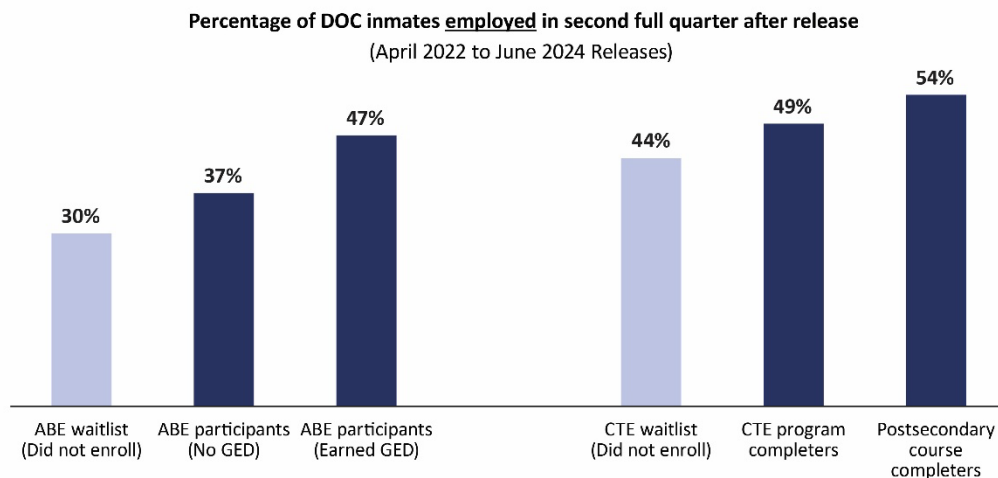
State law requires the DOC director to establish education programs for inmates, including a “functional literacy program” for individuals testing below the 12th-grade level. DOC is also required to provide elementary, secondary, postsecondary, career and technical education, adult education, and special education programs. Educational programs at DOC facilities are primarily funded by the state and constitute a relatively small proportion (about 2 percent) of DOC’s overall budget.

9,200 (40 percent) of DOC's roughly 22,700 state-responsible inmates had been determined to have a "probable" or "highly probable" need for educational or vocational programs to reduce their risk of reoffending.

Virginia inmates who participate in correctional education have somewhat better employment and wage outcomes

JLARC staff's analysis of employment and wage outcomes for correctional education program participants found that inmates who participated in either adult basic education (ABE), career and technical education (CTE), or postsecondary programming were more likely to be employed for the first two quarters after their release from DOC than other similarly motivated inmates (e.g., inmates on a program waitlist who never enrolled). Inmates who participated in CTE or postsecondary programming also earned higher wages than non-participants.

Post-release employment rates of correctional education program participants vs. non-participants



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC employment outcomes data (April 2022 through June 2024 releases).

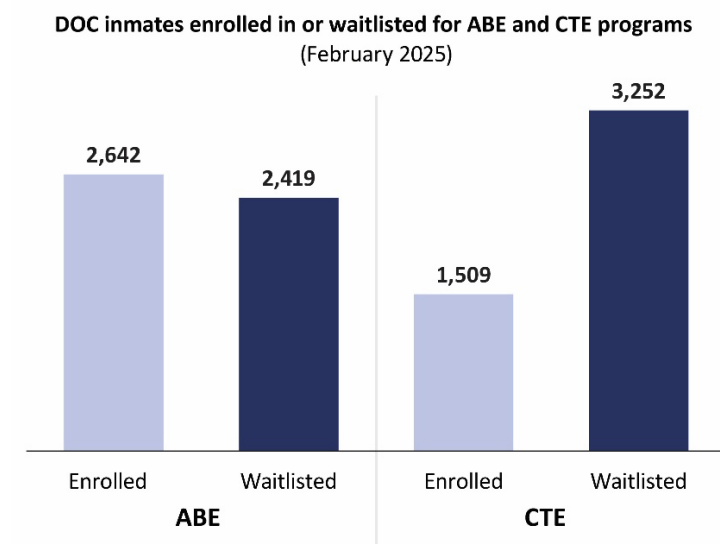
JLARC staff's analysis also found that participants in ABE, CTE, and postsecondary programming had lower rearrest rates within the first 12 months after their release. Although the relationship between program participation and fewer rearrests was not statistically significant, national research has shown that correctional education programs can reduce recidivism. For example, a RAND meta-analysis study of correctional education outcomes in 2018 estimated that ABE programs can reduce the likelihood of recidivism by about 30 percent.

Small proportion of DOC inmates participate in correctional education, but eligibility and demand significantly exceed capacity

While a relatively small proportion of inmates participate in ABE or CTE programs, there is significant unmet demand for these programs because of constraints like staffing, space, and technology. Of inmates released in 2024, about 19 percent participated in ABE, and 16 percent participated in CTE. Both programs have extensive waitlists, and a large number were never enrolled before their release.

About a third of DOC inmates (7,539) lack a high school credential, and DOC policy requires inmates without a high school credential to participate in ABE programming, with some exceptions. Only about half of those inmates were enrolled in ABE programming in February 2025, with roughly the same number on an ABE waitlist.

CTE and ABE programs have extensive waitlists



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of data on the inmate population held in DOC facilities on February 28, 2025.

NOTE: See Chapters 2 and 3 of the full report for enrollments and waitlists by correctional facility.

Furthermore, in February 2025, over 3,000 inmates were on a CTE program waitlist—more than double the number of inmates enrolled at the time. The largest waitlists were for the Custodial Maintenance, Electrical, Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration, Welding, and Masonry programs. In 2024, 623 inmates released from a DOC facility were on a CTE waitlist but were unable to participate in those programs before release.

DOC does not consider recidivism risk in educational enrollment decisions, even though reducing recidivism is a primary goal

DOC considers inmates' recidivism risks and assesses programming needs in enrollment decisions for some programs, but not for educational programming. In February

2025, 1,432 inmates on the ABE program waitlist were assessed to have a “probable” or “highly probable” need for educational or vocational programs to reduce their risk of reoffending. At the same time, many of those who were enrolled were assessed as “unlikely” to need educational programming to reduce their risk of reoffending (43 percent, or 1,134 inmates). During the same period, 1,046 inmates enrolled in a CTE program (70 percent) had been assessed as having an “unlikely” need for education or vocational training, while 1,308 inmates on CTE waitlists were identified as having a “highly probable” or “probable” need for it. Forty-five percent of the 1,219 inmates who were released in 2024 and who were on an ABE and/or CTE waitlist were determined by DOC’s assessments to need educational or vocational programming to reduce their risk of reoffending.

DOC’s educational programming is hindered by staff vacancies, inadequate IT, and use of funding for some non-educational needs

In addition to the correctional officer vacancies mentioned previously, vacancy rates among DOC teachers are high. The vacancy rates among DOC teachers would have placed DOC in the top 10 vacancy rates in the state among school divisions (2024–25 school year). DOC estimates that it would need an additional \$4.3 million to fully fund all 28 vacant instructional positions. JLARC staff estimated that filling these vacancies would allow between 700 and 1,100 additional inmates to enroll in an educational program.

DOC’s educational programs rely on functioning computers and networks for critical tasks like student assessments and instruction. However, only 28 percent of surveyed teachers and principals agreed that internet access at their facility was adequate to support instructional needs; less than half (42 percent) reported that “student-use” computers functioned reliably most of the time; and only 38 percent agreed that IT support and repairs were provided in a timely manner.

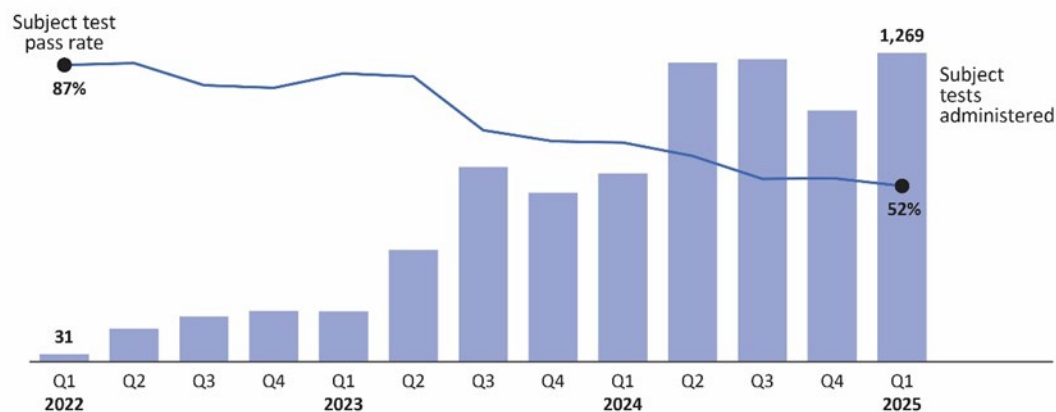
At least some of the roughly \$37 million in funding appropriated for correctional education is being used by DOC for non-instructional purposes. According to DOC central office staff, some teachers are being paid overtime to work certain security posts outside of regular hours. This practice may be warranted at some facilities, especially when there are critical security staffing shortages, but educational program funds should not be used to cover these overtime costs. JLARC staff estimate that as much as \$220,000 appropriated to DOC for educational purposes in FY25 was used to pay staff overtime at DOC facilities, some of which may have been for security purposes. While less than 1 percent of the program’s appropriations, this funding could have instead been invested in low-cost program improvements, like professional development, which many DOC teachers expressed a desire for.

DOC should ensure that its ABE program appropriately balances GED attainment and functional literacy

In recent years, DOC has placed a greater emphasis on GED attainment and revised its testing eligibility policies and funding to support increased attainment. These efforts contributed to a fourfold increase in the number of GEDs attained by DOC inmates (from 117 in 2022 to 544 in 2024), and an even greater rise in the number of GED subject tests administered, which peaked at nearly 4,300 in 2024.

Although GED attainment has increased, declining pass rates and concerns from DOC central office staff, principals, and teachers indicate that a substantial proportion of students are being tested before they are ready. Subject test pass rates fell from 87 percent in early 2022 to 52 percent in early 2025. Retakes have also grown, increasing from less than 5 percent of tests administered in 2022 to more than a quarter of all tests in 2024. A 50 percent pass rate suggests students are being tested prematurely, representing an inefficient use of limited ABE program staff and space.

DOC's GED subject test pass rates are declining, indicating a greater proportion of students may be taking tests before they are ready



SOURCE: DOC data on GED tests taken at DOC facilities from January 2022–March 2025.

NOTE: A score of 145 or higher is needed to pass a subject test; four subject tests must be passed to attain a GED.

DOC facility and central office staff also raised concerns that the recent focus on GED attainment has diverted attention away from students at lower academic levels, who comprise most ABE-eligible inmates and who are statistically more likely to reoffend. Available data indicates that academic progress in the ABE program has declined by a small amount in recent years.

Most DOC CTE programs focus on in-demand jobs and skills, but only half of CTE participants are employed two quarters after release

DOC's CTE programs generally target high-demand occupations or those with many job openings. However, while CTE completers had better out-

comes than inmates who remained on waitlists, many did not find or maintain employment within the first year of release, a critical factor for successful reentry into the community. Among inmates who recently completed DOC CTE programs:

- 49 percent were not employed in the first quarter after release, and
- 67 percent did not maintain employment for all four quarters after release.

DOC's re-entry division provides some employment assistance and has staff at some facilities to help with job skills like interviewing. However, this support is not available at all facilities or to all inmates who will soon be released. In addition, the support is not targeted to specific CTE programs or industries.

In addition, about half of inmates who begin a CTE program do not complete it before they are released. Most inmates who were in a CTE program when they were transferred did not re-enroll in any CTE programs. Education and facility staff can request "transfer holds" when aware of upcoming transfers for program participants, but requests and approvals are inconsistent across facilities.

To expand postsecondary programming, DOC's central office would need to be more involved in program oversight and development

As of September 2025, 17 of DOC's 37 major facilities provided postsecondary education through partnerships with higher education institutions (eight community colleges and one four-year university), a recent expansion prompted by the 2020 restoration of Pell Grant eligibility. In February 2025, 2 percent of DOC's inmates were enrolled in a postsecondary course.

Because of the small amount of programming currently available at correctional facilities, DOC has provided minimal oversight to postsecondary programming at DOC facilities. However, the 2025 General Assembly passed legislation (that was vetoed by the governor in anticipation of this study), which would have significantly expanded postsecondary programming in state prisons. If the General Assembly still wishes to expand postsecondary programming, a more robust central office role is needed.

Most commonly offered associate degree program is likely not most useful for most inmates

The most common DOC postsecondary program offered (as of September 2025)—the Associate in General Studies—does not align with market needs and is likely not the most useful credential for most inmates. This program is designed to provide credits that can be applied toward a bachelor's degree, including courses such as College Success Skills and Religions of the World.

National experts and correctional staff from other states recommend that postsecondary correctional education programs prioritize teaching skills that enhance an inmate's employability. While the Associate in General Studies program may be useful to traditional college students, most inmates cannot pursue a bachelor's degree while

incarcerated. Other credentials that could be offered by higher education institutions may better align with the post-release realities for most inmates. Some states, like Ohio, North Carolina, and Washington, have already adopted this workforce-focused approach.

Most jails reported meeting demand for adult education programs, but not CTE; shorter incarcerations make program expansion difficult

While state law permits but does not require educational and vocational programming in local and regional jails, most jails in Virginia report offering some form of adult education (e.g., education, GED testing and preparation, special education). Some jails offer this programming through self-guided adult education courses on tablets or computers.

Fewer jails offer CTE or postsecondary courses. Twenty-eight of the 51 jails responding to JLARC requests reported offering CTE programs, mostly short courses that teach specific credentials or stackable skills. Eleven facilities offer postsecondary, credit-bearing courses for inmates through partnerships with community colleges.

Most jails reported being able to meet demand for adult education programs, but not for CTE and postsecondary education programs. The most common reasons given were constraints on funding, instructional staff, and physical space. Even if the state allocated more resources, providing comprehensive educational programming in jails is difficult because of inmates' relatively short stays. Pre-trial inmates have frequent court proceedings, and post-trial inmates stay in jail only an average of two months.

Additionally, jail superintendents and sheriffs reported that many inmates have urgent mental health needs that must be addressed before inmates can actively participate in education or other types of jail programming. In 2024, 37 percent of jail inmates were assessed to have a mental illness, a proportion that has been growing in recent years.

If additional educational opportunities in jails are expanded, they should include self-guided pacing courses through tablets, short-term CTE programs, and adult basic education and CTE programs instead of postsecondary courses.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

The following recommendations include only those highlighted for the report summary. The complete list of recommendations is available on page ix.

Legislative action

- Appropriate funding for additional positions to prepare CTE program participants to find employment once released from DOC custody.

Executive action

- DOC should require that principals consider inmates' assessed need for educational and vocational programming to reduce their risk of recidivism when making program enrollment decisions.
- DOC should take steps to ensure that all funds appropriated for educational programming are used only to support such programs.
- DOC should better assess student readiness to take the GED test, monitor GED score reports to identify skill gaps, and modify programming to address these gaps.
- DOC should focus more on improving lower-functioning inmates' foundational literacy skills and grade progression and less on the frequent administration of GED tests in its adult education program.
- DOC should require that correctional facilities regularly report to the DOC director on all inmates' education gains, not just GED attainments.
- DOC should develop clear criteria for using temporary transfer holds for inmates who are in CTE programs and require staff to use these criteria to guide their CTE participant transfer decisions.
- DOC should elevate the position of the college coordinator at its central office to report directly to DOC's superintendent of education.
- DOC should evaluate whether a different postsecondary program than the Associate in General Studies degree would be more useful to inmates after release and, if so, take steps to offer it in its place.

Recommendations: Virginia's Correctional Education Programs

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Virginia Department of Corrections should conduct a one-time targeted review of inmate records to (i) identify all inmates who have not been properly screened for their eligibility for adult basic education (ABE) and (ii) either enroll all non-exempt, ABE-eligible inmates who are identified in the ABE program or place them on the program's waitlist. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Virginia Department of Corrections should take appropriate steps to ensure that, when circumstances prevent proper screening for adult basic education (ABE) eligibility upon initial intake, inmates are assessed for ABE eligibility as soon as practicable after intake and, if they are found eligible, enrolled in or placed on a waitlist for ABE. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Virginia Department of Corrections should annually utilize a portion of its educational programming budget to provide professional development to its adult basic education teachers. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) develop and implement an improved approach for assessing student readiness to take the GED test that reliably predicts students' likelihood of passing the GED and ensures consistency across facilities, and (ii) review and revise its approach for assessing student readiness on an ongoing basis as needed. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) monitor GED score reports to identify any skills that are not being consistently acquired by test takers, (ii) use this information to inform program curriculum, learning material, and teacher training decisions if skill gaps are identified, and (iii) share these reports with principals and teachers to inform programming at their facilities. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Virginia Department of Corrections should take steps within its adult basic education program to place a greater emphasis on (i) improving lower-functioning inmates' foundational literacy skills and progression from one academic grade level to the next and (ii) teaching students the skills and material necessary to earn their GED, and place less of an emphasis on frequently administering GED tests. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) regularly assess adult basic education program participants using the Test of Adult Basic Education, or a comparable assessment, (ii) use test score data to measure program performance and identify needed program improvements, and (iii) as with GED reports, require regular reports to DOC leadership on trends in inmates' education gains, by facility, and by grade level. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Virginia Department of Corrections should evaluate its Electrical program and develop a plan to either (i) improve the existing program's curriculum and re-entry support or (ii) replace it with one or more career and technical education programs that would more effectively prepare inmates for high-demand employment opportunities upon release. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Virginia Department of Corrections should incorporate an analysis of relevant labor market data maintained by the Virginia Office of Education Economics into its triennial reviews of career and technical education programs to (i) ensure the occupations and credentials targeted by each program are in high demand, (ii) identify new programming that would align with newly identified high-demand occupations, and (iii) take steps to modify its programming as necessary and feasible. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 10

The General Assembly may wish to consider including in the Appropriation Act (i) funding for three business developer positions to help inmates who participate in the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) career and technical education (CTE) programs prepare to obtain employment after release, and (ii) language directing DOC to report on the post-release employment outcomes of CTE students and the extent to which additional business developer positions are needed, if any. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) develop clear criteria for using temporary transfer holds for inmates in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and (ii) require designated staff to use these criteria to guide their transfer decisions for CTE participants. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Virginia Department of Corrections should elevate the position of the college coordinator to report directly to the department's superintendent of education. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 13

The Virginia Department of Corrections should develop and maintain operating procedures for the administration of its postsecondary education programs that, at a minimum, address the use of educational materials, waitlist management, and program eligibility. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC), in collaboration with the Virginia Community College System and other participating higher education institutions, should develop a process for (i) documenting the administrative and security costs to DOC of providing each existing and proposed postsecondary program, (ii) documenting higher education institutions' costs and revenues for each program; and (iii) negotiating a cost-sharing arrangement to offset DOC costs with net revenues, if any, earned by the higher education institutions when feasible. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 15

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC), with the assistance of the Virginia Community College System, should (i) evaluate whether a program other than the Associate in General Studies would provide a postsecondary credential that is more useful to inmates after release from DOC custody and, (ii) if a more useful credential is identified, replace the Associate in General Studies program with it. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Virginia Department of Corrections should require that any memorandum of understanding with a higher education institution to provide the Associate in General Studies degree program at a correctional facility include assurances that the higher education institution will assist inmates as needed with transferring their course credits and credentials to a bachelor's degree program. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 17

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) specify in its operating procedures that principals, when making educational program enrollment decisions, should give consideration to enrolling inmates who have been identified through the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Services (COMPAS) assessment as needing educational or vocational programming to reduce their risk of re-offending after release, and (ii) ensure principals have ready access to inmates' COMPAS assessment results. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 18

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) review the information collected from correctional facilities on class cancellations and student absences to determine whether additional or different information is needed to effectively track the frequency of and reasons for them; (ii) take steps to ensure that the information is collected and reported to the central office consistently across correctional facilities; and (iii) provide this information to wardens regularly to help them minimize disruptions to educational programs. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 19

The Virginia Department of Corrections should amend its policies to clarify that wardens are expected to minimize inmates' late arrival to class to the extent safe and practicable. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 20

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) identify the primary causes of delays in filling vacant instructor positions for educational programs, and (ii) take appropriate steps to improve the timeliness in filling these positions. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 21

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) should take steps to ensure that its unit heads, including the DOC superintendent, have sufficient, accurate, and timely information to regularly monitor spending and unspent balances within their respective programs. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 22

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) should establish specific financial controls to ensure that all funds appropriated to DOC for education are used exclusively to support educational programs. (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 23

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) should (i) identify the causes of the lack of timely and effective support for educational technologies at DOC facilities; (ii) take appropriate steps to address the causes; and (iii) request additional funding for personnel if an insufficient number of IT support staff is a primary cause. (Chapter 5)

1 Virginia's Correctional Education Programs

In November 2024, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) directed its staff to review Virginia's correctional education and vocational training programs ("correctional education programs"). JLARC staff were directed to identify the programs at each Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) facility, review their availability and design, and assess the outcomes of program participants. Staff were also directed to evaluate the educational programs in local and regional jails and consider the feasibility and effectiveness of expanding educational programs for jail inmates. (See Appendix A for the study resolution and Appendix D for the discussion of educational programs in jails.)

JLARC staff used various methods to address the study mandate, including site visits to six DOC facilities, surveys, and reviews of other states' approaches. Staff analyzed data on DOC inmate characteristics, along with information on education program participation, completion, and waitlists. Additionally, staff examined employment and re-arrest outcomes for inmates released from DOC facilities since April 2022. JLARC staff also interviewed leaders and staff at DOC, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Virginia community colleges, and other relevant state agencies; facility wardens, principals, and program instructors; national experts; representatives from other states' correctional systems; individuals recently released from DOC facilities; and other stakeholders. Staff conducted three statewide surveys and reviewed relevant documentation, including DOC operating procedures, statewide guidance from VDOE, national research on the effectiveness of correctional educational programs, and publications on other states' correctional education programs. (See Appendix B for a detailed description of research methods.)

Inmates participate in educational programs to improve employability & reintegration into society

The Code of Virginia specifies that a core purpose of state correctional facilities is to provide training and education to inmates. As with other types of rehabilitative programs, these educational programs are intended to "assist prisoners in the successful transition to free society and gainful employment."

State law requires the DOC director to establish education programs for inmates, including a "functional literacy program" for individuals testing below the 12th-grade level. In addition, DOC is required to include elementary, secondary, postsecondary, career and technical education, adult education, and special education programs (sidebar).

DOC is designated as a local education agency (LEA) but is not eligible for state direct aid to public education.

Definitions of “recidivism” vary across studies. The most commonly available measure of recidivism is reincarceration rates. Other measures include rearrest rates and reconviction rates. Rearrest rates were used for JLARC’s analysis because reincarceration data was not available for enough recent DOC releases to reflect current DOC education programming.

DOC specifies through policy that one of the purposes of its programming, including educational programming, is to reduce inmates’ recidivism risk, and national research indicates an association between educational program participation and reduced recidivism (sidebar). In its 2018 meta-analysis of 37 years of research on correctional education programs, the RAND Corporation concluded,

Inmates participating in correctional education programs are 28 percent less likely to recidivate when compared with inmates who did not participate in correctional education programs...[and] this finding holds for all forms of education—including Adult Basic Education courses, GED/high school courses, vocational college courses, and college courses.

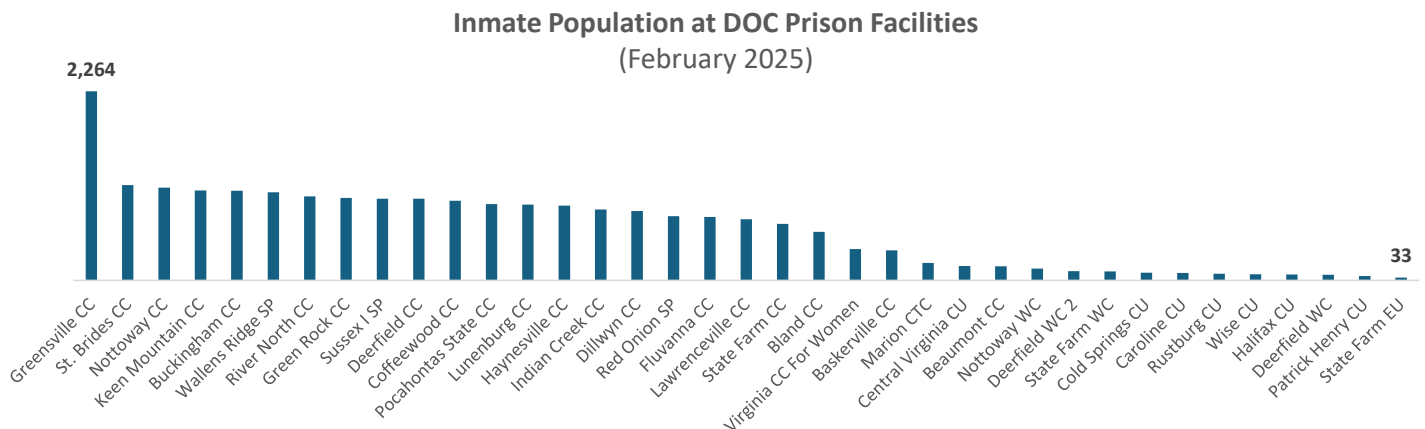
More recently, a 2024 meta-analysis by the nonpartisan Washington State Institute for Public Policy found a 15 percent reduction in future criminal justice system involvement (e.g., arrests, convictions, incarceration) among correctional education participants.

DOC found 40 percent of its inmates need educational programs to reduce risk of reoffending

In February 2025, Virginia had about 25,000 state-responsible inmates, about 22,700 of whom (91 percent) were in one of DOC’s 37 major correctional facilities (including correctional centers, work centers, and correctional units) (sidebar) (Figure 1-1). The remaining 2,300 (9 percent) were held in one of 63 local or regional jails.

State law defines a “state-responsible inmate” as any person with (1) a felony conviction and (2) a total sentence of a year or more.

FIGURE 1-1
DOC’s major correctional facilities vary widely in size



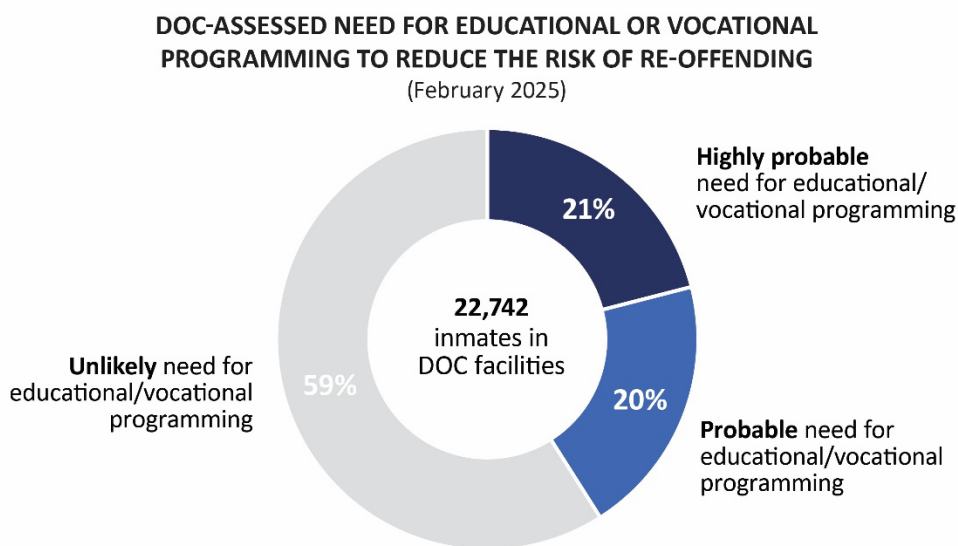
SOURCE: JLARC staff analysis of DOC-provided data on the inmate population held in DOC facilities on February 28, 2025.

NOTE: “CC” = correctional center. “CU” = correctional unit. “WC” = work center, “CTC” = correctional treatment center, EU = “enterprise unit,” and “SP” = state prison. DOC also housed 15 inmates in two secure medical facilities, which are not shown.

About 9,200 inmates (40 percent) held in a DOC facility in February 2025 had been assessed by DOC to have a “probable” or “highly probable” need for educational or vocational programs to reduce their risk of reoffending (sidebar) (Figure 1-2). The proportion of inmates with an assessed need for education (probable or highly probable) varied significantly across facilities and was typically higher in higher-security facilities.

FIGURE 1-2

About 40 percent of DOC inmates have an assessed need for educational or vocational programming to reduce their risk of reoffending



SOURCE: JLARC staff analysis of DOC data on the characteristics of the population held in DOC facilities on February 28, 2025.

NOTE: Educational or vocational need is indicated by the inmate's most recent COMPAS assessment. A “probable” or “highly probable” need for educational or vocational programming indicates that participation in those programs would likely reduce their risk of recidivating to some extent. Information was not available for about 150 inmates. Excludes 15 inmates in either of DOC's two secure medical facilities and state-responsible inmates in local or regional jails.

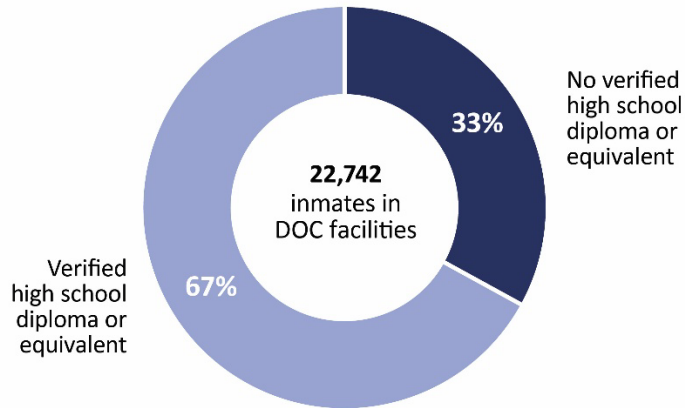
DOC uses the “**Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions**” (COMPAS) assessment to evaluate inmates' overall likelihood of reoffending as well as their need for certain types of programming to reduce their likelihood of reoffending. Inmates' need for each type of programming is scored as “unlikely,” “probable,” or “highly probable.”

The vocational/education section of the COMPAS assessment used by DOC includes 12 questions that cover an inmate's education and work history as well as their perceived need for additional educational and vocational training. It indicates whether an individual needs educational programming but does not specify the type of programming needed, such as a career and technical education or a postsecondary program.

As expected, inmates who lack a verified high school diploma (or equivalent credential) are more likely to be assessed by DOC as having an educational or vocational need than those who have attained one. Available data indicates that approximately one in three (7,539) inmates in DOC facilities lacked a verified high school credential as of February 2025 (Figure 1-3).

FIGURE 1-3

Available data indicates that about one-third of DOC inmates lack a verified high school credential (February 2025)



SOURCE: JLARC staff analysis of DOC data on the characteristics of the population held in DOC facilities on February 28, 2025.

NOTE: JLARC staff analyses determined some inmates may be indicated as lacking a verified high school diploma but only because the verification process had not yet been completed. (See Chapter 2 for more discussion on DOC's verification process.) Figure excludes inmates in local or regional jails. (See Appendix D for more information about this population.)

Most DOC facilities offer adult education and CTE programs, and some offer postsecondary programs

As of February 2025, ABE was not available at Beaumont Correctional Center, which is intended to house inmates with a verified high school diploma, and two work-focused facilities (Deerfield Work Center and State Farm Enterprise Unit).

Refusal to participate in the ABE program can result in limits to inmates' facility employment choices, pay rate, and "good time" earning rate, according to DOC policy.

DOC provides three primary types of educational programs in Virginia correctional facilities (Table 1-1). DOC's largest education program, Adult Basic Education (ABE), focuses on developing inmates' academic skills up through attainment of the GED. Available at almost all of DOC's major correctional facilities (34 of 37), the program is offered to inmates who do not have a verified high school credential and includes special education programming for any qualifying inmates (sidebar). According to DOC policy, the purpose of its ABE program is to "return to society individuals with increased life skills who are more likely to make a successful adjustment and less likely to recidivate." Inmates are generally required by DOC policy to participate in the ABE program if they do not have a verified high school credential, although some exceptions may be granted (sidebar).

DOC's Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are intended to prepare participants for specific occupations by providing them with the academic knowledge, technical skills, and hands-on training needed to pursue these occupations. Most DOC facilities offer at least one CTE program, although the types of programs offered vary across facilities. Participation in CTE programs is voluntary, and each program has minimum requirements to participate (e.g., a verified high school diploma or demonstrated proficiency in math or reading skills).

TABLE 1-1

DOC offers three primary educational programs at its facilities, and a relatively small proportion of inmates were enrolled in February 2025

Type of Educational Program	Participation Required or Voluntary?	Program taught by	# of DOC facilities provided (as of Feb. 2025)	Total enrollment (as of Feb. 2025) (% of total population in DOC facilities)
Adult basic education (elementary, secondary, and special education)	Required if inmate does not have a verified high school diploma or equivalent*	DOC teachers	34 of 37	2,642 (12%)
Career and technical education	Voluntary	DOC teachers	29 of 37	1,509 (7%)
Postsecondary (academic and career and technical education)	Voluntary	Instructors hired by participating community colleges, colleges, and universities	14 of 37	446 (2%)

SOURCE: JLARC staff analyses of DOC policies and procedures, program documentation, and DOC inmate population snapshot data.

NOTE: DOC also housed a small number of inmates (15) in two secure medical facilities, which are not shown. *DOC exempts some inmates from adult basic education based on their age, medical needs, or inability to progress further in the class. The number of DOC facilities reflects the number of facilities where there was at least one inmate enrolled in the program as of February 2025. CTE enrollment includes inmates enrolled in a vocational training program. It does not include a small number of inmates (~215) who were enrolled in other types of DOC CTE programs, such as apprenticeships and DOC “refresher” courses, which include courses on personal finance and computer literacy. Enrollment figures are not unduplicated and include about 135 inmates who were enrolled in multiple types of educational programs in February 2025.

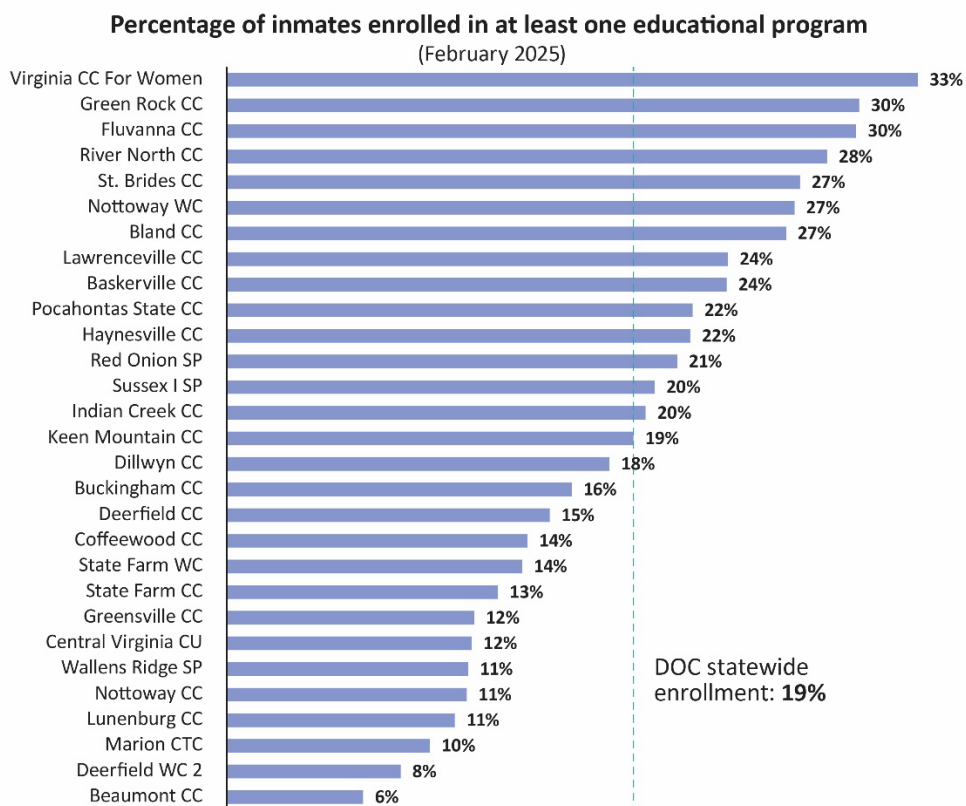
At some facilities, inmates can also participate in an in-person postsecondary program. These programs are provided through an agreement between a higher education institution—most often one of Virginia’s community colleges—and DOC facilities. The most common academic credential offered through these programs is the associate’s degree in general studies, a credential designed to help inmates complete specific courses needed for a bachelor’s degree. Some participating higher education institutions also offer career and technical education programs that are intended to be similar to those available on campus. (See Appendix E for more information on education program offerings by facility.)

About one in five inmates is enrolled in education programs at any given time, although the enrollment percentage varies by facility. In February 2025, 4,585 inmates (19 percent) were participating in an educational program at DOC facilities. Among facilities with at least 100 inmates, the percentage of inmates enrolled in at least one educational program varied from 6 percent at Beaumont Correctional Center to 33 percent at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women (Figure 1-4).

The demand for educational programs at DOC facilities exceeds current capacity. In February 2025, about 2,400 inmates statewide were on a waitlist for the ABE program, and 3,252 inmates were on a CTE waitlist. The waitlist data likely understates the actual demand for programs for several reasons, including DOC policies that allow inmates to be on only one CTE waitlist at a time.

FIGURE 1-4

Percentage of DOC inmates enrolled in at least one educational program varies across facilities



SOURCE: JLARC staff analysis of DOC-provided data on the inmate population held in DOC facilities on February 28, 2025.

NOTE: "CC" = correctional center. "CU" = correctional unit. "WC" = work center, "CTC" = correctional treatment center, "EU" = enterprise unit, and "SP" = state prison. Excludes nine facilities with fewer than 100 inmates. These nine facilities include several work centers and correctional units, as well as two secure medical facilities. "Educational program" includes ABE, CTE, and postsecondary programs.

DOC employs about 300 staff to provide and support educational programs in its facilities

State law requires the DOC director to hire a superintendent to oversee the operations of educational and vocational programs in DOC facilities. Otherwise, DOC has broad latitude to staff its educational programs as it deems appropriate within available resources.

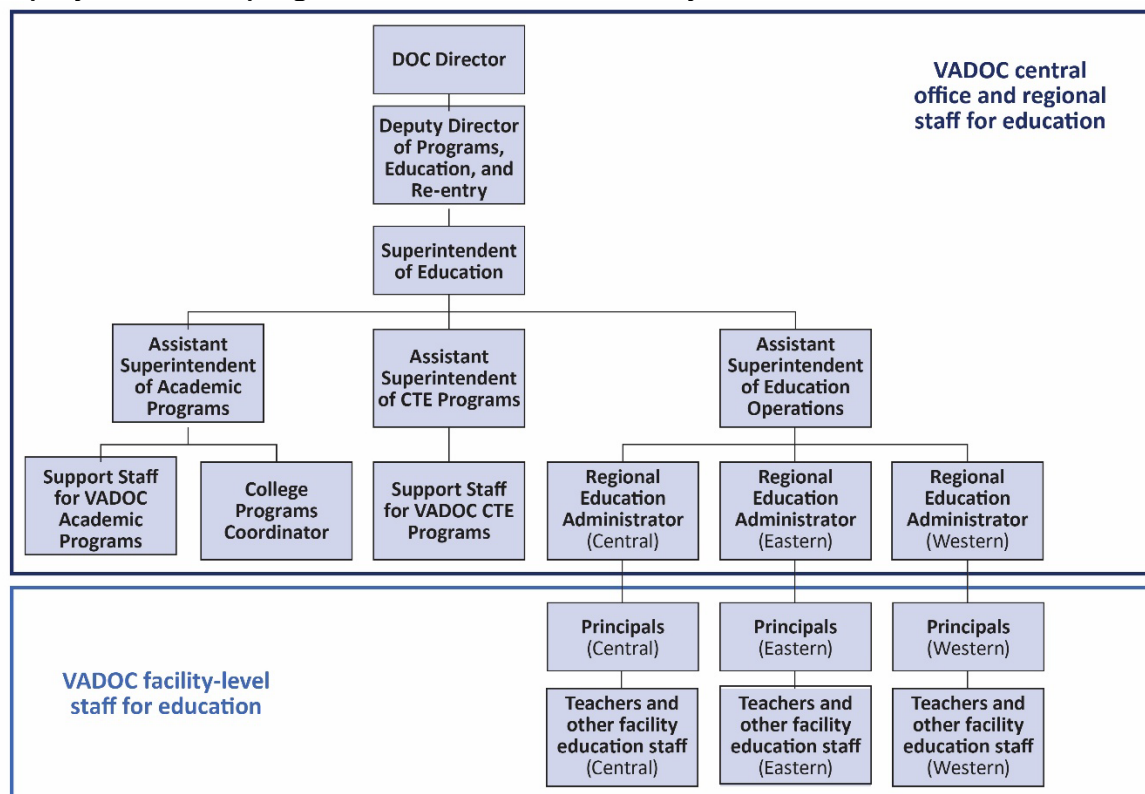
In May 2025, DOC employed 308 education staff, with approximately 90 percent in field roles, including principals, testing staff, adult education teachers, and CTE instructors, who worked at one or more facilities. The remaining 10 percent consists of DOC central office staff, including the superintendent of education, three assistant superintendents, and coordinators for curriculum, library, and assessment.

As of October 2025, DOC's central office education division consisted of three sections: Academic Programs, CTE Programs, and Education Operations (Figure 1-5).

- The Academic Programs and CTE Programs sections create standards, curricula, and programs in DOC facilities; conduct periodic reviews of facility education programs; and offer various other support for staff in facilities. Each of these divisions is overseen by its own assistant superintendent. Both the ABE program and postsecondary programs are overseen by the assistant superintendent of academic programs.
- The Education Operations section oversees the day-to-day operations of educational programs within DOC facilities. Facility-level staff, including teachers and librarians, report to principals. Facility principals are supervised by one of three regional education administrators, who are responsible for the administration and oversight of educational services in their assigned regions, including ensuring educational policies are followed and approving certain types of funding requests. These three regional positions are supervised by the assistant superintendent of education operations.

FIGURE 1-5

DOC's education division includes three sections and reports to the DOC deputy director of programs, education, and re-entry



SOURCE: JLARC review of DOC staffing data and operating procedures.

NOTE: Figure simplified for clarity. "Other facility education staff" vary somewhat across facilities and include positions such as assistant principals, librarians, and program support technicians.

All DOC education staff ultimately report to DOC's superintendent of education, who reports to the deputy director of programs, education, and re-entry. However, all educational staff are also responsible to the facility unit head (most commonly a warden) for certain non-educational matters, including facility safety and security.

Educational programs are mostly state-funded and account for a small proportion of DOC's budget

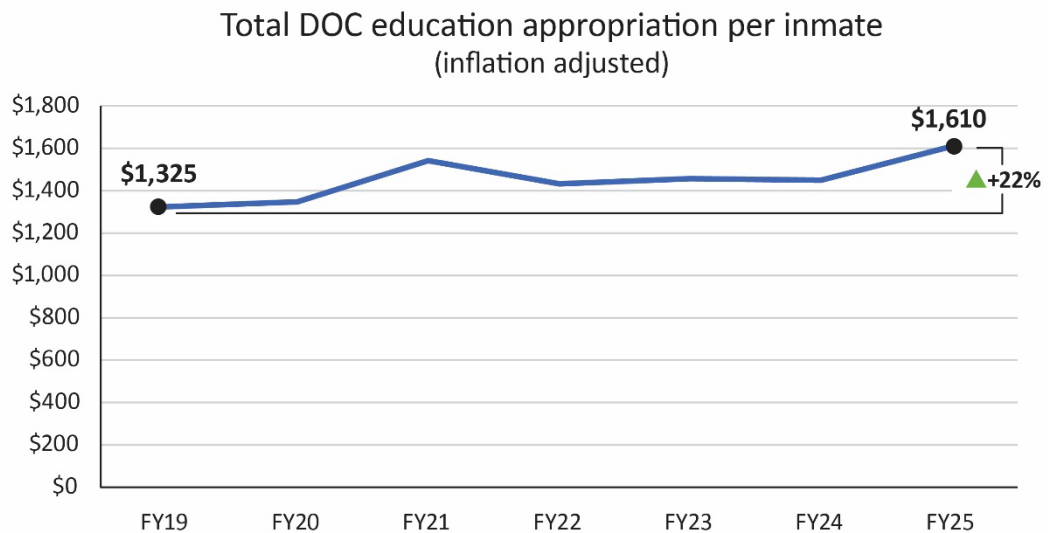
The General Assembly appropriates education funds to DOC through a specific budget item. For FY25, the appropriation specified the funds be used for (1) education programming (\$14.4 million), (2) CTE programming, (\$15.3 million), and (3) central office support for education and CTE programming (\$7.1 million).

Educational programs at DOC facilities are primarily funded by the state and comprise a relatively small proportion of DOC's overall budget. In FY25, appropriations for education totaled approximately \$36.8 million, and nearly all of this funding (99 percent) was state general funds. In that fiscal year, education funding accounted for only about 2 percent of DOC's \$1.58 billion budget. These funds are specifically earmarked for DOC education expenditures and are not to be used for other DOC operations without approval by the Department of Planning and Budget (sidebar).

On a per-inmate and inflation-adjusted basis, educational funding increased 22 percent between FY19 and FY25, largely because of the decline in the DOC inmate population (Figure 1-6). Adjusting for inflation, total DOC education appropriations declined from \$37.6 million in FY19 to \$32.8 million in FY24, before increasing to \$36.8 million in FY25. However, during the same period, the average daily population in DOC facilities decreased 19.5 percent (from 28,382 inmates in FY19 to 22,851 inmates in FY25).

FIGURE 1-6

On a per-DOC-inmate, inflation-adjusted basis, funding for educational programs has increased since 2019



SOURCE: JLARC staff analysis of Appropriation Act data and DOC population summary reports.

NOTE: The inmate population was calculated using the year-to-date average daily population in DOC-operated facilities, as reported by DOC as of June of each fiscal year. Inflation-adjusted to 2025 dollars using CPI-U.

DOC is responsible for deciding how to allocate its education appropriations across facilities and central office education operations. DOC's finance division distributes funds for *personnel costs* directly to each facility and the central office education division based on the number of filled education positions. The agency's central office academic and CTE divisions manage the funds for *non-personnel costs* (e.g., textbooks, equipment, and other learning materials), allocating the majority of these funds across facilities at the beginning of each fiscal year and maintaining a small portion centrally to reimburse facilities for additional unexpected costs.

Providing educational programs in a correctional setting is challenging

An evaluation of the availability and effectiveness of correctional education programming must consider several unique challenges involved in providing these programs in a correctional environment. Factors outside the control of educational programs, such as facility security staff shortages and challenging inmate behaviors, can significantly impact the delivery of education.

Recently, DOC has faced significant staffing shortages at some of its facilities, which makes the implementation and expansion of correctional educational programs difficult without compromising security or safety. As of July 2025, DOC had 1,534 correctional officer vacancies, and 16 facilities had vacancy rates exceeding 20 percent. High vacancy rates among security officers can make it difficult to perform critical safety and security tasks related to the delivery of education programming, such as escorting inmates to and from classes, preventing the unsafe use of equipment and tools, and de-escalating potential conflicts.

Similarly, facilities may need to implement temporary or extended lockdowns to protect the safety of inmates and staff, which can affect the provision of educational programming. During lockdowns, inmates typically are required to remain in their cells, and normal inmate activities and programs are stopped or otherwise limited. For example, Wallens Ridge State Prison had a lockdown from May 2025 to September 2025 after several correctional officers were stabbed by inmates.

A significant portion of DOC inmates have needs or behavioral challenges that also make the effective and consistent delivery of educational programs more difficult than in a community setting. Inmates with mental health or substance use disorder diagnoses or histories are likely to have programming/treatment needs that take precedence over education. They are also more likely to be unable to participate fully in educational activities, especially if these other treatment/programming needs are not met first. According to DOC data, among inmates released from a DOC facility between 2023 and 2025:

- about 40 percent had a mental health impairment, and
- about half (48 percent) had a known history of opioid and/or cocaine use.

Inmates must also be able to engage productively with teachers and other inmates while in class, which can be particularly challenging for inmates with a history of frequent behavior issues while in DOC custody. Additionally, DOC staff must be strategic about placing inmates in a classroom together because conflicts among inmates are common. Behavioral problems, which risk the safety of teachers and other inmates, can be especially common at higher-security facilities.

Chapter 5 includes additional discussion on the various challenges that DOC wardens and principals face in implementing or expanding educational programs.

2 DOC's Adult Basic Education Program

State law requires the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide a program teaching the “skills necessary to function independently in society, including, but not limited to, reading, writing, comprehension, and arithmetic computation” for inmates testing below the 12th-grade level. DOC’s largest education program, adult basic education (ABE), focuses on academic skills up through GED attainment. Available at 34 of DOC’s 37 major facilities, the program is offered to inmates who do not have a verified high school credential and includes special education programming for any qualifying inmates (sidebar). Similar academic programs are offered in most federal and state adult correctional facilities nationwide, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

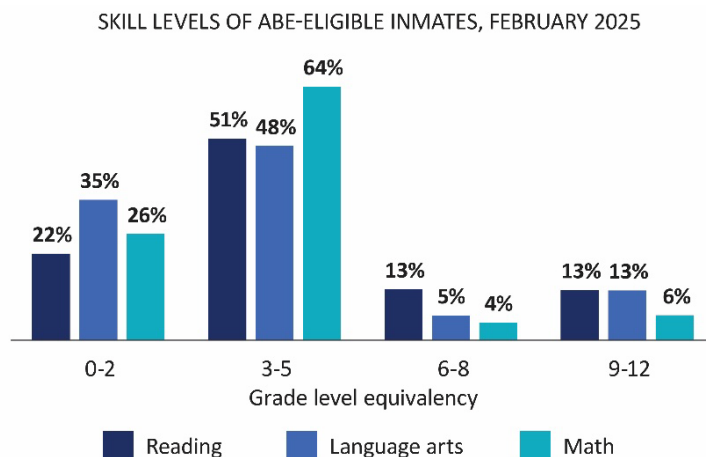
Many inmates at DOC facilities who do not have a high school credential have elementary-level reading, math, or language arts skills. Based on available DOC assessment data, most inmates enrolled in or on the waitlist for ABE have elementary-level reading (73 percent), language arts (82 percent), and math (90 percent) skills (Figure 2-1). However, data constraints prevent conclusions about the skill levels of all DOC inmates who do not have a high school credential (sidebar).

ABE is not available at Beaumont Correctional Center or the State Farm Enterprise Unit. Additionally, there were no active enrollments at Deerfield Men’s Work Center as of February 2025.

High school credentials may include a high school diploma or high school equivalency credential, such as a GED.

Skills assessment data was available for only about 40 percent of inmates who were enrolled in or on a waitlist for the ABE program for several reasons, including inconsistent administration of the skills assessment.

FIGURE 2-1
Many ABE-eligible inmates have elementary-level academic skills (February 2025)



SOURCE: JLARC staff analysis of DOC-provided data on the inmate population held in DOC facilities on February 28, 2025, and inmates’ GED and Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) assessment scores since 2020.

NOTE: “ABE-eligible inmates” include inmates at DOC facilities who were enrolled in or on a waitlist for ABE. JLARC determined inmates’ grade-level equivalences based on their most recent TABE scores or GED scores in the relevant subject area (tests taken since 2020). TABE scores were converted to a grade level based on the TABE 11&12 Grade Range Score Scale Guidance, and inmates at the GED level were included at the 9–12th grade level. TABE and GED scores were available for only about 40 percent of ABE-eligible inmates for each subject.

In FY25, the General Assembly allocated \$14.4 million for adult instruction at DOC, almost all of which comes from the general fund and goes toward the ABE program. DOC also receives about \$100,000 per year in federal grants for its special education students through the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

DOC employs ABE teachers, special education teachers, central office staff, and testing staff to support the ABE program. As of May 2025, DOC had 78 salaried ABE teacher positions, with most facilities having one to three positions. Fourteen facilities also have a special education teacher position. The assistant superintendent of academic programs and various ABE specialists (e.g., a special education coordinator, curriculum coordinator, etc.) support the program from the central office. Twenty-four testing staff provide GED testing, GED bootcamps, and other support for ABE across the state.

There is significant unmet inmate demand for ABE courses, and DOC does not ensure that inmates most likely to benefit are identified and enrolled

Inmates can be exempt from the requirement to participate in ABE based on their medical needs, age, or sustained lack of progress after enrollment. Additionally, some inmates refuse to participate. In February 2025, nearly 500 inmates were exempt, and only 74 inmates who were not enrolled or exempt had refused participation.

DOC policy requires nearly all inmates at DOC facilities without a verified high school credential to participate in ABE unless they are exempt (sidebar). DOC staff verify whether inmates have a high school credential as part of intake and assess the academic levels of inmates who do not have a credential. Inmates who are found to be eligible are supposed to be automatically enrolled in ABE or added to the waitlist if the program is full. Inmates who refuse to participate in ABE become ineligible for earned sentence credits—which can reduce inmates' sentences—and facility job opportunities.

About half of the approximately 5,000 identified ABE-eligible inmates are enrolled in the program

About half (52 percent) of inmates identified as eligible for ABE were enrolled in the program as of February 2025. About 2,650 inmates were enrolled in ABE, and another 2,400 inmates were on a waitlist for the program.

DOC began a new **Reading Enables All Learners program** in June 2024. This program provides one-on-one literacy tutoring for inmates on the ABE waitlist with low reading levels. In February 2025, the program was offered at 13 facilities and had 55 enrolled students.

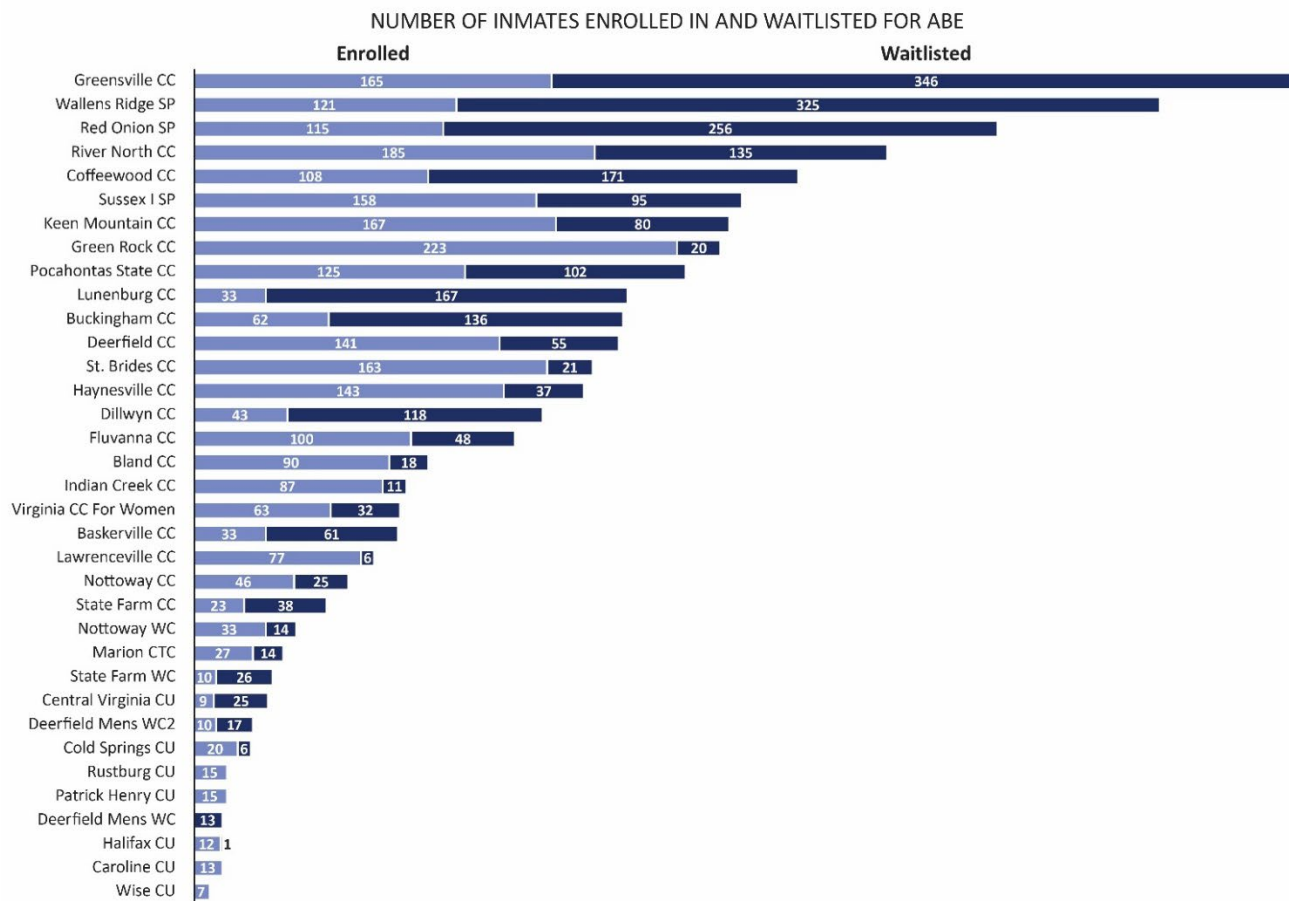
Comparing the number of ABE-eligible inmates who are enrolled versus waitlisted at each facility shows the variation in unmet need. At one-third of facilities, less than half of eligible inmates were enrolled in the program (Figure 2-2). For example, as of February 2025, there were more than five times as many inmates waitlisted as enrolled at Lunenburg Correctional Center. DOC has developed an inmate-led tutoring program for inmates on the ABE waitlist, but this program has so far been available to only a small subset of inmates (sidebar).

DOC's inability to enroll all ABE-eligible inmates is largely because of a lack of resources to expand enrollment, including a lack of instructors. For instance, in May 2025, DOC had 12 ABE teacher vacancies. Additionally, in survey responses, wardens

and principals reported that the lack of physical space for additional classrooms, security constraints, and IT limitations hinder program expansion. (See Chapter 5 for potential options for expanding program availability.)

FIGURE 2-2

Number of inmates enrolled in and waitlisted for ABE varies by facility (February 2025)



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC-provided data on the inmate population held in DOC facilities on February 28, 2025.

NOTE: "CC" = correctional center. "CU" = correctional unit. "CTC" = correctional treatment center, "SP" = state prison, and "WC" = work center. ABE is not offered at Beaumont Correctional Center and the State Farm Enterprise Unit facilities.

ABE enrollment decisions do not consider an inmate's assessed need for educational programs to reduce their risk of recidivating

DOC is not using available information about whether educational programs could reduce inmates' recidivism risk to prioritize ABE enrollment. In February 2025, there were approximately 1,400 inmates on the ABE program waitlist who were assessed by DOC through its risk and needs assessment to have a "probable" or "highly probable" need for educational or vocational programs to reduce their risk of reoffending. At the same time, 43 percent (or about 1,100) of inmates enrolled in ABE were assessed as "unlikely" to need educational programming to reduce their risk of reoffending.

Given the high need for ABE and the potential for improved outcomes (e.g., higher employment/wages and lower recidivism), DOC should include inmates' needs and risk assessment results among factors that are considered when making enrollment decisions for ABE classes. (See Chapter 5 for more discussion about this and other ways to improve enrollment prioritization, particularly Recommendation 18.)

Number of inmates needing ABE program is likely higher than identified by DOC because of issues with DOC's intake process

A substantial number of DOC inmates appear to have not been properly screened at intake for their ABE eligibility. By DOC policy, all inmates who lack a verified high school credential and are not exempt from participation should either be enrolled in ABE or placed on an ABE waitlist. However, as of February 2025, about 2,100 inmates who did not have a verified credential and were not exempt were neither enrolled in ABE nor on an ABE waitlist. Earlier years' data shows similar irregularities. The reasons for these irregularities likely vary by facility, according to DOC staff, but for the most part, they appear due to problems in the intake process.

These irregularities likely cause the true level of unmet need for ABE to be underestimated, particularly at some facilities. JLARC estimates, based on trends in high school credential attainment in the broader DOC inmate population, that at least a third of inmates who have not been properly screened would be ABE-eligible, which would increase the amount of unmet need at some facilities significantly (Figure 2-3). The facilities with the greatest numbers of inmates who appear to be eligible for ABE but who are not enrolled or waitlisted are at Nottoway, St. Brides, Greensville, and State Farm correctional centers.

To address this issue in the short term, DOC should undertake a one-time targeted review of inmate records for all inmates who do not have a verified high school credential and are not enrolled in the ABE program or on the program waitlist. The review should confirm that these inmates do not have a high school credential. For those who do not, DOC should assess their academic skill levels and either enroll them in ABE or place them on the waitlist.

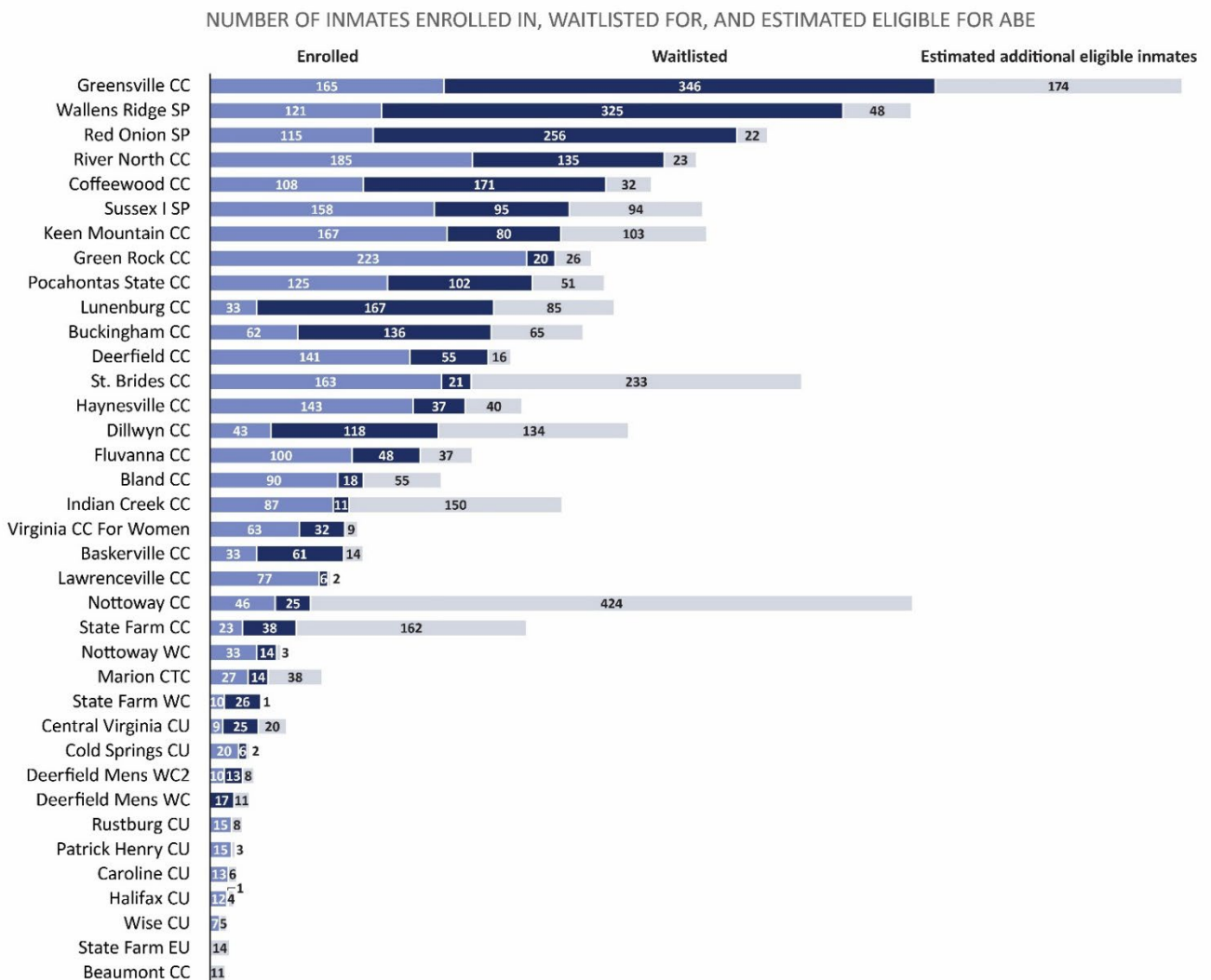
Enrollment in an ABE program could offer benefits beyond achieving a high school credential. DOC's CTE and postsecondary programs have academic prerequisites—such as functioning at a certain grade level or having earned a GED—so inmates who are mistakenly *not* enrolled in or waitlisted for ABE courses are also precluded from accessing these other educational opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Virginia Department of Corrections should conduct a one-time targeted review of inmate records to (i) identify all inmates who have not been properly screened for their eligibility for adult basic education (ABE) and (ii) either enroll all non-exempt, ABE-eligible inmates who are identified in the ABE program or place them on the program's waitlist.

FIGURE 2-3

**Estimated unmet need for ABE is higher than waitlists indicate at many facilities
(February 2025)**



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC-provided data on the inmate population held in DOC facilities on February 28, 2025.

NOTE: "CC" = correctional center. "CU" = correctional unit. "CTC" = correctional treatment center, "EU" = enterprise unit, "SP" = state prison, and "WC" = work center. ABE is not offered at Beaumont Correctional Center and the State Farm Enterprise Unit facilities. Nottoway's number of omitted inmates may be particularly high because the facility is DOC's largest intake center. Some Nottoway inmates may not have been screened for eligibility yet, or they may be awaiting assignment to a permanent facility.

According to DOC staff, recent intake irregularities have been caused by security incidents that disrupt the intake process. Because security incidents are expected in a correctional system, disruptions likely will continue at intake centers, where inmates are screened for eligibility for educational programming. DOC should still ensure that all inmates are screened for educational program eligibility as soon as possible after intake when security-related incidents or other circumstances prevent screening

from being conducted upon intake. For example, DOC central office staff could periodically identify, for principals, the inmates at their facility who do not have a verified high school credential, but who are neither enrolled in nor on the waitlist for the ABE program. This should prompt the principal to arrange for an educational assessment of these inmates.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Virginia Department of Corrections should take appropriate steps to ensure that, when circumstances prevent proper screening for adult basic education (ABE) eligibility upon initial intake, inmates are assessed for ABE eligibility as soon as practicable after intake and, if they are found eligible, enrolled in or placed on a waitlist for ABE.

ABE program aligns with curriculum and staffing standards, but professional development opportunities are lacking

An appropriate curriculum and trained instructors are key aspects of an effective education program. Program curricula outline the skills to be taught in the program, and teachers support students' learning of these skills. Meeting applicable program standards and implementing other best practices provide some reasonable assurances of an education program's overall quality.

ABE curriculum and assessments target the skills needed for work and postsecondary education

State law requires the ABE program to help inmates achieve the skills needed to function independently after their release. DOC policy requires the ABE curriculum to align with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (CCRS). Developed using federal funds, CCRS addresses skills that subject matter experts consider essential for work, postsecondary education, and citizenship. VDOE has adopted these standards for adult education instruction. Likewise, DOC has adopted CCRS as a central component of its ABE program, with 81 percent of surveyed DOC ABE teachers reporting that they use the curriculum "always" or "often" to teach their students.

Additionally, DOC's assessments to measure ABE students' skills from enrollment to program completion (Test of Adult Basic Education, or "TABE", and GED) are also aligned with CCRS and approved for use in adult education programs by the U.S. Department of Education and VDOE.

ABE teachers are fully licensed, exceeding state standards, but would benefit from greater professional development opportunities

DOC requirements for ABE teacher qualifications help assure a baseline competency of instruction in DOC's ABE programs. By DOC policy, all salaried ABE teachers must be fully licensed by VDOE (sidebar). This practice exceeds state law requirements for DOC as well as VDOE's requirements for teachers of its own ABE programs.

Three part-time ABE teachers were not fully licensed, but these staff do not lead ABE classes, according to DOC.

In addition to ensuring initial training qualifications, providing ongoing professional development for staff is also a best practice. The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) grant program requires adult education program recipients to provide “high quality professional development,” and VDOE further specifies the importance of providing this training for all program staff in its adult education program manager responsibilities manual. Ongoing training is also required for maintaining a teaching license in Virginia.

However, DOC ABE teachers and other education staff have expressed concerns about the lack of DOC's professional development opportunities. DOC canceled this past summer's scheduled annual in-person professional development conference for ABE teachers because of reported funding constraints, and similar training in prior years has also been cut because of funding-related reasons. DOC has provided some other training opportunities in the past few years, including shorter regional trainings and a weeklong math training with UVA Wise. DOC teachers are also able to participate in non-DOC trainings. However, just under half of DOC's ABE teachers reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their professional development opportunities in a JLARC survey, which was the aspect of their job with which they were least satisfied. Staff particularly reported needing training for meeting student needs (e.g., working with students with disabilities, non-native English speakers, and students at lower academic levels).

DOC should set aside adequate funding each year for ABE and special education teacher training. Providing professional development would not substantially strain the program's resources. For instance, the in-person professional development conference would cost about \$35,000 annually—or 0.2 percent of the budget for adult instruction. Instead of dedicating funds to professional development, DOC has prioritized funding for other educational activities, such as increased student testing (described in detail later in this chapter). Setting aside professional development funding at the beginning of the fiscal year could ensure teachers receive adequate professional development and are well prepared to assist ABE students.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Virginia Department of Corrections should annually utilize a portion of its educational programming budget to provide professional development to its adult basic education teachers.

ABE curriculum, staffing, and other practices are routinely monitored

Regular and thorough program oversight is essential for ABE programs to identify and address any potential program challenges or shortcomings. The American Correctional Association (ACA), a national professional organization that accredits correctional facilities, performs audits of DOC facilities on a three-year rotation. As part of this review, ACA reviews the ABE program's curriculum, teacher credentials, inmate assessments, and other policies.

DOC staff also routinely observe ABE classrooms. Before each ACA audit, DOC central office academics staff also conduct a structured review of the facility's ABE program. Additionally, principals and regional education administrators are expected to conduct regular formal and informal observations of ABE classrooms.

Recent ABE participants had somewhat better immediate employment outcomes than waitlisted inmates; wage and rearrest outcomes were similar

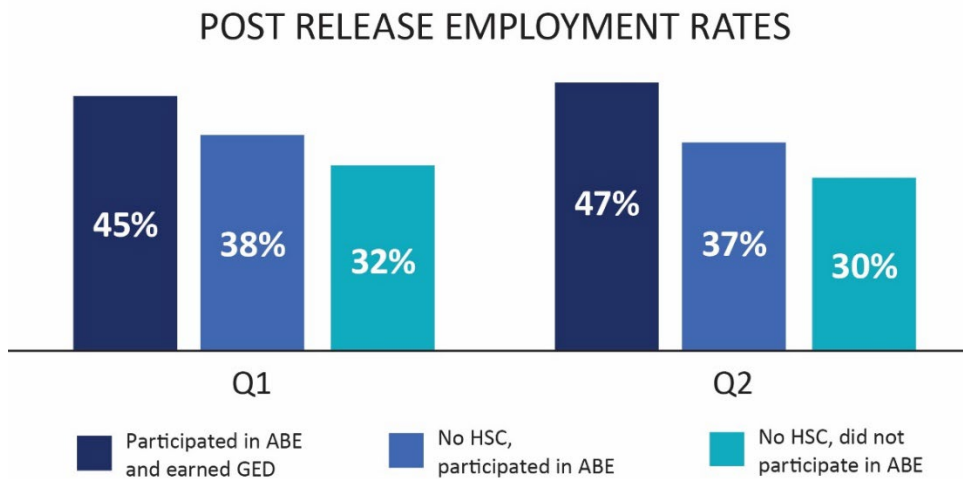
According to state law, all DOC programs are intended to help inmates obtain gainful employment and successfully transition to society after release. Additionally, DOC policy specifies that the goal of the ABE program is to help inmates adjust to society and be less likely to recidivate. National research indicates that ABE programs can help to improve inmates' recidivism outcomes and may help to increase employment rates. For instance, a RAND meta-analysis study of correctional education outcomes in 2018 estimated that ABE programs can reduce the likelihood of recidivism by about 30 percent, and that academic programs, including ABE, may increase employment rates.

Recently released ABE participants in Virginia had higher employment rates after release than inmates who were on the program's waitlist but did not enroll (sidebar). For example, 47 percent of recent ABE participants who earned a GED and 37 percent of ABE participants who did not earn their GED became employed in the second full quarter after release, compared with 30 percent of waitlisted inmates (Figure 2-4). GED earners and other ABE participants were also nine and six percentage points, respectively, more likely to have been employed each quarter throughout the follow-up period than waitlisted inmates. JLARC conducted a more sophisticated analysis of these differences, accounting for relevant factors, such as inmate demographics, incarceration details, and gang affiliation. Even after accounting for these factors, program completion is still associated with higher employment rates. (See Appendix B for more information on JLARC's methodology.)

ABE-waitlisted inmates were used as a comparison group for this analysis because they have similar educational levels and have the same DOC incentives to participate. This helps ensure differences in post-release outcomes are likely to be driven by the effects of program participation.

FIGURE 2-4

ABE participants—particularly GED earners—were more likely to be employed in the first two full quarters after release, April 2022–September 2024



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC-provided program participation and employment outcomes data for inmates released between April 2022 and September 2024 who spent at least some of their sentence at a DOC facility.

NOTE: "HSC" = high school credential. "Q1" and "Q2" refer to the first two full calendar quarters after an inmate's release. Participation in ABE is based on whether the inmate enrolled in ABE since mid-March 2022; some inmates in any of these groups may have participated in the program before this date.

However, ABE participants' wages and rearrest rates appear similar to those of wait-listed inmates. Among inmates who became employed after their release, wages were similar across GED earners, other ABE participants, and waitlisted inmates. Additionally, the median wages for all these groups fell below the approximate \$7,100 needed in quarterly income for self-sufficiency in Virginia (sidebar). Rearrest rates were slightly lower for ABE participants 12 months after release, with 27 and 28 percent of GED earners and other ABE participants rearrested, respectively, compared to 31 percent of waitlisted inmates. Any minor differences in wages and rearrest rates were not statistically significant.

These employment and rearrest trends among recent DOC releasees are in line with the DOC Research Unit's recent publication on outcomes of inmates who earned their GED at a DOC facility before being released in FY20.

DOC has increased GED attainment in recent years, but needs to ensure sufficient support is provided for lower-level learners

While employment and recidivism outcomes are important to consider for ABE participants, measures of participants' skill gains while in the ABE program more directly indicate whether it is achieving its statutory purpose. For inmates in the ABE program who are at higher levels (e.g., 11th and 12th grade), skill gains may be indicated by GED

The Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington's self-sufficiency standard identifies the income required to meet basic needs, considering household composition and local costs of living. Their most recent self-sufficiency standard for a single-person household in Virginia, adjusted for inflation, was about \$7,100. Compared to other self-sufficiency standards, such as the "ALICE Threshold" used by the Virginia Department of Social Services, the standard used in this report's analyses is more conservative because it assumes a comparatively lower level of income is needed to avoid relying on public assistance.

attainment. For inmates at lower levels (e.g., 1st or 2nd grade), skill gains are typically indicated by increases in standardized test scores, as discussed below.

Over the past several years, DOC has emphasized increasing inmate attainment of GEDs, which has contributed to a substantial increase in the number of inmates at DOC facilities who have earned their GED. However, according to available data and central office and facility staff, the emphasis on GED testing has contributed to an increase in testing of students who are not ready and an imbalance of focus in the program. Resources, including funding and staff time, that have been allocated to an increasing number of unsuccessful test attempts could otherwise be used to support lower-level learners, who comprise the largest portion of ABE-eligible inmates.

Number of inmates earning GEDs has increased, but falling pass rates and staff concerns indicate need for revised approach to testing

Widely accepted by employers and postsecondary institutions, GED attainment indicates a measurable skill gain and completion of secondary education. In Virginia, the GED is currently the only high school equivalency credential that has been approved by the Virginia Board of Education. A student attains a GED by passing each of four GED subject tests: reasoning through language arts, mathematical reasoning, science, and social studies.

DOC increased the number of inmates earning a GED in recent years, and was able to do this partially through increased testing

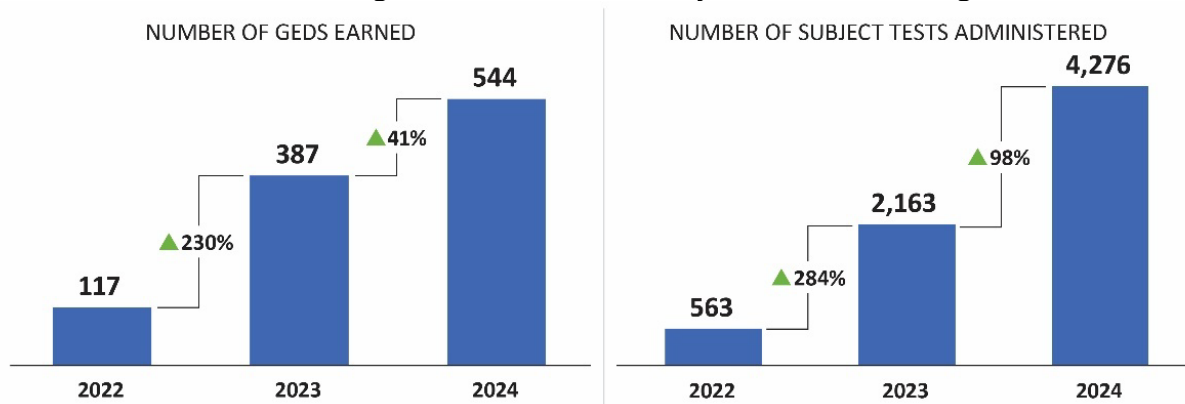
In recent years, DOC has placed a greater emphasis on GED attainment, including setting a goal “to obtain 1,000 GEDs or more” between January 2024 and March 2025. To help meet this goal, DOC revised its policies for assessing student eligibility for testing and increased staffing and funding for GED testing.

Substantially more DOC inmates have earned a GED in recent years. While 117 inmates earned their GED in 2022, this number increased more than fourfold to 544 in 2024. Additionally, more inmates are making progress toward their GED than in previous years. In 2024, 320 inmates who did not earn their full GED still passed at least one GED subject test while in DOC custody, up from 106 the year prior.

DOC appears to have increased GED attainment at least partially through increased testing. The rise in GED attainment coincided with an even greater rise in the number of GED subject tests administered, which peaked at nearly 4,300 in 2024 (Figure 2-5).

FIGURE 2-5

More DOC inmates are earning their GED, facilitated by increases in testing



SOURCE: DOC data on GED tests taken at DOC facilities from January 1, 2022 to May 1, 2025.

Declining pass rates and concerns from DOC central office staff, principals, and teachers indicate that a substantial proportion of students are being tested before they are ready

Although GED attainment has increased, changes in GED test results indicate students are more frequently taking GED tests before they are ready or that the program is not preparing students as well for the GED. These trends include:

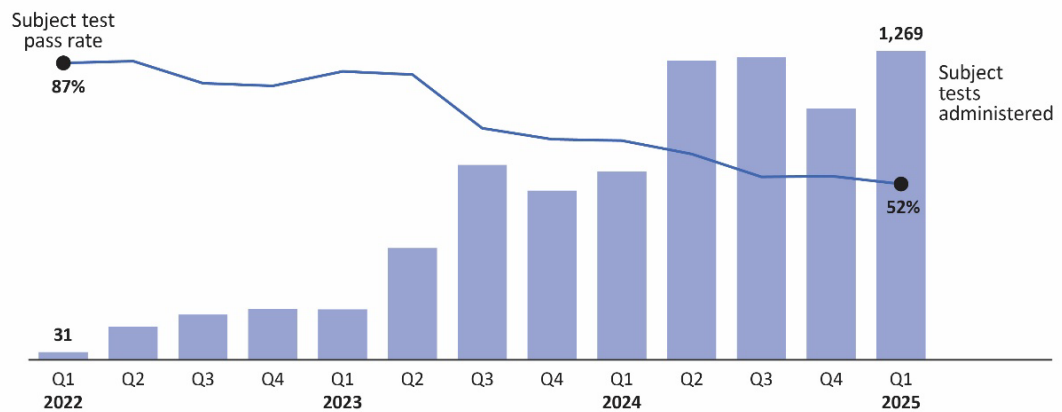
- Declining pass rates** - The percentage of *subject tests passed* at DOC facilities fell from 87 percent in the first quarter of 2022 to 52 percent in the first quarter of 2025 (Figure 2-6). This decline occurred across all four subject tests. Additionally, the program has yet to return to its pre-COVID *GED pass rate* (sidebar). (See Appendix G for more information on trends in pass rates by subject test.)
- Increasing numbers of unsuccessful retakes** - The proportion of subject tests administered at DOC facilities that are “retakes” has increased significantly, from less than 5 percent of tests in 2022 to over a quarter of tests in 2024. Students who retake tests also do not appear ready for the tests, as retake attempts have lower subject test pass rates than initial attempts.
- Declining scores among those who pass subject tests** - Test takers who pass subject tests with particularly high scores earn distinctions of “College Ready” or “College Ready + Credits” (sidebar). In 2022, 11 percent of subject tests administered at DOC facilities resulted in these distinctions, but in 2024, less than 3 percent did. Additionally, median scores on passed subject tests have decreased slightly in recent years.

The GED pass rate reflects the percentage of test takers who have taken all four subject tests and earned their GED, regardless of whether or how often they retook any of the subject tests before passing. Pre-COVID, DOC's annual overall pass rates were in the low 80s, but since COVID, pass rates have not exceeded the low 70s.

GED College Ready and GED College Ready + Credit recognize students for demonstrating higher skill proficiency than the minimal passing level. Some postsecondary institutions may waive remediation or placement tests or grant college credit to students achieving these score levels.

FIGURE 2-6

DOC's GED subject test pass rates are declining, indicating a greater proportion of students may be taking tests before they are ready



SOURCE: DOC data on GED tests taken at DOC facilities from January 2022–March 2025.

NOTE: A test taker needs a score of 145 or higher to pass a subject test and must pass four subject tests to attain a GED.

Some DOC ABE teachers have reported positive impacts from the GED emphasis, including easier access to testing, helpful bootcamps, and greater prioritization of education programming.

The policy changes have enabled me to qualify my students much more quickly, which in turn has made me focus much more on GED level content. (DOC ABE teacher)

I have been more supported in my teaching. There was an urgency in getting students to class. (DOC ABE teacher)

This year, we started focusing on subject area bootcamps which have proven successful in getting students prepared to pass the subject area GED tests. Bootcamps have been the most successful endeavor to prepare students to earn passing scores on GED tests. (DOC ABE teacher)

However, some central office staff and education staff at about half of the facilities providing ABE programming expressed concerns about the recent emphasis on GED attainment, including its adverse effects on the quality of education students are receiving. One common area of concern was increased pressure to test students before they are ready. The following statements highlight concerns raised by DOC staff in interviews, surveys, and site visits about testing:

This emphasis on GED completions is placing pressure on teachers to test students before they are ready or multiple times to get that pass. This increases failures and people retaking the GED multiple times. Memorization then kicks in, so students aren't actually attaining the skills/knowledge that the GED is testing, which is really the skills they need to be successful out in the real world. (DOC central office staff)

There is a push for competition between facilities, which causes educators to bypass learning concepts and just push, push, and push students to memorization. Many educators cram information into students to get them to pass the GED test, and if they are not able to take the test right after information has been given, students are not able to pass the test. (DOC ABE teacher)

We're pushing students to achieve minimal passing scores rather than building lasting analytical skills that support successful reentry. Some are repeatedly re-tested without sufficient time for meaningful remediation. (DOC testing staff)

Some test failures are expected for any test, but a 50 percent pass rate raises questions about the preparedness of students and the use of the ABE program's limited resources (e.g., staff time and facility space). DOC's research staff have noticed these declining subject test pass rates and determined in a recent internal report that "there could be substantial savings by potentially lowering the number of failed exams."

Repeated failed tests may have adverse effects on inmates who are not ready to take them (sidebar). National research indicates that failing high-stakes assessments can adversely impact students' mental health, reduce their self-confidence, and cause them to drop out of school. Several interviewed stakeholders, including DOC central office and facility staff, indicated that many inmates enrolled in or eligible for the ABE program already lack self-confidence, so repeated poor performance and retakes are likely especially demotivating to this population.

Adjustments to DOC's GED testing approach could ensure student readiness to test and promote improvements to program quality

DOC could more strategically administer GED testing and avoid wasted testing costs. Test score trends and staff concerns indicate that many students are taking GED tests before they are ready. In early 2024, DOC reduced the requirements students must meet before taking a GED subject test. However, students may not even be meeting these reduced requirements before they are taking the tests, according to DOC data trends and interviews and surveys with some DOC education staff.

Requiring inmates to take a readiness assessment before testing for the GED aligns with common practices and is a more efficient use of public resources. In addition, DOC's research staff have already identified readiness assessments as an option to reduce unnecessary testing costs. VDOE requires its adult education program participants to attain a qualifying score on the official GED practice test before they can take a GED test using state funds. Additionally, the Federal Bureau of Prisons and at least nine other states require inmates to achieve a minimal score on an assessment before being allowed to take a high school equivalency test. In its previously mentioned internal report, DOC research staff determined that implementing the lower-cost GED practice test before the actual GED test could yield "substantial savings" for the agency.

"Failures are detrimental to academic progress more than you realize. If a student has reached us without already earning a high school diploma or GED, they have had lots of failure. Giving them confidence and restoring faith in themselves is a major goal for academic teachers."

– DOC ABE teacher

Because of continuing declines in subject test pass rates and the need to ensure it uses public funds as efficiently as possible, DOC should develop and implement an improved approach to assessing student readiness for the GED. It should include an assessment that reliably predicts students' likelihood of passing the GED that is used at all facilities. DOC's approach for assessing student readiness should be periodically reviewed by central office education staff.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) develop and implement an improved approach for assessing student readiness to take the GED test that reliably predicts students' likelihood of passing the GED and ensures consistency across facilities, and (ii) review and revise its approach for assessing student readiness on an ongoing basis as needed.

Furthermore, low pass rates may indicate that the material inmates need to pass the GED is not always effectively taught. In such cases, additional instructor training or instructional time should be given to the skill areas in which students are consistently performing poorly.

DOC should monitor students' GED results to determine if there are skills gaps that need to be addressed through instruction. In addition to providing scores, GED results include detailed feedback on test takers' skill gaps, even if they receive a passing score. DOC should monitor these score reports for areas where DOC students are consistently underperforming. Once identified, central office education staff can use this information to inform curriculum, learning materials, and teacher professional development decisions to address any program-wide instructional gaps. Additionally, these score reports should be shared with and reviewed by principals and teachers to inform their facility-level program practices.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) monitor GED score reports to identify any skills that are not being consistently acquired by test takers, (ii) use this information to inform program curriculum, learning material, and teacher training decisions if skill gaps are identified, and (iii) share these reports with principals and teachers to inform programming at their facilities.

Overemphasis on GED testing could be diverting attention and resources needed for students at lower academic levels to progress

The increased focus on GED testing appears to be contributing to issues related to the programming provided for students at lower academic levels. As noted previously, most students in the ABE program are assessed to be at elementary academic levels, and DOC facility and central office staff expressed concerns about how the recent

emphasis on GED attainment has diverted some attention away from lower-level students and their performance. The following statements reflect concerns from staff at various levels about the effect of focusing on students at the GED level:

This attempt to chase improved numbers has resulted in more GEDs obtained than ever before, but I worry that the cost has been that lower-achieving students and ESL students have been pushed to the side. I know in my classes they are not the focus because we have been given a quota to meet. (DOC ABE teacher)

Adult students progress at their own pace and often require months or even years of intense instruction and remediation to reach their educational goals. If we view the success of educational programs only in terms of GED graduates, we are doomed to fail. (DOC principal)

We can't get [lower-level students] in the classroom, because it has to be packed full of people who are close to their GED. (DOC central office staff)

As noted below, DOC has not been consistently collecting data on skill gains among ABE participants who are not at the GED level, but the limited available data indicates that academic progress in the ABE program has declined by a small amount in recent years. Among students who enrolled in ABE in 2022 for at least six months and for whom data was available, 36 percent improved by at least one reading grade level in the first six months (sidebar). This percentage had declined to 32 percent of inmates who enrolled in 2024 for at least six months. Rates of math grade level improvement in the first six months of enrollment similarly declined, from 38 percent in 2022 to 33 percent in 2024. While these trends could be caused by several factors, and not necessarily DOC's focus on GED attainment, they indicate the need for additional attention to the quality of education for inmates at lower academic levels.

Reallocating some resources currently used to test inmates unprepared to take the GED to educational programming at lower academic levels would be more cost effective. Inmates at lower academic levels are more likely to reoffend than those at higher academic levels who are approaching readiness for the GED. According to prior DOC analyses, inmates released in FY20 with skill levels below a second-grade level were reincarcerated within three years at almost three times the rate of inmates at the 11th and 12th-grade level (29.6 percent versus 10.8 percent). Similarly, employment rates among inmates released in FY20 with lower skill levels (through the fourth grade) were between nine and 19 percentage points lower than those of inmates at the 11th and 12th-grade level.

Additionally, research suggests little to no difference in outcomes between inmates who earned a GED certificate and inmates who reached the high school level but had not yet earned a GED. DOC's research showed similar recidivism and employment outcomes for inmates released in FY20 who had earned a GED (11.1 percent reincarcerated and 68 percent employed within three years) and those who reached a high school level on the TABE test but had not earned their GED (10.8 percent reincarcerated and 68 percent employed within three years). Similarly, a study of inmates in

For this analysis, a **grade level improvement** includes an increase in TABE score to a higher grade level, according to the TABE 11&12 Grade Range Score Scale Guidance, or passage of the relevant GED subject test.

Missouri found only temporary employment advantages for GED earners compared with those who participated in the academic program but who had not passed the GED test, with no impact on wages.

These findings suggest that *less* GED testing may not negatively impact the post-release outcomes of inmates. Instead, reducing some GED testing could potentially enable DOC to better achieve all of the objectives of its ABE program. However, DOC would need to reprogram some of its current resources for testing toward improving instruction for lower-level learners.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Virginia Department of Corrections should take steps within its adult basic education program to place a greater emphasis on (i) improving lower-functioning inmates' foundational literacy skills and progression from one academic grade level to the next and (ii) teaching students the skills and material necessary to earn their GED, and place less of an emphasis on frequently administering GED tests.

DOC has inconsistently collected data needed to evaluate the effectiveness of ABE for most inmates

DOC should have a meaningful performance measure for its ABE program aside from GED attainment, such as performance on TABE tests. Having an additional performance measure—one that allows it to measure the academic gains of all ABE participants, not just those at higher academic levels—would be a better overall measure of the program's performance and complement the GED attainment measure.

ABE programs in the community and in correctional settings commonly use “educational functioning level gains” to assess both individual progress and overall program performance. This indicator measures changes in standardized test scores (e.g., through a TABE assessment) or progress toward a high school credential (e.g., passing individual GED subject tests) (sidebar).

The “educational functioning level gains” indicator is the only skill gain information relevant for many DOC ABE participants. As outlined previously in this chapter, the majority of DOC inmates who are enrolled in or waitlisted for ABE are at elementary skills levels and are not close to ready to attain their GED (sidebar).

DOC currently lacks consistent data to accurately measure inmates' academic improvement. Despite DOC policy requiring quarterly TABE testing, pre- and post-TABE scores were available after the first six months of enrollment for only about 10 percent of ABE students who were enrolled for at least that duration since March 2022.

TABE is a nationally recognized standardized assessment for measuring educational functioning level gains in adult education programs. It has been approved by VDOE for use among adult education programs in Virginia.

Fewer than 15 percent of inmates who participated in ABE between March 2022 and their release in 2024 earned their GED before release.

To ensure that DOC education leadership has adequate information to assess the skill gains of all ABE participants—not just those preparing to take GED tests—the education operations staff in DOC's central office should determine why TABE testing is not occurring and take the necessary steps to ensure testing is regularly administered.

Once sufficient data is available, DOC should use it to evaluate ABE program performance statewide and at each facility, including identifying areas of underperformance (e.g., skill areas or facilities) and developing strategies to improve it. To ensure that DOC leadership is aware the ABE program's performance, the agency should ensure that its leaders regularly receive detailed, facility-level data on TABE improvement rates, just as they currently do with reports on GED attainment by facility.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) regularly assess adult basic education program participants using the Test of Adult Basic Education, or a comparable assessment, (ii) use test score data to measure program performance and identify needed program improvements, and (iii) as with GED reports, require regular reports to DOC leadership on trends in inmates' education gains, by facility, and by grade level.

3 Career and Technical Education Programs

State law requires the Department of Corrections (DOC) to provide inmates with opportunities to participate in career and technical education (CTE) programs to the extent feasible. CTE programs are intended to prepare participants for specific careers by providing them with the academic knowledge, technical skills, and hands-on training needed to pursue employment in those occupations (sidebar). The programs also offer opportunities to obtain industry-recognized credentials required for the targeted occupations.

In FY25, DOC was allocated \$15.3 million for CTE programs, accounting for 42 percent of its total education appropriation. Almost all of the funds came from the state general fund, though approximately \$157,000 in federal funds were included in the CTE budget. Funding was relatively stable between FY16 and FY24 for these programs after adjusting for inflation. In FY25, DOC received an additional \$2.1 million to expand its CTE offerings by using mobile trailers (see Chapter 5 for more information on this initiative). CTE programs also generate revenue and use it to pay for miscellaneous program costs, such as course materials, equipment, and, in some cases, tools for inmates to help them obtain employment after release. This revenue is generated through the sale of products and services provided through the CTE programs.

Most of DOC's facilities offer CTE programs, and the courses offered at each facility vary. Thirty-one of DOC's 37 major correctional facilities (84 percent) provide these programs, with each facility offering an average of four different programs. There are 31 different types of CTE programs being offered across these facilities, with the most common programs being Business Software Applications and Introduction to Computers (each offered at 16 facilities), followed by Custodial Maintenance and Electrical (each offered at 10 facilities).

Each program is taught by a DOC-employed CTE instructor, and most positions were filled as of April 2025. At the time, DOC employed 102 CTE instructors—98 salaried and four part-time instructors—and had 16 CTE instructor vacancies. The eastern region had the most vacancies with eight, while the western region had the fewest with three. (Chapter 5 discusses opportunities to address these vacancies.)

Each CTE program requires inmates to meet specific academic requirements and a remaining sentence long enough to complete the program. Academic prerequisites range from fifth- and sixth-grade reading and math levels to a high school diploma or its equivalent. Completion times vary by inmate and program, but program lengths typically run from three months to 28 months, with a median expected completion time of 12 months (sidebar).

For this chapter, **CTE programs refer to vocational training programs**. DOC also offers other types of CTE, including industry certification courses and apprenticeships. Between January 2024 and May 2025, approximately 350 inmates began an industry certification or apprenticeship program, compared to 4,019 inmates who started a vocational training program.

CTE programs differ from DOC work certification programs, like Virginia Correctional Enterprises (VCE) and Agribusiness. While work certification programs provide hands-on work experience, CTE programs teach the skills needed to qualify for a specific job.

The expected length of time to complete a CTE program accounts for common correctional disruptions, such as lockdowns and other security-related programming delays.

Not many inmates participate in CTE programs before release, and most programs have waitlists

A relatively small proportion of inmates participate in CTE programs while incarcerated at DOC facilities. Around 1,100 inmates released in 2024 (16 percent) participated in a CTE program shortly before their release. Since programs resumed in March 2022 following the pandemic, inmate participation has steadily increased, and the proportion of participating inmates is in line with or above neighboring states.

Waitlist data likely underestimates the actual level of inmate interest in CTE programs because inmates can only be on one CTE waitlist at a time and are required to be at the facility where the specific program is offered.

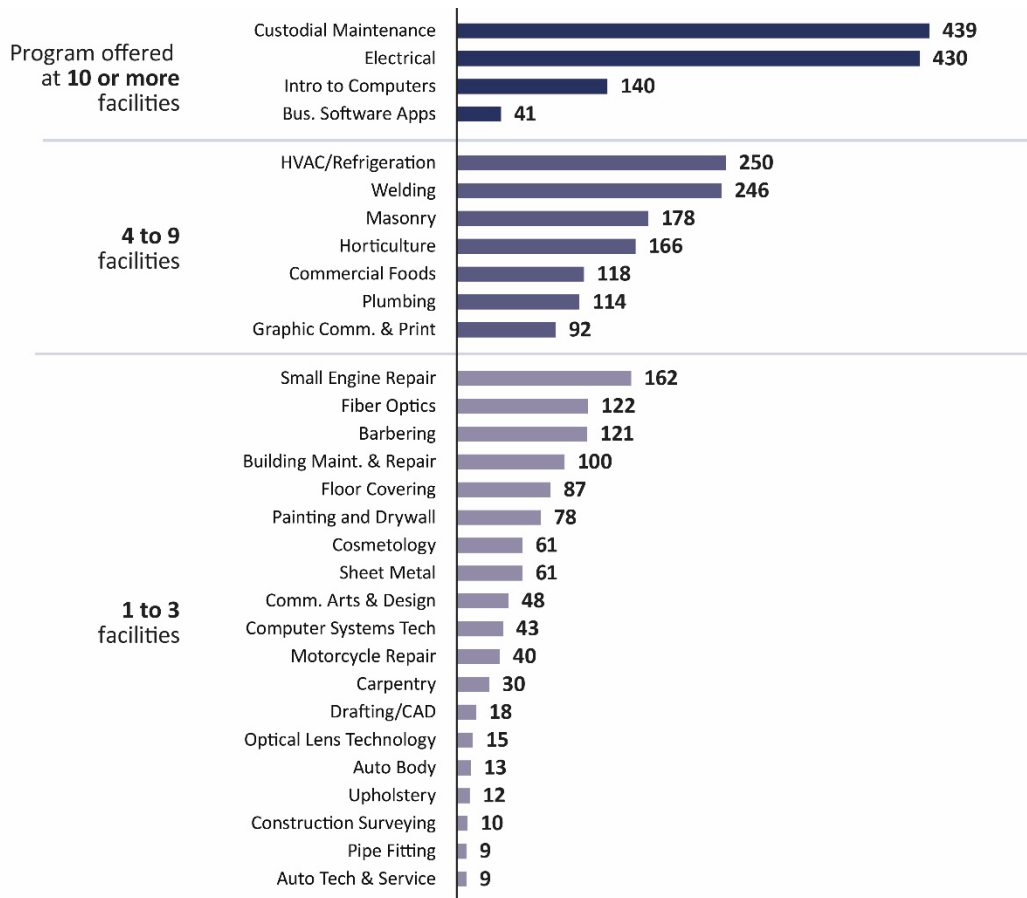
The most common programs former inmates had been waiting to participate in include Small Engine Repair, Electric, Custodial Maintenance, Plumbing, Masonry, and Welding.

DOC waitlist data suggests that inmate demand for CTE programs far exceeds enrollment capacity. In February 2025, for example, 3,252 inmates were on a CTE program waitlist—more than double the number of inmates enrolled at the time (1,509) (sidebar). Almost all CTE programs across DOC facilities (116 of 127 or 91 percent) had waitlists. The largest waitlists were for Custodial Maintenance, Electrical, Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration (HVAC/R), Welding, and Masonry (Figure 3-1).

Many inmates are never admitted to a CTE program before they are released, including some DOC has determined need further education or training to reduce their likelihood of reoffending. Nine percent of all inmates released from a DOC facility in 2024 (623 inmates) were on a CTE waitlist but were not able participate in those programs before release (sidebar). Thirty-nine percent of these inmates were determined by DOC's assessments to need educational or vocational programming to reduce their risk of reoffending.

Several operational constraints contribute to DOC's capacity limitations. Facility space limitations, inadequate IT infrastructure and availability, and shortages of instructional and security staff were the most reported barriers to expanding CTE offerings. (Chapter 5 of this report provides a detailed analysis of these constraints and outlines specific strategies to address them.)

Additionally, as described in chapters 2 and 5 of this report, DOC could include among the factors used to make CTE course enrollment decisions whether inmates need educational or vocational programming to reduce their likelihood of reoffending. Filling available program slots with the inmates who are most likely to benefit from CTE programming would ensure that DOC is making the most efficient and effective use of its limited CTE program capacity.

FIGURE 3-1**Many CTE programs have substantial waitlists statewide (as of February 2025)**

SOURCE: JLARC staff analysis of DOC inmate snapshot data (February 28, 2025).

NOTE: This figure presents waitlists for CTE programs that were active as of February 2025, rather than the current CTE inventory. Pipefitting and Sheet Metal are no longer offered at DOC facilities as standalone programs; these programs were either terminated because of difficulty recruiting CTE instructors or had their competencies incorporated into other CTE programs, like Plumbing or HVAC/Refrigeration.

Recent DOC CTE program completers had somewhat better short-term outcomes than waitlisted inmates

Evaluating the effectiveness of DOC's CTE programs requires analyzing inmates' post-release employment and recidivism outcomes. These metrics provide the most direct measure of whether the programs are achieving the statutory goal to assist "prisoners in the successful transition to free society and gainful employment" (sidebar).

Inmates who completed a CTE program were more likely to be employed after release than inmates who wanted to participate in a program but were unable to do so (Figure 3-2) (sidebar). For example, 49 percent of recent CTE program completers were employed in the second full quarter after release, compared with 44 percent of those who had been waitlisted for a CTE program but never enrolled (sidebar). Similar trends are

This outcomes analysis focuses on inmates released since April 2022 to ensure the findings reflect DOC's current CTE programming. Employment and recidivism data are available up until December 2024 and December 2023, respectively. More recent data is not available because of data reporting lags.

See Appendix B for more details.

This outcomes analysis focuses on CTE program completers, who make up around half of all participants. Between January 2024 and May 2025, the overall completion rate for CTE programs was 47 percent.

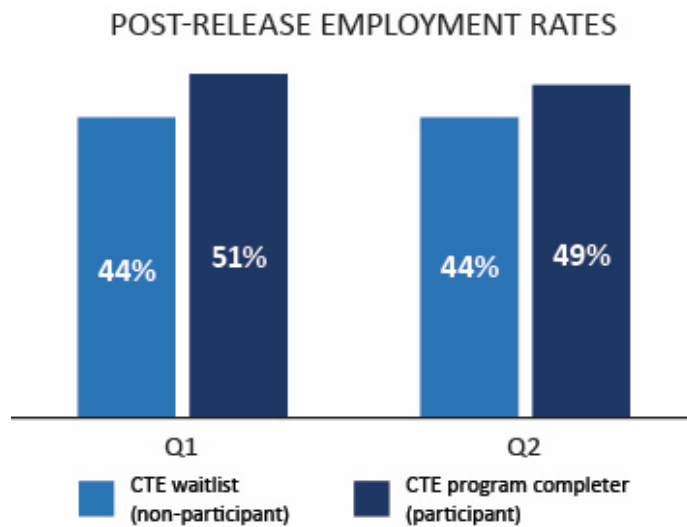
Waitlisted inmates for CTE programs were used as the comparison group for this analysis because they had similar educational backgrounds and motivation to further their employability skills as those in CTE programs. This helps ensure differences in post-release outcomes are more likely to be driven by program participation rather than other individual characteristics.

Data limitations prevented JLARC staff from analyzing whether CTE program completers secured jobs in the fields related to their CTE program.

found when looking at employment rates by CTE career clusters. Additionally, CTE program completers also maintained employment at a higher rate, staying employed for an average of 42 percent of all post-release quarters, versus 38 percent for the waitlisted group. JLARC conducted a more sophisticated analysis of these differences, accounting for relevant factors, such as inmate demographics, incarceration details, and gang affiliation. After using techniques to account for these factors, program completion is still associated with higher rates of employment.

FIGURE 3-2

CTE program completers had higher employment rates than waitlisted inmates



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC employment outcomes data (April 2022 through September 2024 releases).

NOTE: The number of quarters after release that were available for analysis varied based on an inmate's release date. The maximum amount of time data is available for an inmate was nine quarters. This employment data is collected through VEC, which does not include individuals who are self-employed, independent contractors, or employed through a few other types of avenues.

Employed CTE program completers also earned higher wages on average than those on waitlists. CTE completers who were employed after release earned, on average, \$489 more per quarter than inmates waitlisted for a CTE program. Additionally, the average quarterly wages of employed CTE program completers met Virginia's self-sufficiency level for a single-person household (~\$7,100) by their second quarter after release. After using more sophisticated techniques to account for demographic and other relevant factors, program completion is still associated with higher post-release wages.

The cohort used for rearrest outcomes differs from that of employment outcomes because there is a larger lag in reporting rearrests to DOC for former inmates.

Inmates who completed CTE programs while incarcerated also had lower rearrest rates than those who had been waitlisted but never enrolled in a CTE program. Among inmates released between April 2022 and December 2023, 18 percent of CTE program completers were re-arrested within 12 months of release, compared with 28 percent of non-participants (sidebar). However, these differences were not statistically significant.

These findings generally align with prior analyses by DOC and available national research. For inmates released in FY20, DOC's Research Unit found that CTE program completers were employed at higher rates, earned more than non-participants, and had lower recidivism rates. National research literature also indicates that inmates who participate in CTE programs tend to have higher employment and lower recidivism rates post-release than non-participants.

DOC's CTE programs are generally well designed and overseen, but some improvements could support better outcomes

Although CTE completers had better outcomes than inmates who remained on wait-lists, many did not find or maintain employment within the first year of release, a critical factor for successful reentry into the community. (Maintaining employment includes being employed over time, either at the same or different employers.) Among inmates who recently completed DOC CTE programs:

- 49 percent were not employed in the first quarter after release (releases between April 2022 and September 2024), and
- 67 percent did not maintain employment for all four quarters after release (releases between April 2022 and December 2023).

Although post-release employment outcomes are influenced by factors outside DOC's control, the agency could take additional steps to help inmates obtain relevant and gainful employment. Providing well-designed and implemented CTE programs can teach inmates in-demand skills and credentials that increase their likelihood of securing employment upon release. Targeted reentry support that connects program completers directly with employers in their respective fields can also bridge the gap between earning relevant credentials and securing a job.

DOC's CTE programs have qualified instructors, relevant curricula and technology, and oversight

Qualified instructors are important to ensure CTE programs teach skills that align with those needed in the workforce. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) requires a DOC CTE instructor to be at least provisionally licensed within the first year of hiring (sidebar). A CTE instructor license requires at least two years of recent work experience and necessary credentials or licenses in the instructors' respective CTE fields.

DOC's CTE instructors meet VDOE's requirements for these positions. As of September 2025, nearly all instructors were either fully (68 instructors) or provisionally (25) licensed. Three of these provisionally licensed teachers were in the process of obtaining their full license. An additional four CTE instructors were not currently licensed but were in the process of qualifying for a license.

The use of provisionally licensed instructors can be expected as CTE instructors typically have professional backgrounds in the industries they teach, rather than teaching backgrounds.

DOC reviews and updates the curriculum and equipment needs for each of its CTE programs on a staggered, three-year cycle to ensure they align with current industry standards and offer in-demand credentials. CTE instructors, in coordination with central office staff, lead these reviews. These staff determine whether any changes are needed to the competencies, job titles, or certifications of their programs based on current industry practices and labor market demands. All suggested revisions must be approved by the CTE advisory committee, which is composed of community providers in the industry, community college and university staff, as well as other state agencies' staff (e.g., VDOE and Virginia Community Colleges System staff).

Most CTE instructors reported that the curriculum and equipment used in their programs meet current industry standards and practices (sidebar). Among the CTE instructors who responded to JLARC's facility staff survey:

- 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the skills and competencies taught in their programs aligned with industry standards and practices; and
- 74 percent agreed or strongly agreed that students have tools and equipment in their programs that are comparable to those professionals currently use in the field.

CTE instructors who believed their programs' tools and equipment did not align with those used in the industry attributed the misalignment to IT limitations, security concerns, and funding constraints. For example, inadequate broadband capabilities limit the learning materials available to students while safety restrictions limit the types of equipment inmates can use, particularly at higher security prisons.

Both DOC central office and facility staff oversee CTE programs. Principals are required to conduct ongoing informal and two formal classroom observations each year to ensure program quality. Regional education administrators (REAs) reported that they conduct regular site visits to facilities in their region to monitor instruction and help address any programming challenges (sidebar). In addition, central office CTE staff also reported visiting classrooms across facilities to monitor instruction and equipment.

DOC's CTE programs also are reviewed by external entities. All of DOC's CTE programs are audited by the American Correctional Association (ACA) once every three years to ensure compliance with accreditation standards such as instructional effectiveness, classroom management, and safety. In addition, certain CTE programs must meet the design and instruction requirements of partners like the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) (for 12 programs) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) (for 22 programs). Five CTE programs offer college credits, which subjects them to reviews by the American Council on Education (ACE) every three years (sidebar).

All recent external audits have found that DOC's CTE programs comply with external standards and requirements.

JLARC conducted a survey of DOC facility staff, which included wardens, principals, academic teachers, and CTE instructors. Sixty-three percent of DOC's CTE instructors responded to the survey. See Appendix B for more information.

Examples of support REAs should provide include managing relationships between education staff and operations staff (e.g., wardens, security staff) at facilities, identifying solutions to reduce disruptions to education programming, and limiting the impact security and other facility policies have on education operations while maintaining compliance with those policies.

Danville Community College offers college credit for DOC's CTE programs at Green Rock Correctional Center.

Most DOC programs focus on in-demand jobs and skills, although several warrant review

CTE programs should be well aligned with the current labor market to help ensure inmates are prepared for employment and to optimize DOC educational resources. Programs should meet three key criteria: target high-demand fields, lead to jobs offering a self-sufficient wage, and provide industry-valued certifications. This approach helps provide participants with viable career paths and increases their likelihood of financial stability upon release, which can help mitigate common risks associated with reoffending, such as unemployment and financial hardship.

The majority of DOC's CTE programs target occupations that are in high demand in Virginia (Table 3-1). Twenty-three of 31 programs are designed to prepare inmates for in-demand career paths. One additional program, Masonry, prepares students for a high-demand job field through its advanced curriculum, which can be taken after completion of its foundational program. The remaining seven programs target job titles that are not in high demand.

These seven programs that do not target high-demand occupations still prepare inmates for occupations with many current job openings (Table 3-2). For example, three of the seven programs targeted occupations with over a thousand job openings statewide between May 2024 and April 2025. Three others had more than 100 openings for their targeted job openings—one of the criteria the Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) considers when determining if an occupation is in high demand. These openings generally exceed the number of inmates who participate and complete each of these programs, suggesting they prepare inmates for viable employment opportunities upon release.

TABLE 3-1
Some DOC CTE programs do not target in-demand jobs or certifications

CTE program	High-demand jobs targeted	In-demand certifications offered
Automotive Technology & Repair		
Building Maintenance & Repair		✓
Communication Arts & Design	✓	
Drafting/CAD		✓
Electrical		✓
Graphic Comm. & Digital Print Prod.		✓
Motorcycle Repair		✓
Roofing And Siding		✓

SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC CTE program documentation and Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) labor market data (May 2024–April 2025).

NOTE: DOC offers 23 additional CTE programs that are not presented in this table because they meet the presented labor market criteria. See Appendix F for details on these programs. VOEE determines a job title to be in high demand based on set criteria. A job title must (1) have a typically entry-level education range of no formal education to a bachelor's degree, (2) have a minimum of 1 percent projected growth in workforce demand in the next five years, (3) have a minimum of 100 projected statewide openings per year, on average, over the next five years, and have median earnings that are at least 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Alternatively, a job title can be considered high demand if it is an active "apprenticeable" occupation according to the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry.

TABLE 3-2
CTE programs targeting jobs not in high demand still have many job openings

CTE program	Average annual job openings	Number of DOC program participants (2024)
Automotive Technology & Repair	1,857	16
Building Maintenance & Repair	1,459	59
Graphic Comm. & Digital Print Prod.	1,241	118
Electrical	382	254
Roofing & Siding	272	-
Drafting/CAD	116	82
Motorcycle Repair	52	19

SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC CTE participation data (2024) and VOOE labor market data (May 2024 – April 2025).

NOTE: Average annual job openings reported are a summation of the job openings for all occupations targeted by each CTE program. Each of these seven programs had between one and eight targeted occupations. The roofing and siding program had no new program enrollments or completers in 2024.

DOC does not offer several programs for high-demand fields because of hiring restrictions related to criminal histories. Examples include healthcare (e.g., registered nurses and medical assistants), childcare, and education (e.g., teachers and teaching assistants) occupations.

Twenty-six of 31 CTE programs target at least one occupation with self-sufficient entry-level annual wages. The average entry-level annual wages across all CTE programs' targeted job fields were \$31,868, which is approximately \$3,400 above the self-sufficiency threshold for a single-person household (adjusted to 2025 dollars).

While five programs did not have self-sufficient entry-level wages, their longer-term wage potential makes them viable paths to self-sufficiency. These five programs were Barbering, Cosmetology, Cabinet Making, Custodial Maintenance, and Horticulture (sidebar). These programs targeted occupations with entry-level wages that were between 3 percent and 25 percent below the self-sufficiency threshold. However, every occupation targeted by these CTE programs offers *median* annual wages that surpass the self-sufficiency level. Median annual wages reflect the wages of experienced, longer-tenured employees. This means that employees in these occupations can eventually earn self-sufficient wages if they remain in the job long enough. In 2024, about 18 percent of new CTE participants enrolled in one of these five programs.

Twenty-nine of 31 DOC CTE programs offer certifications that are in demand for the job fields or broader industries they target, further supporting inmates' future employability upon completion. The only programs that do not offer in-demand certifications in their respective fields are Automotive Technology & Repair and Communication, Arts & Design (Table 3-1).

Eighteen of DOC's CTE programs met all the labor market criteria discussed above. More information on the demand, wages, and certifications offered for job titles targeted by each CTE program is presented in Appendix F.

Entry-level wages for Barber and Cosmetology occupations may be understated as the data used for this analysis relies on employees' self-reported wages to their employers. Research indicates that tips are underreported by employees to reduce tip contributions to the employer, tax liability, and other financial obligations associated with higher reported wages.

Reconsideration of DOC's Electrical program is warranted to better equip inmates for post-release opportunities

DOC needs to reconsider its Electrical program, one of DOC's largest CTE programs, because it does not lead to an occupation with a high number of job openings. This program is intended to prepare inmates to be an electrical helper, which is an entry-level position in the electrical industry with relatively few job openings—an estimated average of 382 openings per year between 2024 and 2029—and no anticipated growth. However, 11 facilities offer this program, and 995 inmates enrolled in it between March 2022 and May 2025, making it the third-largest DOC CTE program (sidebar). The gap between job openings and program completers suggests that completers will have difficulty finding a job in this field after their release.

The Electrical program waitlist is the second largest waitlist among DOC's CTE programs with 430 inmates waiting for enrollment in February 2025.

While other occupations in the electrical industry are in high demand in Virginia, they typically require training and practical experience that are not feasible for most inmates to obtain while incarcerated. For example, licensed electricians are in high demand, but an individual must obtain a minimum of four years of practical experience and 240 hours of theoretical training to be eligible for the license. Some inmates may be able to get that experience and additional training through an apprenticeship opportunity at a DOC facility. However, these opportunities are limited based on the low need for electrical positions at facilities, the availability of an apprenticeship mentor, and the time remaining on an inmate's sentence after completing the CTE program.

DOC should evaluate the curriculum for its Electrical program to determine whether it could be modified to better prepare students for in-demand occupations. If modifications are not feasible, DOC should consider whether it would be more cost-effective to replace the program, in at least some facilities, with other CTE programs that target more in-demand occupations.

The evaluation should also review the program's enrollment criteria and re-entry support. For example, DOC could assign some program slots to inmates with longer sentences—rather than reserving all slots for those nearing release—with the intention of transitioning them into apprenticeships post-completion. The program could also be strengthened by offering targeted employment support to help graduates secure positions upon release, a strategy discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Virginia Department of Corrections should evaluate its Electrical program and develop a plan to either (i) improve the existing program's curriculum and re-entry support or (ii) replace it with one or more career and technical education programs that would more effectively prepare inmates for high-demand employment opportunities upon release.

Using additional labor market data would better ensure DOC's CTE programs continue to prepare inmates for relevant careers

While most programs prepare inmates for occupations that are currently in demand, a third of the occupations targeted across DOC's CTE programs were projected to experience a decrease in job openings between 2024 and 2029. This could make some of these programs less useful/valuable to inmates upon release, particularly for programs with few current job openings, such as the Motorcycle Repair or Drafting/CAD programs.

Additionally, DOC does not offer in-demand *credentials* in all its programs. For example, DOC offers the Microsoft Office Specialist certification through its Computer System Technology Program but not its Communications, Arts & Design program, even though these certifications are in demand for one of the program's targeted occupations. Similarly, the EPA 609 certification is also in demand for the Automotive Technology & Repair program but is only offered for the HVAC/Refrigeration program. Broadening access to this and other existing certifications—such as OSHA 10, OSHA 30, A+ CompTIA, and Autodesk certifications—could further align some of DOC's programs with labor market needs. These certifications are conferred by third-party industry groups (e.g., Microsoft) that verify whether an inmate has satisfied the requirements for the certification. Making in-demand credentials available for more programs would not require DOC to partner with new industry groups, but rather to work with its existing industry partners.

Examples of high-demand occupations that DOC could consider targeting through existing or new CTE programs include Customer Service Representatives; Laborers and Freight, Stock and Material Movers; and First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers.

While DOC's current CTE program design reviews appear to be well structured, it should integrate Virginia's labor market data into this triennial process. VOEE provides regularly updated data on the projected demand and wages of occupations in Virginia, as well as the certifications and skills that are in demand for each occupation. This data will help ensure all DOC programs continue to prepare students for relevant occupations and certifications, allowing DOC to determine whether programs should be replaced by another existing one or by a new program targeting other high-demand fields (sidebar).

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Virginia Department of Corrections should incorporate an analysis of relevant labor market data maintained by the Virginia Office of Education Economics into its triennial reviews of career and technical education programs to (i) ensure the occupations and credentials targeted by each program are in high demand, (ii) identify new programming that would align with newly identified high-demand occupations, and (iii) take steps to modify its programming as necessary and feasible.

Lack of a formal process to connect inmates with relevant job opportunities prior to release undermines CTE program effectiveness

Connecting inmates with relevant job opportunities before release is a key strategy to help them avoid barriers to securing employment. Research literature indicates that former inmates face barriers to employment, including employer reluctance to hire people with criminal records, gaps in employment history, and a lack of workforce skills like interviewing, job searching, and resume writing.

While CTE program completers have higher employment rates than those left on the waitlist, a significant number still were not employed within their first quarter of release, suggesting additional re-entry support is needed for these inmates. In addition to the recommended improvement to the CTE curricula discussed previously, providing targeted re-entry support can help better prepare inmates for employment.

DOC's re-entry division provides some employment assistance and has staff at some facilities to help with job skills like interviewing, but this support is not available at all facilities or to all inmates who will soon be released (sidebar). In addition, the support is not targeted to specific CTE programs or industries.

DOC central office has recognized this gap in re-entry support for CTE participants and has piloted a new position to better connect them with relevant employers. DOC created a federally grant-funded business developer position in January 2023 for the welding program, which engages with welding and manufacturing employers to raise awareness of the DOC welding program and the benefits of becoming a second-chance employer (sidebar).

Expanding DOC's business developer program would provide CTE participants who are about to be released from DOC with targeted employment support, increasing their likelihood of securing and maintaining work upon release. Assigning specific career clusters to each business developer is the most effective way to ensure they have the specialized knowledge needed to work with employers. This approach allows developers to become experts in their assigned fields, improving collaboration and outcomes with industry partners.

Creating three business developer positions would allow DOC to focus its employer-engagement efforts on the three career clusters that comprise the majority of its CTE programs, which collectively accounted for about 75 percent of all CTE completers released in 2024. Once these roles are in place, DOC should report on the extent to which post-release outcomes improve and whether more positions are needed to support CTE participants.

Establishing these new business developer positions will require additional funding. DOC reported that the grant-funded pilot position cost approximately \$93,000 for salary and benefits.

DOC's CTE division provides job-specific toolkits to some inmates re-entering the community who have completed certain CTE programs. The toolkits include tools and materials an individual will need to pursue the professions they were trained for, with the intention of reducing the financial constraints inmates may face to securing employment in those fields, like those that may affect barbering, electrical or building maintenance, and repair positions.

Second-chance employers are businesses that do not disqualify individuals from employment based on their past criminal history or gaps in employment.

RECOMMENDATION 10

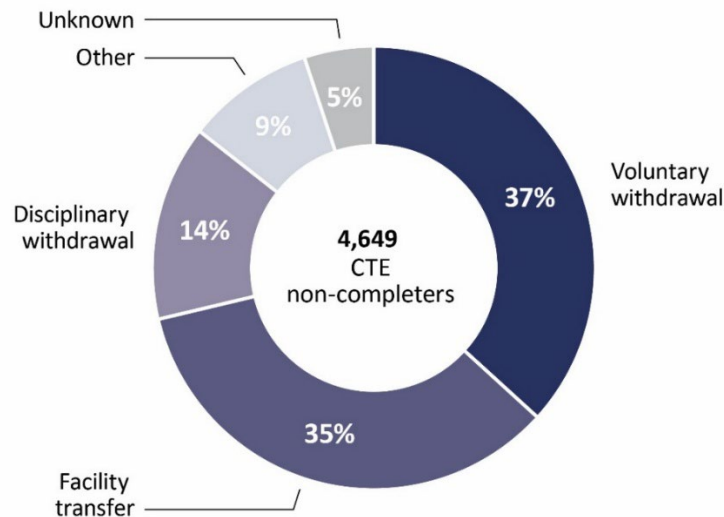
The General Assembly may wish to consider including in the Appropriation Act (i) funding for three business developer positions to help inmates who participate in the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) career and technical education (CTE) programs prepare to obtain employment after release, and (ii) language directing DOC to report on the post-release employment outcomes of CTE students and the extent to which additional business developer positions are needed, if any.

About half of CTE participants do not complete their programs, and facility transfers are a leading cause

Greater attention by DOC to its facility transfer practices would also increase the impact of CTE programs and the state funds used to support them, as facility transfers are a leading reason why only about half of inmates enrolled in a CTE program complete it. Between January 2024 and May 2025, CTE programs had a 47 percent completion rate, and facility transfers have been the second most common reason why inmates have not completed CTE programs in recent years (Figure 3-3).

FIGURE 3-3

Facility transfers are among the most common reasons for CTE program non-completion (March 2022 through May 2025)



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC education program participation data (March 2022 through May 2025).

NOTE: "Other" includes program participation ending because of medical transfers, releases into the community, termination of the program, or withdrawals by DOC for reasons not otherwise specified.

Education and facility staff can request "transfer holds" when aware of upcoming transfers for program participants, but requests and approval are inconsistent across

facilities. Data validates these inconsistencies as facility transfers accounted for 7 percent to 89 percent of CTE non-completions across facilities between January 2024 and May 2025.

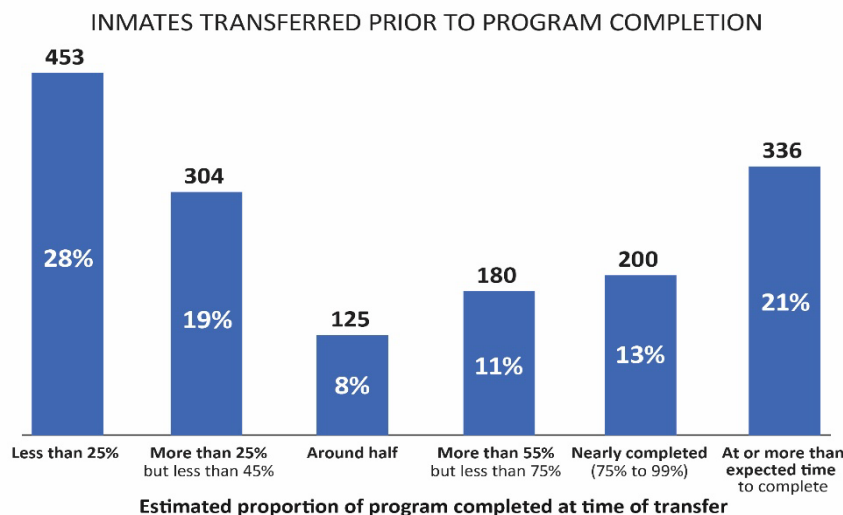
Facility transfers are necessary for a variety of reasons. For example, inmates may need to participate in substance abuse or sex offender treatment programming that they can only access at another facility. An inmate may need to be transferred to a facility with a different security level because of changes in their behavior. DOC has also closed correctional facilities and changed the security level of some facilities, which has necessitated inmate transfers (sidebar).

For context, DOC had several facility closures and security level changes since 2024. It closed three facilities and changed the security levels of four facilities.

While transfers may be warranted for a variety of reasons, transferring inmates before they complete their CTE program disrupts inmates' progress. Only 7 percent of inmate transfers between March 2022 and May 2025 resulted in inmates re-enrolling in the same program at a new facility; 14 percent were enrolled in different CTE programs, while the remaining 79 percent did not re-enroll in any CTE programs. Data also shows that more than half of inmates who were participating in CTE programs at their time of transfer had already finished at least half of their program (based on the amount of time expected to complete it) (Figure 3-4). For many inmates, re-enrollment in programs may not be possible because the program is not available at the new facility or has no available seats.

FIGURE 3-4

More than half of transferred CTE participants who did not complete their program are estimated to have already completed at least half of it



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC program participation data (March 2022 through May 2025).

NOTE: This analysis is based on DOC's estimated times to complete each CTE program. However, an inmate may take more or less time to complete a program based on their learning capabilities. DOC has policies giving teachers the authority to remove students from their class if adequate progress is not being made in a program.

DOC's new "Virginia Model" initiative could increase the number of facility transfers. This initiative is offering programming and incentives to inmates with a history of good behavior, a key incentive being a transfer to a correctional facility with better amenities and freedoms. DOC educational staff reported that some inmates who have been transferred to and from these correctional facilities have experienced disruptions to their educational programming because transfers are being scheduled without considering the impacts on inmates' educational programming.

DOC should ensure that its transfer process adequately considers inmates' CTE program participation, which should include developing clear criteria for the use of "temporary holds" for inmates participating in these programs. At a minimum, the criteria should account for three key factors: (1) whether the inmate's current CTE program is offered at the receiving facility, (2) how much of the program the inmate has already completed, and (3) whether the inmate wishes to remain at the facility and complete the program or be transferred to another facility and potentially not complete the program. This assessment could be used to determine when a temporary hold makes sense and whether the inmate can realistically finish the course within the hold timeframe.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) develop clear criteria for using temporary transfer holds for inmates in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and (ii) require designated staff to use these criteria to guide their transfer decisions for CTE participants.

4 Postsecondary Educational Programs at DOC Facilities

DOC's postsecondary educational programs are designed to provide inmates with college-level learning opportunities. Available national research, including a 2018 meta-analysis by the RAND Corporation and a 2024 meta-analysis by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, indicates that inmates who participate in postsecondary education programs are less likely to recidivate than non-participants. The effects of postsecondary education programs on post-release employment have been less conclusive than those on recidivism, primarily because of limited high-quality research on employment outcomes.

DOC offers far more Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs than postsecondary programs, and most postsecondary programs are relatively new. As of September 2025, fewer than half of Virginia's major facilities offered at least one postsecondary program, although the types of programs vary (sidebar). Seventeen of DOC's 37 major facilities provided postsecondary education through contracts with eight community colleges and one four-year university (Table 4-1). Postsecondary programming provided in DOC facilities includes both academic programs, including associate degree programs, and CTE programs, such as courses on HVAC, business management, and precision measurement. Inmates' postsecondary education options depend on the DOC facility they are in; one facility may offer only a single CTE course, while another may offer a full associate degree course load.

Most postsecondary programs in DOC facilities were established recently and were prompted by a 2020 federal law that restored Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students (sidebar). This change created a funding source for inmate tuition payments and generated nationwide interest among colleges to provide postsecondary programs to incarcerated individuals.

DOC's postsecondary programs are typically taught on-site at correctional facilities by instructors employed by Virginia higher education institutions. In addition to classroom space, DOC provides administrative and security staffing support to facilitate instruction. College courses are typically taught during evenings or weekends to avoid conflicts with other DOC programming and operations.

Eligible inmates typically do not pay for college course tuition. Instead, the programs are funded through a combination of Pell Grants, state-level need-based aid that is also available to the general public (e.g., "FastForward"), and financial assistance from individual higher education institutions.

Postsecondary education programs operating within Virginia's correctional facilities are subject to quality assurance standards from both regional and federal accrediting

Major facilities refer to DOC's prison facilities, and excludes CCAPs, secure medical facilities, and other administrative offices.

In 2015, the Second Chance Pell initiative began as an experiment to restore Pell Grant access for incarcerated students on a trial basis.

The success of this program directly led to the passage of the FAFSA Simplification Act in 2020, which fully reinstated eligibility in July 2023. This policy reversed a 1994 federal law that had barred incarcerated students from receiving aid.

Pell Grants provide federal, need-based financial assistance to undergraduate students.

bodies. All partner colleges and community colleges are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which ensures a baseline of institutional quality through a peer-review process. Additionally, to be eligible for Pell Grant funds for incarcerated students, a college program must be designated as a Prison Education Program (PEP), which requires a separate application and review from both SACSCOC and the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

TABLE 4-1**Overview of postsecondary programming offered in DOC facilities (as of September 2025)**

Types of postsecondary programs	Description	College providers	Number of DOC facilities
Associate degree programs in general studies, liberal arts, or science	Academic programming that fulfills general education requirements for transfer to a four-year degree program.	Piedmont CC, VA Wesleyan, Rappahannock CC, Southside VA CC	11
Career and technical certificate (non-credit bearing) programs	Vocational classes that result in certificates but not college credits.	Paul D Camp CC Wytheville CC, Mountain Empire CC, Germanna CC, Southside CC, Rappahannock CC	7
Career and technical credit-bearing programs	Vocational classes that result in certificates or associate degrees and can accumulate college credit.	Danville CC, Southside VA CC	6

SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC and VCCS documents, staff interviews, and DOC program participation data.

NOTE: Career and Technical credit-bearing programs category includes DOC-provided CTE programs that students can earn community college credit for. As of September 2025, some types of programming are offered at multiple DOC facilities. Most facilities that offer associate degree programs also offer a "Uniform Certificate" as a lower-value credential for students who only complete the first half of associate degree coursework.

"Potentially eligible" is defined as having a GED or high school diploma.

DOC's data system tracks only individual course completions but does not maintain data on progress toward a specific degree (e.g., associate in general studies). This outcomes analysis focuses on individuals who have completed one or more postsecondary courses and were released since April 2022.

See Appendix B for more details.

Only 2 percent of DOC's population is enrolled in postsecondary programs

As of September 2025, only a small proportion of potentially eligible DOC inmates participate in postsecondary programs, although the number of inmates participating has increased in recent years (sidebar). In February 2025, about 3 percent of potentially eligible inmates (2 percent of the total state-responsible inmate population in DOC facilities) were enrolled in a postsecondary course. The number of inmates enrolled in postsecondary programs increased from 346 in February 2023 to 446 in February 2025.

Recent postsecondary participants had somewhat better employment outcomes than non-participants

Evaluating the effectiveness of DOC's postsecondary programs requires analyzing the post-release employment and recidivism outcomes of participating inmates (sidebar). DOC inmates who completed at least one postsecondary course were employed at

higher rates than comparable DOC inmates who did not participate in a postsecondary program (Figure 4-1) (sidebar). Fifty-four percent of postsecondary course completers were employed two quarters after release, which is 10 percentage points higher than the comparison group. Postsecondary course completers who were employed after release also earned higher wages (on average, \$550 more per quarter) than nonparticipants. JLARC conducted a more sophisticated analysis of these differences, accounting for relevant factors, such as inmate demographics, incarceration details, and gang affiliation. After using techniques to account for these factors, postsecondary course completion is still associated with higher rates of post-release employment and wages.

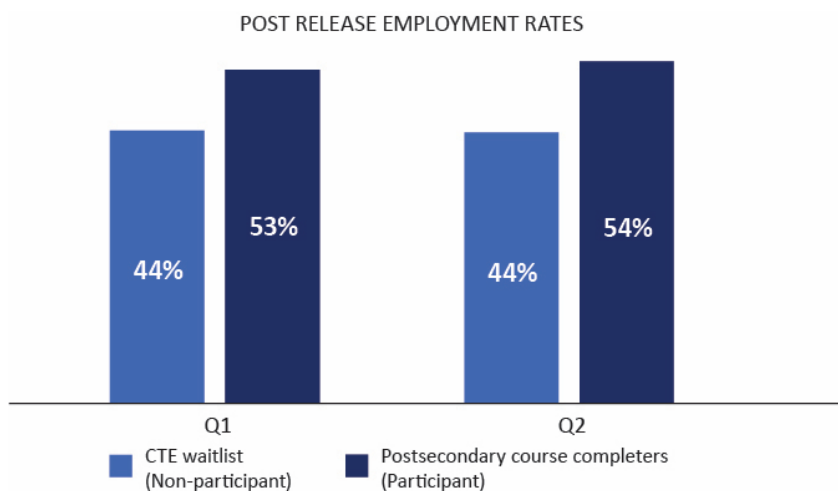
There was also a difference in 12-month rearrest rates between postsecondary course completers and non-participants (22 percent versus 28 percent, respectively). However, these differences were not statistically significant. (More information about JLARC's analyses of post-release outcomes is available in Appendix B.)

Nearly half of postsecondary course completers *also participated in CTE programming*. Of the 240 postsecondary program completers, 27 percent completed vocational programs, and 16 percent participated in vocational programs but did not complete them. Therefore, it cannot be determined whether these outcome differences are due to postsecondary education, vocational education, or some combination.

Waitlisted inmates for CTE programs were used as the comparison group for this analysis to control for academic levels and selection bias. They are referred to in the text as "non-participants." This group was selected as the most similar comparison group because DOC central office does not maintain data on individual facility-level waitlists for postsecondary programs.

FIGURE 4-1

College participants were employed at higher rates than inmates with no college programming for two quarters post-release



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC employment outcomes data (April 2022 through September 2024 releases).

NOTE: The number of quarters after release that were available for analysis varied based on an inmate's release date. The maximum amount of time data is available for an inmate was nine quarters. This employment data is collected through VEC, which does not include individuals who are self-employed, independent contractors, or employed through a few other types of avenues.

Several administrative changes would improve postsecondary program operations at DOC facilities

In 2024, the General Assembly passed legislation to expand educational opportunities in DOC facilities, including postsecondary programs. That legislation, which was vetoed by the governor in anticipation of this study, would have established a task force to implement “a consistent education program” across all state correctional facilities. It would have directed DOC to “implement a postsecondary education program that provides access to coursework.... in every state correctional facility operated by DOC by July 1, 2030.”

Security restrictions at some DOC facilities may prevent implementing some types of postsecondary programs, such as career and technical education programs that require certain tools as part of the curriculum.

Providing consistent postsecondary programming across all DOC facilities has several advantages but would likely be challenging, especially in the near term. Offering consistent postsecondary programs at DOC facilities would expand inmate access to these programs since not all facilities have them and enable inmates to continue their education if they transferred facilities. However, DOC wardens and principals report considerable security, space, and information technology barriers to significantly expanding postsecondary programs across DOC facilities (sidebar). (For more information on other factors hindering program expansion, see Chapter 5.)

In the meantime, however, DOC could better support expanding postsecondary programs with certain administrative changes. Until recently, each correctional facility has been largely responsible for negotiating with Virginia’s higher education institutions, and DOC central office oversight has been minimal. This is reasonable given the relatively small amount of college programming currently available at correctional facilities. However, if the General Assembly wishes for DOC inmates to achieve more widespread access to postsecondary programs, a more robust central office role is needed.

DOC central office’s organization of postsecondary oversight reportedly contributes to delays in program implementation

Timely administrative processes are important to expanding postsecondary programs; delays can postpone the implementation of new programs or temporarily prevent inmate access to federal aid. Offering federal Pell Grants to incarcerated students is an administratively demanding process requiring close coordination between colleges and state departments of corrections. For example, the federal Prison Education Program application process requires that memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and data-sharing agreements be established before the higher education institution can offer Pell Grants to incarcerated students.

In interviews, higher education institutions and facility staff commonly reported that DOC central office delays hindered deployment of new programs (sidebar). College and facility staff reported experiencing long wait times to have MOUs and data-sharing agreements approved by DOC central office. For example, some college staff

JLARC staff interviewed staff from eight out of nine higher education institutions that have active partnerships with DOC major facilities as of September 2025 about their experiences working within DOC correctional facilities and perspectives on statewide oversight of postsecondary education in DOC facilities.

reported that it took between six and 12 months to receive an MOU approval. These delays are reportedly due to approval and finalization of these agreements and not time spent drafting the documents.

DOC central office has recently taken steps to improve statewide oversight and support of postsecondary programming. DOC hired a college coordinator at the central office, whose responsibilities include developing an MOU template, helping to facilitate negotiations between individual correctional facilities and higher education institutions, and leading communications with the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia. However, the individual correctional facilities remain responsible for the day-to-day management of the programs. The coordinator serves as the intermediary for nine higher education institutions and 16 DOC facilities.

The new college coordinator position appears helpful, but stakeholders are concerned the position's organizational placement within the education division may limit its effectiveness and ability to address issues quickly. As of September 2025, the college coordinator position reported to the assistant superintendent of academics, who is responsible for DOC's adult education and special education programs. These programs are substantively different from postsecondary programs (e.g., in goals, funding structures, instructional staff, etc.), and therefore, this supervisory structure seems misaligned. Additionally, about half of DOC's postsecondary programs are CTE, and the assistant superintendent of academics does not have purview over CTE programs. A better approach would be to have the college coordinator position report directly to the DOC superintendent of education. A more direct reporting relationship with the DOC superintendent could help reduce delays in finalizing the inter-agency agreements required for new postsecondary programs, because it would give the college coordinator greater authority and reduce time for decision-making and approvals.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Virginia Department of Corrections should elevate the position of the college coordinator to report directly to the department's superintendent of education.

Lack of operational policies and procedures contributes to inconsistent oversight of DOC's college programs

Similar to other states' correctional systems, DOC develops and maintains a substantial number of operating procedures to "guide DOC staff... in all matters related to DOC operations." DOC operating procedures range from the use of the DOC logo to health services administration and facility security and control. Collectively, these operating procedures are intended to help ensure the uniform application of DOC directives.

In the education division, however, DOC lacks operating procedures for managing and implementing postsecondary programs at its facilities. DOC provides procedures

for its adult education programs and CTE programs, including information on administration and management, class organization, student orientation, and educational testing. However, as of September 2025, the only operating procedure pertaining to college programs is one sentence specifying that the DOC superintendent “will designate staff to administer college programs and to coordinate services related to college courses for inmates.”

The lack of policies has reportedly challenged higher education instructors’ ability to provide classes comparable to those provided to traditional college students. Higher education staff observed that there is inconsistency across (and within) DOC facilities regarding college programs’ operations, particularly concerning allowable educational materials like textbooks and classroom supplies. Higher education staff report that allowable materials vary widely across facilities of the same security level and that approved materials can change depending on the warden’s preferences. For example, college staff have reportedly struggled to consistently provide materials needed for lab-based science classes, which is a required component of the Associate Degree in General Studies program.

Creating operating procedures to guide the management and administration of postsecondary programs, similar to those already established for DOC’s other types of education programs, would help support postsecondary programs, especially as they expand. The new operating procedures should cover topics such as approved educational materials (by security level and other relevant factors), program waitlist management, and enrollment prioritization based on assessed need and prior educational enrollments. These new operating procedures should be shared with higher education providers, as appropriate, to ensure DOC requirements are clearly understood by all parties.

RECOMMENDATION 13

The Virginia Department of Corrections should develop and maintain operating procedures for the administration of its postsecondary education programs that, at a minimum, address the use of educational materials, waitlist management, and program eligibility.

Cost-sharing arrangements among DOC, VCCS, and higher education partners would help support program expansion and implementation

To operate postsecondary programs within DOC facilities, various administrative and security needs must be addressed. Administrative needs include scheduling classes, managing waiting lists, reporting data, and addressing logistical challenges. Security needs include providing sufficient security staff to move inmates to and from educational classrooms and to remain in or near classrooms during the classes.

According to DOC central office and facility staff, some programs would have been unable to meet these critical program needs if DOC facility staff had not voluntarily

performed them in addition to their other responsibilities. For example, multiple facilities with postsecondary programs have recently been unable to assign enough security staff to the education buildings in the evenings because of staff shortages (sidebar). Consequently, principals at these facilities have been volunteering to work security in the halls to enable postsecondary programs to run normally, according to DOC central office and facility staff. Stakeholders, including staff from DOC facilities, central office, and higher education institutions, also report that various other administrative tasks needed for postsecondary programs to operate, including scheduling, managing waitlists, and data reporting, are frequently handled by DOC facility staff in addition to their normal work duties.

While it is reasonable for DOC to bear some of the administrative and security responsibilities and associated costs of these programs, relying on staff volunteers to work additional hours to run these courses is not sustainable over the long term and could compromise the delivery of postsecondary programs.

To support the sustainability and expansion of postsecondary programs, DOC should develop a formal and transparent process for identifying and managing the added costs required for their implementation. Addressing these costs should be a required part of the MOU for all new and renewing programs. Under this process, higher education institutions should document their expected program costs and revenues, while DOC assesses its additional security and administrative costs to run the program. Based on the estimated costs and revenues, DOC should propose and negotiate a cost-sharing agreement with the relevant higher education institution to help offset its costs, when feasible. For example, the arrangements could require the higher education institution to pay for the costs of stipends for security or administrative staff who must work overtime to run the program.

Cost-sharing arrangements should be determined on a program-by-program basis and may not be possible in all cases. Any agreement should reflect a reasonable allocation of costs without increasing student tuition and fees.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC), in collaboration with the Virginia Community College System and other participating higher education institutions, should develop a process for (i) documenting the administrative and security costs to DOC of providing each existing and proposed postsecondary program, (ii) documenting higher education institutions' costs and revenues for each program; and (iii) negotiating a cost-sharing arrangement to offset DOC costs with net revenues, if any, earned by the higher education institutions when feasible.

Six DOC facilities that offer postsecondary programs were among the 10 facilities with the highest correctional officer vacancy rates as of July 2025. This includes Nottoway CC (40%), Lunenburg CC (39%), Buckingham CC (36%), Fluvanna CC for Women (35%), St. Brides CC (30%), and State Farm CC (29%).

Most common postsecondary program likely not most useful to inmates

As of September 2025, the postsecondary program offered at most facilities, the Associate in General Studies, does not by itself align with labor market needs. Instead, it is designed to provide inmates with credits that can be applied toward a bachelor's degree. Examples of courses in the Associate in General Studies program include College Success Skills, College Composition I and II, as well as other core requirements for a bachelor's degree, including Quantitative Reasoning and Religions of the World.

The Associate in General Studies program, while useful to traditional college students, is limited for inmates since most cannot pursue a bachelor's degree while incarcerated. Because DOC does not currently offer any bachelor's degree programs (outside of any inmate self-funded correspondence courses), inmates must wait until after release to apply their Associate in General Studies credits to a bachelor's degree. Currently, neither DOC nor VCCS can report on how often inmates successfully transfer their Associate in General Studies credits to a four-year degree. Ultimately, other types of postsecondary credentials are more likely to lead to successful outcomes for inmates.

National experts and correctional staff from other states recommend that postsecondary correctional education programs prioritize teaching skills that enhance an inmate's employability. This approach is intended to better prepare incarcerated individuals to secure employment and support themselves upon release. Some states have already adopted this workforce-focused approach. Ohio's correctional system, for example, intentionally offers degrees in subject areas like communications, substance use counseling, and business.

Other credentials that could be offered by higher education institutions may better align with the post-release realities for most inmates. Institutions in North Carolina offer an Associate Degree in Applied Science in HVAC and a comparable amount of credit hours in entrepreneurship. In Washington, state facilities offer associate degrees in various directly employable fields like automotive repair technology, graphic design and web development, and welding.

DOC, in collaboration with VCCS, should consider whether other types of credentials would be more useful to inmates than the Associate in General Studies. If DOC determines that other credentials would be more useful, it should develop and implement plans to replace or supplement the Associate in General Studies. For example, Southside Virginia Community College provides associate degree coursework in both General Studies and Business Management degree tracks at five DOC facilities.

Where the Associate in General Studies is found to be the most useful credential, DOC should ensure that the MOUs specify that participating higher education institutions will provide reasonable supports to help program participants transfer their credentials upon release. At this time, no such expectations are established in the MOUs.

The state's first bachelor's degree programs for incarcerated individuals are expected to begin in 2026 at three facilities through MOUs with Virginia Wesleyan University and the University of Virginia. These initial programs will be relatively small.

RECOMMENDATION 15

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC), with the assistance of the Virginia Community College System, should (i) evaluate whether a program other than the Associate in General Studies would provide a postsecondary credential that is more useful to inmates after release from DOC custody and, (ii) if a more useful credential is identified, replace the Associate in General Studies program with it.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Virginia Department of Corrections should require that any memorandum of understanding with a higher education institution to provide the Associate in General Studies degree program at a correctional facility include assurances that the higher education institution will assist inmates as needed with transferring their course credits and credentials to a bachelor's degree program.

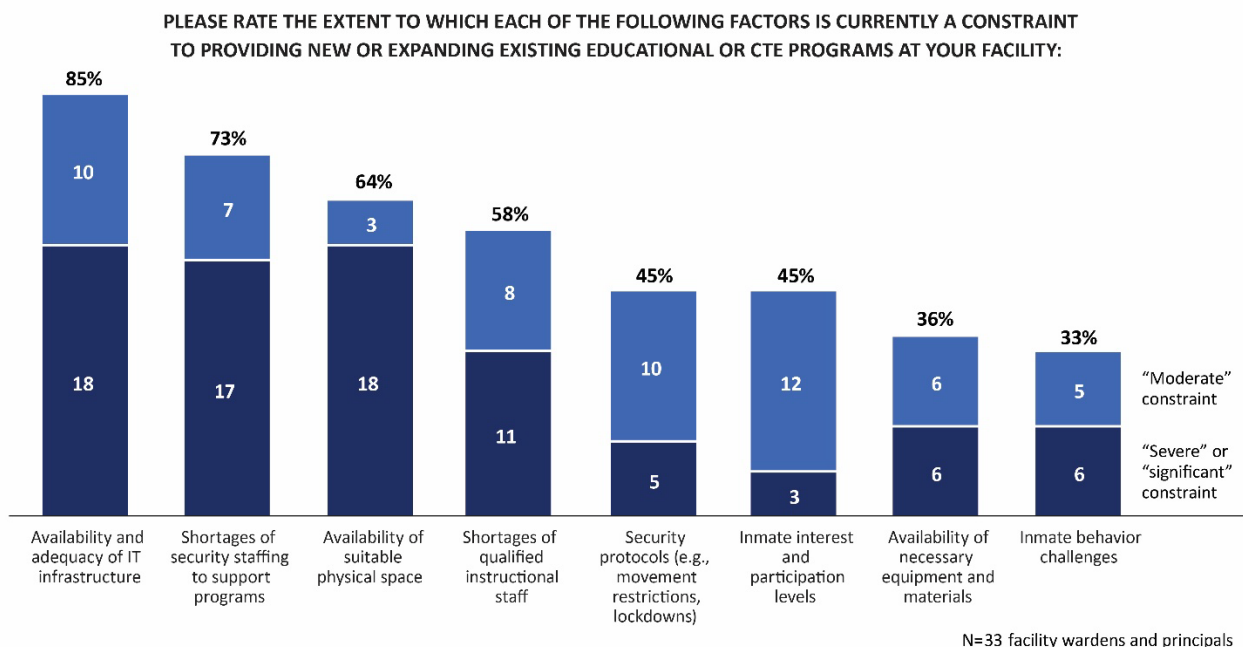
5 Supporting Educational Program Access and Effectiveness

In recent years, both legislators and the governor have expressed interest in expanding access to educational programs in Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities. JLARC staff have identified several short-term operational changes at DOC that could improve the effectiveness of existing educational resources and increase access for inmates who would benefit most.

Several operational changes could improve educational programming access and efficiency

DOC wardens, principals, and teachers seem to generally be interested in increasing educational opportunities for inmates. However, several barriers make it challenging to do so, particularly shortages of physical space, security staff, and IT infrastructure. (Figure 5-1).

FIGURE 5-1
Wardens and principals report that space, security staffing, and IT are the most significant barriers to expanding educational programming



SOURCE: JLARC Survey of Wardens, Principals, and Teachers (July – August 2025).

NOTE: The 33 responding facility wardens and principals represented a majority of DOC’s major correctional facilities (25 of 37).

While additional funding is needed to meet a significant portion of unmet demand for education programs, some unmet demand can be met through operational efficiencies rather than solely new spending. For example, minimizing unnecessary delays in inmates’ educational programs would reduce the time it takes for inmates to complete a program, opening seats sooner for other inmates. Adopting a more strategic approach to enrollment—one that considers how likely an inmate is to benefit based on DOC assessments—would also help. Given the multiple aspects of prison operations, adopting strategies to improve access to education programming will involve collaboration with other DOC divisions (Table 5-1).

TABLE 5-1
Identified near-term improvements to DOC’s educational programs will require support from other units within DOC

Improvement	DOC unit support needed
Consider the information DOC already collects on the extent to which educational/vocational programming could reduce an inmate’s recidivism risk in enrollment decisions	Counseling
Reduce avoidable security-related disruptions to class attendance	Operations / Security
Improve the hiring process/competitiveness of compensation for education program staff	Human Resources
Ensure the DOC education superintendent can effectively manage funds appropriated to DOC for educational programming	Finance
Provide more timely IT support for existing educational technology	Information Technology Unit
Use “temporary holds” for inmates deemed eligible to transfer to another facility, where practicable and appropriate, if it is determined that a transfer would impede educational progress	Central Classification Services

SOURCE: JLARC staff analysis.

DOC does not consider inmates’ recidivism risk when making educational program enrollment decisions

Reducing inmates’ risk of recidivating is a primary goal of educational programming. National research indicates that correctional programs, including education programs, should focus on inmates at high risk of re-offending and target their “criminogenic risk factors.” Addressing these factors can reduce an individual’s likelihood of re-offending.

DOC does not currently consider an inmate’s risk of recidivating or how educational or vocational programming could reduce this risk when making class enrollment decisions. DOC uses the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) assessment to estimate each inmate’s recidivism risk level and evaluate their educational or vocational programming needs. Inmates who score higher on educational and vocational needs are assessed to need these programs to lower their risk of reoffending. The COMPAS assessment appears to be a fairly reliable predictor of an inmate’s actual experiences shortly after release (sidebar).

DOC inmates released between July 2022 and December 2024 with the highest assessed educational or vocational needs had the lowest employment rates and earnings. Similarly, inmates assessed to have the lowest educational or vocational needs had the highest employment rates and earnings.

Available data suggests that many inmates assessed as needing educational programming to reduce recidivism risk were on waitlists, while some assessed as unlikely to need it to reduce reoffending risk were enrolled in programs. For example, in February 2025, there were 1,432 inmates on the adult basic education (ABE) program waitlist who had a “probable” or “highly probable” need for educational or vocational programs. At the same time, 43 percent of inmates (1,134 inmates) who *were* enrolled were assessed as “unlikely” to need educational programming to reduce their risk of reoffending. Data showed similar trends for CTE programs: 1,046 inmates enrolled in a CTE program (70 percent) had been assessed as having an “unlikely” need for education or vocational training, while 1,308 inmates on CTE waitlists were identified as having a “highly probable” or “probable” need for it. Forty-five percent of the 1,219 inmates who were released in 2024 and who were on an ABE and/or CTE waitlist were determined by DOC’s assessments to need educational or vocational programming to reduce their risk of reoffending.

DOC already considers inmates’ recidivism risks and assesses the need for programming when it makes enrollment decisions for other types of programs. For example, DOC policies for case management specify that “the counselor or a member of the treatment team should base the inmate’s individual program assignments on the results of the inmate’s risk/needs assessment and the identified criminogenic factors that apply to that inmate.” These expectations do not extend to educational programming.

DOC needs to consider inmate recidivism risk in making educational program enrollment decisions. Reducing recidivism is a primary goal of DOC’s education program, and both national research and analysis of DOC inmates’ outcomes indicate that educational programming is associated with positive employment and recidivism outcomes. DOC should balance inmates’ recidivism risks with other relevant factors that need to be considered, such as the time remaining on an inmate’s sentence (sidebar).

According to DOC central office staff, neither the central office nor the facility’s educational staff has access to inmates’ COMPAS assessment results, which are in DOC’s primary data system (CORIS). Principals will need this information to consider recidivism risk in making enrollment decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 17

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) specify in its operating procedures that principals, when making educational program enrollment decisions, should give consideration to enrolling inmates who have been identified through the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Services (COMPAS) assessment as needing educational or vocational programming to reduce their risk of re-offending after release, and (ii) ensure principals have ready access to inmates’ COMPAS assessment results.

As of September 2025, DOC used length of stay as one prioritization criterion, where inmates closer to release are to be enrolled before those farther from their release date. Other factors, such as whether the inmate has sufficient time left to complete the program or if the inmate is eligible for special education services, may be considered depending on the type of program.

Reducing avoidable security-related disruptions to class would help inmates progress through class more quickly

Correctional facilities face numerous security-related challenges that can impact the delivery of educational programming. Navigating these challenges requires close coordination between the facilities' educational and security staff. DOC policies require facility leadership to "minimize cancellation of educational programs to the extent possible," recognizing that security requirements and processes must supersede all other facility priorities. DOC policies also require facility leadership to "ensure, to the extent possible, the availability of inmates to participate in educational programs."

Educational programs at some DOC facilities appear to experience regular disruptions and attendance and enrollment challenges. For example, based on available data, JLARC staff estimate that security lockdowns, the late movement of inmates from their housing units to the classroom, and unavailable security officers were responsible for about 4,600 hours of lost ABE instruction and 5,400 hours of lost CTE instruction statewide in 2024. These disruptions were a primary driver of missed instruction for these programs, accounting for an estimated 35 percent of all missed ABE hours and 63 percent of all missed CTE hours.

Some level of class cancellations and sporadic inmate attendance should be expected in a prison setting. However, DOC is unable to evaluate with existing data whether prison leaders are complying with the expectation that they minimize cancellation of educational programs, and educational staff at some facilities reported believing this expectation was not being fully met. A majority (57 percent) of the 135 DOC teachers and principals responding to JLARC's survey agreed that leaders at their facility were doing everything they could to minimize class interruptions and cancellations. However, 27 percent of respondents, located at 16 different facilities, disagreed.

DOC has begun to collect data to evaluate how often and why these program disruptions occur, but the data is not fully reliable. For example, the frequency of disruptions causing class cancellations is likely underreported because facilities report to the DOC central office only disruptions that cause the cancellation of all ABE or all career and technical education (CTE) classes. Facilities do not report disruptions that cause the cancellation of some classes. Additionally, facilities inconsistently track the impacts of security "lockdowns" on class cancellations; in some facilities, class cancellations are not counted because teachers send classwork to the inmates in their housing units during a lockdown.

DOC's current data collection efforts also provide limited insight into inmates' class attendance. For example, existing attendance reports do not distinguish between students who arrive on time and those who arrive late. According to DOC central office and facility staff, students may regularly miss most of a class because of the time it takes to safely move inmates from their housing units or other areas of the facility to the classroom.

DOC should review the information it collects from correctional facilities on class cancellations and student attendance to identify opportunities to improve its usefulness or reliability. Relatively minor adjustments to current data-collection efforts, including clarifying for teachers what information should and should not be reported, would make them more worthwhile.

Data improvements should include better documenting class disruptions and student attendance and how often inmates arrive late to class. This would allow DOC central office staff to assess whether wardens are minimizing avoidable class disruptions. DOC should regularly provide wardens and their regional supervisors with statistics comparing their facilities' class cancellations and student tardiness to those of other facilities.

Wardens could take actions to minimize class disruptions and improve student attendance. For example, this could range from small changes like training new security staff on the process of moving inmates to class to larger changes such as using educational programming to dictate inmate housing assignments. Wallens Ridge State Prison, one of DOC's maximum-security facilities, recently decided to house inmates participating in educational programs in the same housing unit, which staff report has made it easier to move inmates to and from classes. Lunenburg Correctional Center has adopted a similar strategy. This specific approach may not be safe and practicable at all DOC facilities, however.

RECOMMENDATION 18

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) review the information collected from correctional facilities on class cancellations and student absences to determine whether additional or different information is needed to effectively track the frequency of and reasons for them; (ii) take steps to ensure that the information is collected and reported to the central office consistently across correctional facilities; and (iii) provide this information to wardens regularly to help them minimize disruptions to educational programs.

In addition to collecting and using more data, DOC should amend its policies to clarify that wardens are responsible for ensuring not only that class cancellations are avoided as much as possible, but that inmates arrive at their classes on time, to the extent safe and practicable.

RECOMMENDATION 19

The Virginia Department of Corrections should amend its policies to clarify that wardens are expected to minimize inmates' late arrival to class to the extent safe and practicable.

Improving the timeliness of hiring teachers would enable DOC to enroll more inmates in classes

Vacant teaching positions limit inmates' access to correctional education programs and the overall effectiveness of programs. DOC has experienced some challenges recruiting and retaining educational staff in recent years. As of May 2025, 16 of DOC's 115 CTE positions (14 percent) were vacant, and 12 of its 78 ABE positions (15 percent) were vacant. Turnover rates for FY25 through May 2025 were approximately 16 percent for ABE teachers and 13 percent for CTE instructors. The vacancy rates among DOC teachers appear substantially higher than among public school teachers statewide (3.4 percent during the 2024–25 school year), based on available data, and would have placed DOC in the top 10 vacancy rates in the state among school divisions that year.

DOC appears not to be filling vacant positions in a timely manner. As of May 2025, facility educational positions, including CTE teachers, ABE teachers, and librarians, had been vacant for a median of 249 days.

In survey responses, several wardens and principals cited lengthy hiring processes as a primary challenge to filling vacancies. Others reported low compensation, especially for CTE teachers, was a barrier to filling vacancies. Negative perceptions about working in a correctional facility were also cited as a cause of low applicant volume.

RECOMMENDATION 20

The Virginia Department of Corrections should (i) identify the primary causes of delays in filling vacant instructor positions for educational programs, and (ii) take appropriate steps to improve the timeliness in filling these positions.

Eliminating all waitlists for educational programs could not be achieved solely by increasing the number of instructors, as facilities face a variety of other constraints, including insufficient classroom space.

When the Department of Correctional Education was transferred to DOC in 2012, the personnel funding transferred to DOC was reportedly insufficient to fill all educational positions. As a result, since 2012, DOC has purposefully held a certain proportion of its educational positions vacant (approximately 12 percent in FY25). DOC estimates that it would need an additional \$4.3 million to fully fund all educational positions.

Filling all these vacant teacher positions would not eliminate program waitlists but would increase the number of inmates who could participate in educational programming. JLARC staff estimate that filling all 28 vacant teaching positions would allow between 700 and 1,100 additional inmates to enroll in an educational program (sidebar).

Better internal controls would help ensure funding for instruction is fully spent and spent only on educational programming

In recent years, DOC has (1) not spent all of its General Assembly appropriations for educational programming and (2) spent some of this appropriated funding for non-educational purposes.

Over the past two fiscal years, DOC's education division ended each year with unspent fund balances, partially because central office educational program staff do not have timely or reliable information on their budget balances. In FY25, the division had a balance of \$250,903 at year-end, while in FY24, it ended with \$93,564 in unspent funds. However, DOC canceled its 2025 planned professional development conference for ABE teachers because it believed the division had insufficient funds to cover the conference's \$35,000 cost. Ultimately, the division had sufficient funds, but this was not conveyed to division leaders until too close to the end of the fiscal year to spend the money strategically. Educational staff also indicated that had they known about the available funding, they would have purchased needed educational supplies for classrooms and potentially hired a new teacher.

DOC should ensure that its educational division receives sufficient information to regularly monitor educational program spending and unspent balances. This would help the DOC superintendent more effectively "control expenditure of educational resources as prudently and effectively as possible," as required by DOC policy.

DOC leadership appears to be aware of its need to provide unit heads, including the DOC superintendent, more control over and information about their budgets. In a September 2025 memo, the DOC director announced that relevant staff would be receiving more information from DOC leadership to better understand their budgets starting in October 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 21

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) should take steps to ensure that its unit heads, including the DOC superintendent, have sufficient, accurate, and timely information to regularly monitor spending and unspent balances within their respective programs.

DOC should also develop and implement a process to ensure that all funds appropriated for educational programming at DOC are used for educational programming. It appears that at least some funding appropriated for education at DOC is being used for non-instructional purposes.

According to DOC central office staff, some teachers are being paid overtime to work certain security posts outside of regular hours. This practice may be warranted at some facilities, especially when there are critical security staffing shortages, but educational program funds should not be used to cover the overtime costs (sidebar).

Using Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) data, JLARC staff estimate that as much as \$220,000 appropriated to DOC for educational purposes in FY25 was used to pay for staff overtime at DOC facilities. While APA data does not detail the overtime activities that were being compensated (e.g., instruction versus security), two facilities (Buckingham and Greenville) that accounted for almost half of these overtime payments also have especially high correctional officer vacancy rates, increasing the likelihood that

A more appropriate funding stream to cover these security-related costs would have been the \$917.7 million "Operation of Secure Correctional Facilities" line item in the 2024 Appropriation Act.

some portion of the overtime was for security-related activities. DOC should take steps to ensure that educational funds are used only for educational purposes in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 22

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) should establish specific financial controls to ensure that all funds appropriated to DOC for education are used exclusively to support educational programs.

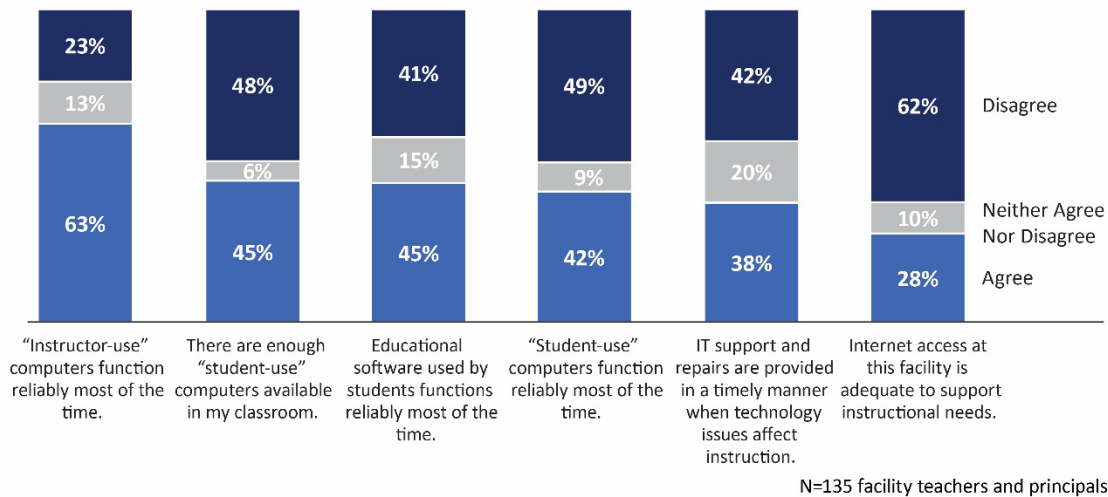
DOC teachers and principals report frequent problems with classroom educational technology, lack of timely support, and repairs

DOC's educational programs rely on functioning computers and networks for various critical tasks, including student assessments and instruction. DOC ABE program teachers use technology, such as smartboards and document cameras, for lessons, and students complete computer-based skills practice and GED assessments. Similarly, some CTE programs, including Business Software Applications, are heavily reliant on functioning computers for student learning, and other programs, including custodial maintenance and sanitation, may present lessons on computers to help inmates learn foundational concepts before participating in hands-on activities.

Through survey responses and interviews, teachers and principals expressed concerns related to educational technology, particularly regarding network speeds, internet access, IT support, and the reliability and functionality of computers and software. For example, only 28 percent of surveyed teachers and principals agreed that internet access at their facility was adequate to support instructional needs, and less than half (42 percent) reported that "student-use" computers functioned reliably most of the time (Figure 5-2).

FIGURE 5-2

DOC teachers and principals reported problems with internet access, IT support, and computer and software reliability



SOURCE: JLARC Survey of Wardens, Principals, and Teachers (July – August 2025).

NOTE: "Disagree" includes responses of "strongly disagree" and "disagree", and similarly, "agree" includes "strongly agree" and "agree".

DOC central office staff report plans to improve the network speeds in classrooms and increase instructor access to the internet, but DOC needs to address other IT problems, such as delays in addressing repairs and replacements. Through interviews and survey responses, correctional education teachers and instructors reported considerable frustration with the IT support provided. Only 38 percent agreed that IT support and repairs were provided in a timely manner when technology problems affect instruction. The following quotes illustrate some of the concerns raised related to the current levels of IT support teachers receive:

Twenty percent of my classroom computers are non-operational, and there is no plan (to my knowledge) to repair or replace them in the near future. This limits my ability to educate my students and severely limits my ability to increase their computer familiarity for future testing ease of use. (ABE teacher)

Our computers are often down for weeks to months at a time before our IT person comes to fix them. The educational programs themselves are often slow and crash, or stop working altogether. I have learned never to rely on our technology when I plan my daily instruction. (ABE teacher)

Computers stay down too long before being fixed, and sometimes they don't get fixed the first time, then you have to wait again. (CTE instructor)

Unclear causes—potentially inefficient ticketing processes or insufficient IT staffing—are leading to slow IT support for teachers needing help with classroom technology. For classroom technology, DOC staff are required by policy to submit service requests through the agency's IT support ticketing system, and inefficiencies in this process may contribute to IT support delays.

In its 2024–2026 strategic plan, DOC reported that “current [IT] staffing levels are not sustainable to handle the growing technical needs of DOC.”

However, evidence also indicates that DOC may not have enough IT support staff to respond quickly to educational IT issues or handle the agency’s growing IT initiatives. As of September 2025, DOC had nine field technology staff members dedicated to supporting educational technology at facilities across the state, and DOC central office staff report challenges providing sufficient IT support for the growing number of IT initiatives being implemented across the agency (sidebar). Supporting DOC’s concerns about insufficient IT staffing, a JLARC analysis revealed that DOC budgeted the lowest total amount and proportion of IT spending on staffing among Virginia’s largest state agencies in FY25.

Considering DOC’s plans for expanding its IT infrastructure at DOC facilities, the agency should ensure it has adequate IT support for existing educational technology.

RECOMMENDATION 23

The Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) should (i) identify the causes of the lack of timely and effective support for educational technologies at DOC facilities; (ii) take appropriate steps to address the causes; and (iii) request additional funding for personnel if an insufficient number of IT support staff is a primary cause.

Additional security staff at certain facilities and mobile trailers would improve inmate access to educational programs

Security staff shortages at some DOC facilities are so severe that it is not realistic to expect these facilities’ educational programs to be fully operational. Limited space is another key constraint to the expansion of educational programming at DOC facilities.

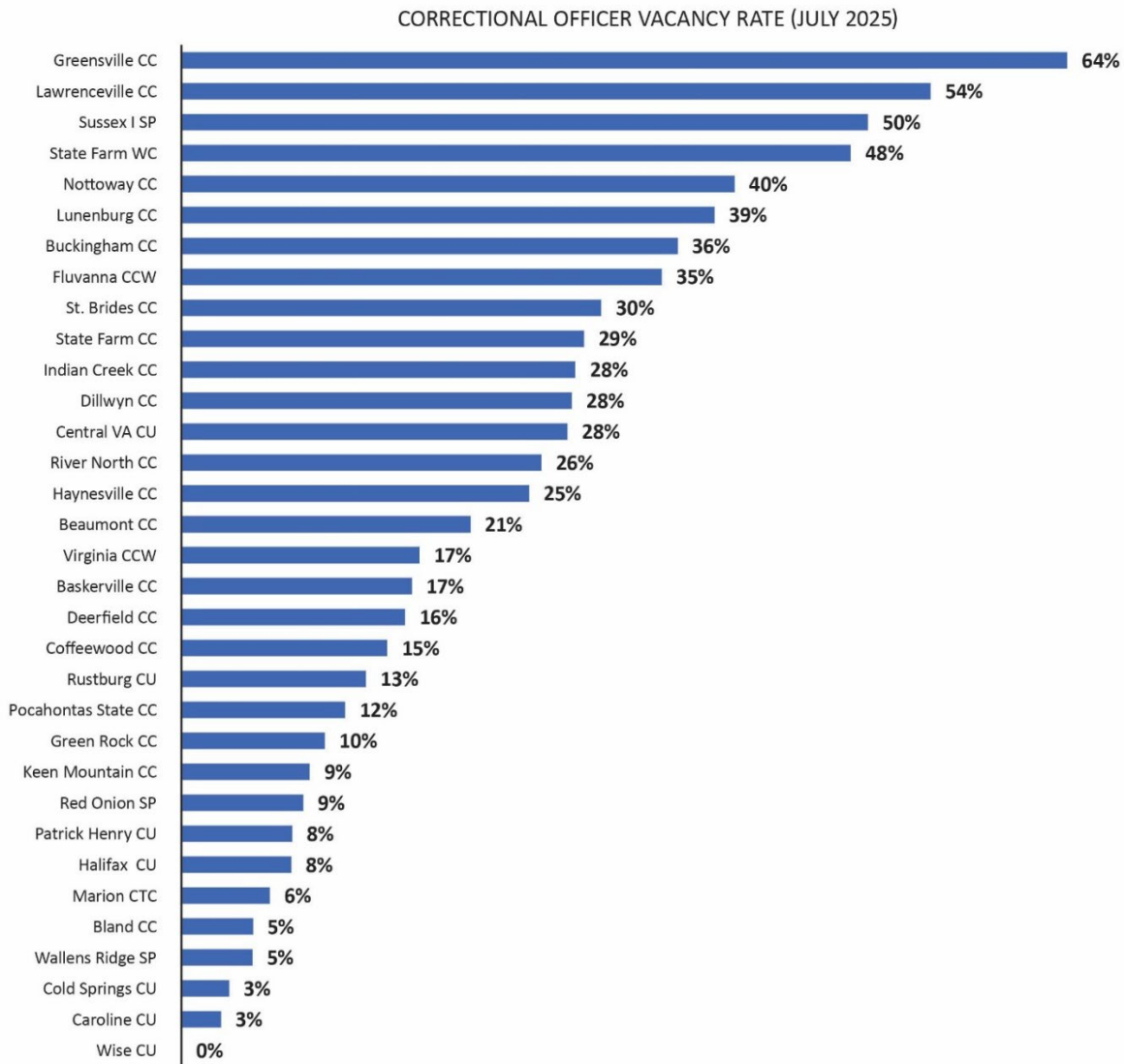
Targeting funding for additional security staff at certain facilities could improve inmates’ access to educational programs

Security staff are essential for educational programs to operate safely. A secure and controlled classroom allows both inmates and staff to engage in educational activities safely and without disruption. Security staff are needed to manage the logistics of moving inmates to and from class, prevent the unsafe use of equipment and tools in classrooms or their removal from the classrooms, and de-escalate potential conflicts. During correctional officer shortages, facility leadership must prioritize essential security posts (e.g., medical runs), which can understandably lead to non-essential activities, including education, being canceled for the day.

DOC continues to face significant challenges in maintaining safe staffing levels in its facilities. A 2024 consultant’s report found that DOC facilities are “critically, and, in many cases, dangerously short-staffed,” particularly for correctional officer positions, which are the front-line staff directly managing populations on units and in programs.

As of July 2025, DOC had 1,534 correctional officer position vacancies, ranging from no vacancies at Wise Correctional Unit to a 64 percent vacancy rate at Greenville Correctional Center (Figure 5-3). These security vacancies are most acute in the eastern region and lowest in the western region.

Figure 5-3
Correctional officer vacancy rates across DOC facilities vary widely (July 2025)



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC correctional officer vacancy rate data (July 2025).

Security staff shortages have affected inmates' access to educational programming. Insufficient security coverage was commonly reported to contribute to educational program delays and disruptions. Additionally, as described previously, these shortages have resulted in education staff being delegated security responsibilities, diverting them from their primary duties. Educational staff raised concerns that assigning them

these responsibilities could lead to increased turnover because of higher workloads, a misalignment with job expectations, or security incidents resulting from improper training.

The 2024 consultant report for DOC identified various reasons for security staff vacancies in DOC facilities, and some of these were outside the department's control. Inadequate salaries were commonly cited as a primary cause of recruitment and retention difficulties. Other contributing factors included facility culture and the belief that employment opportunities outside of corrections offered a more desirable work environment.

Addressing security staff vacancies at certain facilities, including Greenville Correctional Center, Lawrenceville Correctional Center, Sussex I State Prison, St. Brides Correctional Center, and Nottoway Correctional Center, would have a particularly positive effect on inmates' access to educational programs. These five facilities had a correctional officer vacancy rate of at least 30 percent as of July 2025, operated between six and 10 educational programs, and collectively housed 27 percent of DOC's 22,742 inmates as of February 2025.

Recent General Assembly funding for mobile educational trailers should help increase student access to CTE programs

Establishing new CTE programs in correctional facilities can be challenging because of the high costs of establishing needed space and equipment. Hands-on trades like construction and manufacturing require large labs to house industry-grade equipment. These programs can also necessitate facility modifications—including specialized electrical, plumbing, and safety features—to support training and ensure safe operations. They may even require facilities to be expanded to create suitable program space.

Despite the benefits these programs offer inmates, investing in *permanent* CTE programming space can be inefficient. Operational changes, such as a shift in a facility's security level, can render a program unsafe to continue operating and force it to shut down. While some equipment can be transferred to other facilities and programs, the substantial investment in the fixed lab space is lost. Staffing challenges present similar risks. Because qualified CTE instructors can be difficult to recruit, a single departure can suspend a program indefinitely, requiring DOC to invest additional funds to repurpose dedicated classroom space.

DOC has begun establishing *mobile* educational programs to cost-effectively overcome these constraints. Mobile programs are classrooms in mobile trailers where instructors can transport classroom space and equipment to facilities to provide instruction to inmates. This model eliminates the need for dedicated space inside facilities and provides flexibility to relocate the program space and equipment to new facilities if operational needs or staff change.

DOC currently has a mobile welding trailer that recently completed instruction for a cohort of students at Deerfield Work Center. The program provides students with

full-day, theoretical and hands-on training four days a week. It can be completed within three months and supports up to six students simultaneously. The mobile program is now being moved to Brunswick Community Corrections Alternative Program (CCAP).

The General Assembly recently allocated an additional \$2.1 million to expand DOC's CTE offerings through three additional mobile programs by the end of FY26 (side-bar). DOC has contracted with a vendor to develop these units, which will include one HVAC/Refrigeration program and two electrical solar programs, and each program has a capacity for 12 students per session. DOC is still developing the instructional model, including whether to run a single, accelerated all-day cohort or two half-day cohorts, which would serve 24 students over a longer period.

Implementing mobile CTE programs is a cost-effective strategy for expanding and diversifying CTE offerings across DOC facilities. As demonstrated by the welding program's move from Deerfield to Brunswick, a single mobile unit can serve multiple locations, maximizing its reach and providing equitable access to training across the state. The upcoming launch of HVAC and solar programs further demonstrates the model can be used for several different types of programs. This approach allows DOC more flexibility to evolve to labor market demands without being constrained by the availability of suitable space at any single institution.

Future efforts to expand CTE offerings should prioritize the mobile program model. This could include adding more trailers for DOC's existing CTE programs or adding new CTE programs. For example, other correctional and educational systems have successfully implemented mobile training for carpentry, painting, advanced manufacturing, heavy equipment operations, and computer-based programs like business software applications. Any new program, however, should be selected based on its alignment with current labor market needs in Virginia.

Establishing new mobile programs include costs for the physical trailer space (~\$250,000-\$300,000), the equipment (which varies by program), instructional personnel, and materials.

Appendix A: Study resolution

Inmate Education and Vocational Training Programs

Authorized by the Commission on November 7, 2024

WHEREAS, the Code of Virginia directs the operation of educational and vocational programs in all correctional institutions; and

WHEREAS, the average daily population in the state prison system has been about 23,000 in recent years, and many state responsible inmates are housed in regional or local jails; and

WHEREAS, inmates after they are released have unemployment rates at least four times higher than the general population; and

WHEREAS, research suggests that participation in education and vocational training programs and successful employment post-release lower the likelihood of reoffending; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Corrections strategic plan emphasizes the importance of opportunities to participate in educational and vocational programs and the promotion of postrelease employment; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission that staff be directed to review the availability and effectiveness of inmate education and vocational training programs, including those that focus on providing life skills necessary for success. In conducting its review, staff shall: (i) inventory the programs at each correctional institution and identify how they are funded and staffed; (ii) evaluate whether the programs are sufficiently available and appropriately designed to meet the needs of inmates and the Virginia labor market; (iii) evaluate participant outcomes, to include employment, academic or industry credentials, or further education; (iv) compare Virginia's programs to evidence-based and best practices; and (v) evaluate the feasibility and potential effectiveness of providing educational and vocational services in local and regional jails.

JLARC shall make recommendations as necessary and review other issues as warranted.

All agencies of the Commonwealth, including the Virginia Department of Corrections, Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, Virginia Employment Commission, Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Community College System, Virginia Compensation Board, Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia, Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission, Virginia State Police, the Virginia Department of Workforce Development and Advancement, and local sheriffs' departments, shall provide assistance, information, and data to JLARC for this study, upon request. JLARC staff shall have access to all information in the possession of agencies pursuant to § 30-59 and § 30-69 of the Code of Virginia. No provision of the Code of Virginia shall be interpreted as limiting or restricting the access of JLARC staff to information pursuant to its statutory authority.

Appendix B: Research activities and methods

Key research activities JLARC performed for this study include:

- structured interviews with leadership and staff of the Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) and other state agencies, leadership and staff of Virginia's major correctional facilities and local and regional jails, community colleges, former DOC inmates, other correctional stakeholders, and subject-matter experts in the nation and Virginia;
- site visits to six DOC correctional facilities;
- surveys of DOC wardens, principals, and teachers, local and regional jails, and individuals recently released from DOC facilities;
- analysis of DOC data and other state agencies' data;
- reviews of previous reports on Virginia's correctional education programs;
- reviews of national research; and
- reviews of relevant documentation, such as those related to laws, regulations, and policies relevant to the provision of correctional education in Virginia.

Structured interviews

Structured interviews were a key research method for this report. JLARC conducted around 100 interviews. Key interviewees included:

- central office staff of DOC and other state agencies;
- wardens, principals, and teachers at DOC correctional facilities;
- former inmates of DOC correctional facilities;
- staff of Virginia community colleges and universities;
- leadership and programming staff of local and regional jails; and
- stakeholders and subject-matter experts in Virginia and nationally.

Central office staff of DOC and other state agencies

JLARC conducted around 45 structured interviews with DOC central office staff. Topics varied across interviews but were primarily designed to understand DOC's oversight and administrative functions related to the provision of correctional education. DOC staff were also asked for their perspectives on opportunities to improve both the effectiveness and availability of Virginia's correctional education programs.

JLARC also interviewed staff of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Department of Planning and Budget (DPB), the Office of the State Inspector General (OSIG), the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), and the Compensation Board.

Leadership and staff of DOC's correctional facilities

JLARC staff conducted around 15 individual and group interviews with wardens, school principals, teachers, and other staff from eight state correctional facilities in Virginia, including:

- Deerfield Correctional Center;
- Fluvanna Women’s Correctional Center;
- Green Rock Correctional Center;
- Lunenburg Correctional Center;
- Red Onion State Prison;
- St. Brides Correctional Center; and
- Wallens Ridge State Prison.

Interview topics included the logistical challenges in providing educational programming in DOC facilities, prioritization and enrollment decisions; class schedules and structures; and instructional resources (e.g., equipment, software, textbook materials) available to teachers. Leadership and staff were also encouraged to share ideas for improving education operations in DOC facilities based on their own experiences and expertise.

Former inmates of DOC correctional facilities

JLARC staff conducted four structured listening sessions with former DOC inmates who had been released from DOC since 2023. Sixteen former DOC inmates volunteered to participate in these sessions.

The sessions focused on these individuals’ perspectives on correctional education, particularly any key issues they experienced in accessing or receiving instruction in these programs, as well as the re-entry support they received for securing employment while incarcerated. Individuals were also asked for their perspectives on opportunities to improve both the effectiveness and availability of Virginia’s correctional education programs.

Staff of Virginia community colleges and universities

JLARC interviewed staff of seven community colleges and two other higher education institutions that have active contracts to provide college-level coursework in DOC facilities. Interview topics included staff perspectives on current postsecondary program availability, funding, staffing, and operations. Staff were also asked for their opinions on DOC’s support for postsecondary programs and strategies to ensure that postsecondary programs are maximally useful for inmates being released from DOC facilities.

Leadership and programming staff of local and regional jails

JLARC staff conducted around nine individual and group interviews with sheriffs and superintendents overseeing local and regional jail operations in Virginia, as well as local and regional jail staff overseeing educational program operations within these facilities. Interview topics focused on the current availability and operations of education programs in each respective facility. Staff were also asked for their perspectives on the need to implement new or expand existing education programs, barriers to increasing education offerings in these facilities, and other considerations that should be made when deciding whether to increase these offerings.

Stakeholders and subject-matter experts in Virginia and nationally

JLARC staff interviewed various Virginia stakeholder groups and subject-matter experts, including representatives of:

- Virginia's Pre-release and Post-Incarceration Services (PAPIS) providers
- The Humanization Project
- Virginia Re-entry Councils
- The Virginia Consensus for Higher Education in Prison

JLARC staff also interviewed national subject-matter experts, including representatives of:

- The American Correctional Association
- The RAND Corporation
- The Vera Institute
- Washington State Institute for Public Policy
- Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International
- Correctional education staff in other states

These interviews were used to gather stakeholder perspectives on a variety of topics, including satisfaction with educational programming provided in Virginia's major correctional facilities, challenges, and concerns regarding the provision of those programs, ideas for addressing those concerns, and actions taken in other states to address similar challenges.

Site visits

JLARC staff visited six DOC correctional facilities, comprising various levels of security:

- Deerfield Correctional Center;
- Fluvanna Women's Correctional Center;
- Lunenburg Correctional Center;
- Red Onion State Prison;
- St. Brides Correctional Center; and
- Wallens Ridge State Prison.

During the site visits, JLARC staff conducted structured interviews with facility staff (details of which are discussed above), toured the facilities, including academic and CTE classroom spaces, and observed classes.

Surveys

For this study, JLARC staff conducted surveys of (1) DOC facility staff, (2) individuals recently released from a DOC facility, and (3) local and regional jails. Additionally, JLARC shared a feedback form with DOC's testing staff.

Survey of DOC wardens, principals, and teachers

The survey of DOC facility staff was administered electronically to wardens, principals, and academic and CTE teachers of all 37 DOC correctional facilities. The survey was designed to gather these staff's perspectives on the design, delivery, and effectiveness of Virginia's correctional education and CTE programs. It also aimed to gather their perspectives on the challenges and barriers impacting these programs, and staff's satisfaction with their job and workplace support. JLARC received 160 responses from DOC facility staff at 32 DOC facilities, although some staff work at multiple DOC facilities.

The overall survey response rate was approximately 67 percent, and response rates varied by position type (53 percent for wardens, 82 percent for principals, and 68 percent for teachers).

Survey of former inmates of DOC facilities

To gather direct perspectives from recently released individuals on their experiences with correctional education, JLARC staff developed and administered an electronic survey. The survey was designed for individuals released from a DOC prison on or after January 1, 2023, who either participated in or wanted to participate in an education or job training program while incarcerated. The objective was to collect feedback on program experiences, accessibility, and post-release utility to help inform potential findings and recommendations.

There is no comprehensive statewide list of recently released individuals available for direct distribution of surveys. Therefore, JLARC staff worked with PAPIS providers, community-based organizations that provide re-entry and other services directly to former inmates, as well as the Humanization Project, to distribute the survey. These organizations further shared the survey link with other service providers in their networks.

Despite these distribution efforts, JLARC received only 52 responses. Due to the low response count and the non-random, convenience-based sampling method, the survey results were not statistically generalizable to the entire population of individuals recently released from VADOC facilities. However, they did provide additional insight into the experiences and perspectives of those who had been released from DOC facilities, as well as some commonly reported challenges.

Survey of local and regional jails

The survey of local and regional jails was administered electronically to all 56 authorities. Each jail was asked to submit one response by the staff member who was most familiar with the education and vocational programming offered at the facility or who would have the most knowledgeable perspective on implementing these programs if they weren't currently available.

Staff were asked to provide information about the educational programs they provide, including whether they were provided in-person or virtually, who provided instruction, how they were funded, and the current schedule and class sizes for these programs. JLARC also asked local and regional jail staff for their perspectives on the current availability of educational programming in their facilities and any barriers to expanding or implementing educational programming.

JLARC received an 80 percent response rate for the survey, with responses from 45 of the 56 jails.

Feedback form for DOC testing staff

JLARC also sent a feedback form to DOC’s educational testing staff, including staff who administer GED tests and conduct GED bootcamps. Staff were asked about their workload, job challenges, concerns about or ideas for improving DOC’s approach to testing, and thoughts on any other ways DOC’s correctional education programs could be improved.

JLARC received a 68 percent response rate on the feedback form, with responses from 17 of the 25 staff members.

Data collection and analysis

JLARC collected data from DOC and the Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) to analyze for this study. JLARC staff also used publicly available data from other states’ correctional agencies, the University of Washington’s Center for Women’s Welfare, Lightcast, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Analysis of correctional facility inmate population and education program participation (Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4)

JLARC received DOC CORIS snapshot data on inmates held in DOC facilities, including their demographics, education status, assessed risk levels and needs, sentence length, and current enrollment and waitlist status for DOC education programs. DOC also shared demographic information, facility placements, and sentencing dates for state-responsible inmates held in local and regional jails. Data was available for inmates held in these facilities on the last day of February in 2025, 2024, and 2023.

JLARC also received data on inmates’ participation in education programs, including the type of programming, dates of participation, facility, and participation status. Data was available for any participation that occurred between January 1, 2020, and May 1, 2025.

JLARC used these datasets to analyze correctional education participation, completion, and need trends overall and across facilities and inmate characteristics.

Analysis of outcomes for former inmates of DOC correctional facilities (Chapter 2, 3, and 4)

JLARC received DOC release event data on state-responsible inmates who were released between April 2022 and December 2024. Data included inmates’ sentence start and end dates, demographics, release location, whether the inmate had spent time in a DOC facility during their incarceration, and other inmate characteristics that are associated with recidivism and employment outcomes (assessed recidivism risk level, mental health status, substance use history, gang affiliation status, etc.).

Additionally, DOC shared two more datasets with information from other state agencies on these inmates’ employment and recidivism outcomes. Both data sets could be combined with the DOC release event data through a unique identification number for each release.

- One dataset included Virginia Employment Commission data on these released inmates’ quarterly earnings and employer industry (NAICS code) for each employer between 2022 and 2024. Data was available only if the inmate was employed in Virginia and was not self-employed. Employment data for inmates’ first and second full calendar quarters after release was available

only for inmates who were released by September 2024 and June 2024, respectively. The maximum number of follow up periods was nine quarters after release.

- The other dataset included Virginia State Police and DOC data on whether these inmates were rearrested, reconvicted, or reincarcerated as a state-responsible inmate six, 12, and 24 months after release. Due to data lag, reconviction and reincarceration data was available for very few inmates, and rearrest data was only available for inmates released through December 2023.

Together, this data was used with DOC program participation data to develop descriptive statistics of how education program participants' employment rates, wages, and rearrest rates compared to similar non-participants soon after release.

JLARC also conducted regression analyses to control for various factors in its outcomes analysis and limit the impact of these other factors on the results. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions were used to analyze the outcomes of former inmates within the first full quarter of their release, if available, and all available quarters after their release, with the longest period being up to nine full quarters after release. The main outcomes analyzed included employment, quarterly wages (dollar amount and natural log), and re-arrests.

Comparing outcomes of program participants and completers to former inmates who were never removed from a waitlist for a program was a key feature of the regression analysis. This approach helped to mitigate selection bias as inmates who had been placed on a waitlist were more likely to demonstrate similar interest and motivation in the programs as those who participated in them. The CTE waitlist was the control group for participants in postsecondary education programs, as DOC does not maintain a waitlist for those programs. ABE participants were compared to former inmates who appeared on the ABE waitlist but were never enrolled. Inmates were not included in the waitlist group if they participated in any postsecondary or CTE programming since March 2022, regardless of the type of program for which they were on a waitlist. However, some participants enrolled in both postsecondary and vocational training programs.

To ensure the findings were robust, the models also controlled for a wide array of demographic, background, and temporal characteristics. These control variables included: age, length of stay, sex, race, ethnicity, education and vocational assessment levels, mental health needs, criminal history, substance abuse history, known gang affiliation, the number of prior incarceration events, calendar quarter, and inflation. Some specifications included locality and facility of release.

Analysis of DOC staffing data (Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5)

JLARC received educational staffing data from DOC to analyze current staffing levels, vacancies, and licensure statuses of education staff in DOC's facilities. Teacher licensure data was received for adult basic education teachers as of April 2025 and for CTE instructors as of September 2025. Filled and vacant teaching positions for both academic and CTE programs across DOC's facilities were provided for May 2024 through May 2025.

JLARC also received security staffing vacancy data from DOC for July 2025. This was available by DOC region and facility.

Analysis of DOC adult basic education test assessment data (Chapter 2)

JLARC staff received DOC data on all GED and Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) subject tests administered at a DOC facility from January 1, 2020, to May 1, 2025. Data included test types and subjects, dates, facilities, and scores, as well as an inmate identification number that connected this data to the other inmate-related data shared by DOC. Additionally, DOC provided a list of all GED earners, including the date the final subject test was passed, for the same time period.

This data was used to analyze trends in measurable skill gains, student testing, and the academic levels of inmates enrolled in or waitlisted for adult basic education. An inmate's academic level—whether they were enrolled in a class or on a waitlist—was determined by their most recent TABE score or passed GED test prior to February 29, 2025, to the extent data was available. For students enrolled for at least six months, “measurable skill gain” was achieved if they either progressed one or more grade levels between their first and last TABE scores or passed a GED subject test within that period. Additionally, the rate of testing was calculated as the percentage of these long-term students who had at least two TABE scores recorded during their first six months of enrollment.

Analysis of labor market data (Chapter 3)

JLARC received labor market data from the Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) to analyze the demand for current occupations and certifications offered through DOC's CTE programs, and to analyze the median earnings of the targeted occupations in Virginia. JLARC received 2024 data indicating whether DOC's targeted CTE occupations were in high demand, according to the VOEE's established criteria; the median annual earnings for those occupations; and the size of the workforce. Information on the projected annual openings and changes for each occupation between 2024 and 2025 was also included. The certifications most in-demand for each occupation that DOC's CTE programs targeted were also provided for May 2024 through April 2025.

JLARC also utilized 2023 Labor Market Information (LMI) data from Lightcast to analyze entry-level earnings for each occupation targeted by DOC's CTE programs. The 25th percentile of earnings for each occupation was used as an estimate for the entry-level earnings.

The self-sufficiency threshold used for JLARC's analysis came from publicly available data through the Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington. The most recent available self-sufficiency standards for Virginia were for 2021. As for all its earnings analysis, JLARC accounted for inflation and adjusted earnings to 2025 dollars using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index.

Analysis of education program availability data (Chapter 5)

JLARC received DOC hours of operations, attendance and enrollment, and institutional capacity reports from DOC to analyze trends in DOC education programs' availability. These reports included data on the occurrence of program disruptions, enrollment rates, attendance rates, and classroom capacities by facility and month for 2024. JLARC additionally used DOC CORIS snapshot data (described above) to support these analyses.

Analysis of local and regional jail population trends (Appendix D)

JLARC received data from the Compensation Board's LIDS database to analyze the placement statuses (e.g., pre-trial, post-trial awaiting placement, post-trial locally responsible) and length of placements for inmates of all Virginia's local and regional jails. Publicly available average daily population data for February 2025 was used to analyze the placement status of inmates. JLARC requested placement length data from the Compensation Board for all inmates released from these facilities in FY24.

Review of previous reports on Virginia's correctional facilities

JLARC staff reviewed a variety of previous reports, audits, presentations, and other materials published in recent years pertaining to DOC's correctional education system. The review of these materials helped inform the team's understanding of the previous challenges identified in the correctional education system, the current oversight of the system, and the broader challenges in the correctional system affecting the delivery and quality of education services in Virginia.

Materials reviewed included:

- American Correctional Association narrative reports on facilities' education programs;
- DOC preaudits of facilities' ABE and CTE programs;
- other audit reports for DOC's CTE programs, including those by the American Council on Education and National Center for Construction Education and Research;
- DOC research unit reports on DOC's ABE and CTE programs;
- DOC Reports to the General Assembly; and
- DOC security staffing consultant report (2024).

Review of national research

JLARC staff reviewed publications and resources on correctional education from national organizations, including resources from:

- American Council on Education;
- California Legislature's Nonpartisan Fiscal and Policy Advisor;
- Coalition on Adult Basic Education;
- Correctional Education Association;
- Council of State Governments;
- Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority;
- RAND Corporation;
- U.S. Department of Education; and
- Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

Document review

JLARC also reviewed numerous other documents and literature pertaining to correctional education programs in Virginia and nationwide, such as:

- federal laws, regulations, and policies pertaining to correctional education, special education, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity grant funding;
- VDOE requirements and documents relating to its adult education programs;
- federal regulations related to the provision of Pell Grants for incarcerated individuals and technical guides to creating Pell-eligible Prison Education Programs (PEPs);
- technical guides to GED, TABE, and COMPAS assessments;
- DOC CTE program curricula documentation;
- journal articles and government reports on trends in correctional education and federal and state correctional facilities;
- annual reports for Virginia’s local and regional jails on the programs available in each facility, including education and vocational programs; and
- other states’ laws, regulations, policies, and processes related to the provision of correctional education.

Appendix C: Agency response

As part of an extensive validation process, the state agencies and other entities that are subject to a JLARC assessment are given the opportunity to comment on an exposure draft of the report. JLARC staff sent an exposure draft of this report to the Department of Corrections and the secretary of public safety and homeland security.

Appropriate corrections resulting from technical and substantive comments are incorporated in this version of the report. This appendix includes a response letter from the Department of Corrections.



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

CHADWICK S. DOTSON
DIRECTOR

Department of Corrections

P.O. BOX 26963
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23261
(804) 674-3000

November 3, 2025

Hal E. Greer, Director
Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission
919 East Main Street, Suite 2102
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Director Greer,

On behalf of the Virginia Department of Corrections I want to extend our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to review and comment on the exposure draft of Virginia's Correctional Education Programs. Thank you also for meeting with our Senior Leadership team in person on October 23, 2025, to discuss the findings and recommendations.

The Report is a thorough and thoughtful study on correctional education, and it reflects the many complexities and challenges of providing education in secure prison environments with limited resources. The report also reflects the excellent work of our educators and other prison staff who support safety and programming, and the passion and dedication that guides their work. Education provides a critical role in lasting public safety as evidenced by the significantly lower recidivism rate of our academic and career and technical education (CTE) graduates. We are proud of the programming provided within VADOC and we also continually seek and embrace the opportunity for continual growth and improvement.

We largely agree with the Report's recommendations, including challenges and opportunities that exist in correctional education. We will thoughtfully consider implementing all recommendations. Among these are:

- We will better balance student learning measures with targeted outcome measures (GEDs) by returning to TABE testing of all students at regular intervals.
- We will review the education level of all inmates by June of 2026 to ensure that anyone who tests as needing services is either enrolled in school or is documented on a waiting list.
- We are seeking funding for automated solutions to reduce the incidences of inmates being removed from school due to prison transfers and will seek funding for business developers to focus on the post release employment of CTE graduates.
- We will ensure monthly data is collected and shared with wardens, principals and leadership to resolve barriers and support student full-time attendance of classes.

- We will reorganize our administrative support staff to report to the Superintendent to provide stronger leadership to Memorandums of Understanding with colleges and universities to ensure courses meet the employment needs of our population.
- We will consider cost sharing arrangements with post-secondary schools to alleviate the agency from bearing added costs of administrative support and security supervision of post-secondary education in prisons.

We appreciate JLARC's recognition of the importance of correctional education as a cornerstone of changed lives, stronger families and safer communities. The Commission's findings affirm our commitment to providing high quality education programs that equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to become employed, support families, and lead productive, law-abiding lives after release.

Thank you again for JLARC's careful analysis and constructive, practical recommendations. We look forward to continuing collaboration with our multiple stakeholders to advance correctional education outcomes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Dotson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chadwick S. Dotson

Appendix D: Educational programs in local and regional jails

The correctional education study resolution directed JLARC to evaluate the feasibility and potential effectiveness of providing educational and vocational services in Virginia’s 56 local and regional jails. This appendix is intended to address that directive and serve as a resource for legislators interested in better understanding educational programming in these facilities.

JLARC reviewed annual reports on each jail’s educational services and programs; surveyed jail staff; interviewed sheriffs, jail superintendents, and program staff; and analyzed Compensation Board data on jail placements and inmates’ lengths of stay. Information on educational programming was collected from 51 of the 56 jail authorities in the state (91 percent). The jails that did not provide any information to JLARC on their educational programming are in the counties of Accomack, Page, Patrick, and Pittsylvania, and the city of Portsmouth. More information on the methods used can be found in Appendix B.

Virginia’s jails house both state- and locally responsible inmates, inmates awaiting trial, and inmates awaiting sentencing

Virginia has 56 local and regional jail *authorities*, but the state has 63 total jail facilities. While jails consist of only one facility, Blue Ridge Regional Jail Authority has five jail facilities and Southwestern Virginia Regional Jail Authority has four.

Jails house individuals under both pre-trial and post-trial placement statuses. Pre-trial placements include individuals who are awaiting trial. Post-trial placements include individuals who have been convicted and are awaiting sentencing or are serving all or a portion of their sentence in jail.

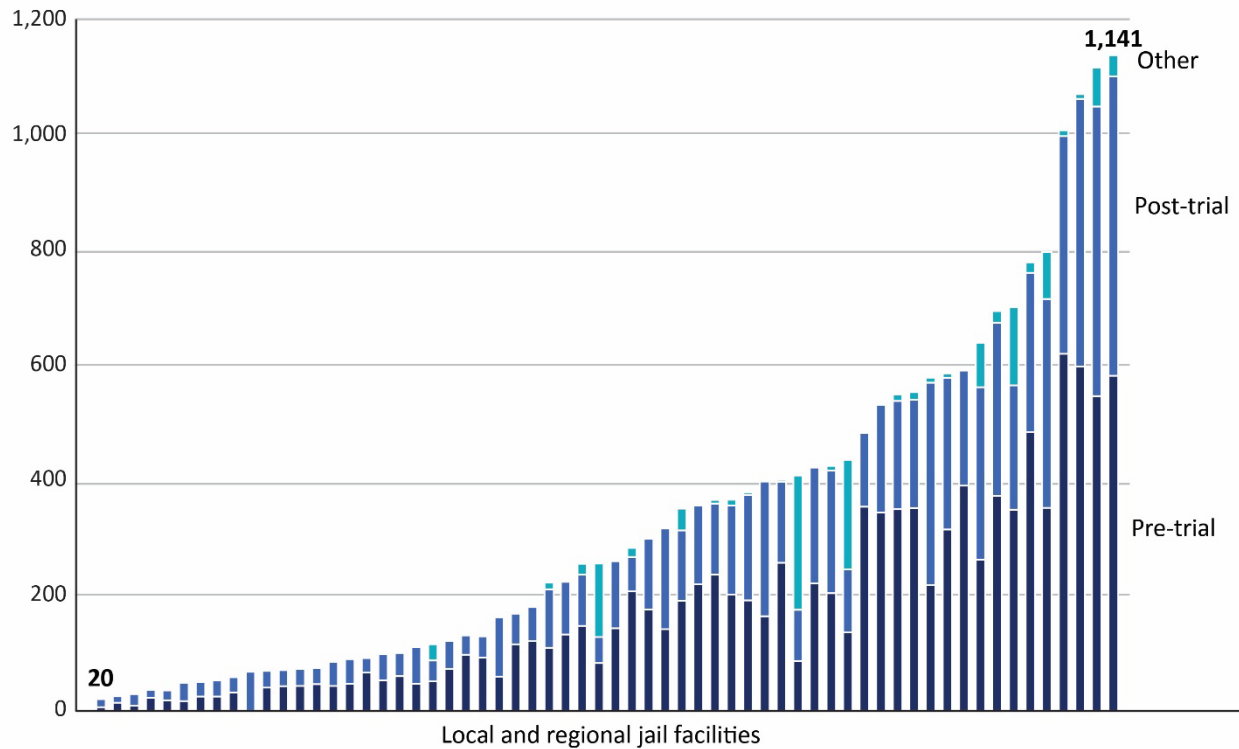
In addition to their placement status, jail inmates are classified as either “locally responsible” or “state-responsible.” Locally responsible inmates include all inmates who are pre-trial and inmates convicted of misdemeanors or felonies with a sentence of 12 months or less. State-responsible inmates include inmates who are convicted of one or more felonies with a total sentence of more than 12 months. The Department of Corrections (DOC) decides whether state-responsible inmates serve their sentence in a jail or a state prison.

In February 2025, the average daily population in Virginia’s jails was 20,651. Over half (54 percent) of these were pre-trial inmates. Forty-one percent had been convicted and were either awaiting sentencing or serving a portion of or all of their sentence in jail. The remaining population committed ordinance violations or were federal, juvenile, or out-of-state placements.

Jails’ average daily population (ADP) and composition of inmates vary across Virginia’s local and regional jails. The median ADP across facilities was 261, with populations ranging from 20 to 1,141 inmates (Figure D-1). Between 21 percent and 74 percent of all inmates housed within one of these jails were pre-trial inmates, and 18 percent to 69 percent were post-trial inmates. Three facilities—Alexandria, Northern Neck, and Piedmont—had a notable portion of federal inmates.

TABLE D-1

Average daily population across Virginia's jail facilities varies both in size and composition (February 2025)



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of average daily population data from the Virginia Compensation Board (February 2025).

NOTE: Sixty-two facility locations are presented above, each belonging to one of the 56 local or regional jail authorities. Blue Ridge Regional Jail Authority's Bedford and Campbell facilities each had an average daily population of one inmate and are not pictured above.

Most jails offer some educational programming for inmates, though they are not required to by state law

State law permits, but does not require, local and regional jails to offer educational and vocational programming to inmates. If a jail does opt to provide these types of programs, it must establish written policies, procedures, and practices that govern the availability and delivery of educational services for inmates.

Most jails in Virginia report offering some form of adult education to inmates within their facilities. Forty-nine of the 51 jails JLARC received programming information from reported offering these programs (Table D-1). Those offerings included adult basic education, GED testing and preparation, special education, and/or English as a Second Language courses. These courses are generally taught in person by instructors hired through public schools, the jail, adult learning centers, or community colleges and universities. Some jails offer self-guided adult education courses on tablets or computers that inmates can participate in during their placement.

Twenty-eight of the 51 jails responding to JLARC requests also reported offering career and technical education (CTE) programs. Most of these programs are relatively short courses that teach specific credentials (e.g., ServSafe, OSHA 10, NCCER Core) or stackable skills that inmates can either use in various fields or transfer to a full vocational program in the community upon release. Fewer jails reported being able to offer long-term (e.g., 8-12 months) CTE courses, similar to those available at some DOC facilities. CTE programs are taught either in-person by an instructor hired by the jail or a community partner (e.g., a community college or adult learning center), or through self-guided courses on tablets.

Few facilities offer postsecondary, credit-bearing courses for inmates. Eleven facilities reported providing these types of programs through partnerships with community colleges. Some of these programs are provided in-person, and others are taught through virtual instruction.

TABLE D-1**Types of education programs offered in Virginia's jails (as of 2025)**

Local or regional jail authority	Adult education	Career and technical education	College education
Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail	✓	✓	✓
Alexandria ADC	✓	✓	
Alleghany Regional Jail	✓	✓	✓
Arlington County Detention Facility	✓	✓	✓
Blue Ridge Regional Jail Authority	✓		
Botetourt/Craig County Jail	✓		
Central Virginia Regional Jail	✓	✓	✓
Charlotte County Jail	✓		
Chesapeake City Jail	✓	✓	
Chesterfield County Jail	✓	✓	
Culpeper County Jail	✓		
Danville City Jail	✓	✓	
Eastern Shore Regional Jail	✓		✓
Fairfax County ADC	✓	✓	✓
Fauquier County ADC	✓		
Franklin County Jail	✓		
Gloucester County Jail	✓		
Hampton City Jail	✓	✓	
Henrico County Jail	✓	✓	
Henry County Jail	✓	✓	
Lancaster County Jail	✓		
Loudoun County ADC	✓	✓	
Martinsville City Jail	✓		
Meherrin River Regional Jail	✓		
Middle Peninsula Regional SC	✓	✓	
Middle River Regional Jail	✓	✓	
Montgomery County Jail	✓		
New River Valley Regional Jail	✓		
Newport News City Jail	✓	✓	
Norfolk City Jail	✓	✓	✓
Northern Neck Regional Jail	✓	✓	

Local or regional jail authority	Adult education	Career and technical education	College education
Northwestern Regional ADC	√	√	
Pamunkey Regional Jail	√	√	
Piedmont Regional Jail	√		
Prince William-Manassas Regional ADC	√	√	
Rappahannock Regional Jail	√	√	
Richmond City Jail	√	√	
Riverside Regional Jail	√	√	√
Roanoke City Jail	√	√	√
Roanoke County Jail	√	√	√
Rockbridge Regional Jail	√	√	
Rockingham/Harrisonburg Regional Jail	√		
RSW Regional Jail	√		
Southampton County Jail			
Southside Regional Jail	√		
Southwest Virginia Regional Jail Authority	√	√	
Sussex County Jail			
Virginia Beach City Jail	√		
Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail	√		
Western Tidewater Regional Jail	√		
Western Virginia Regional Jail	√		√

SOURCE: JLARC analysis of local and regional jails annual programming reports, and survey responses.

NOTE: "ADC" = Adult detention center. "SC" = Security center. Six local jails are not listed because they did not submit annual reports or survey responses to JLARC. These jails include Accomack County Jail, Page County Jail, Patrick County Jail, Pittsylvania County Jail, and Portsmouth City Jail.

Relative to the total jail population, few jail inmates appear to be enrolled in educational programming at any given time. For the jails that provided information on the number of inmates currently participating in their programs, a median of 17 inmates were enrolled in adult education and eight inmates were enrolled in CTE. Only two facilities with postsecondary programs provided enrollment information, with 10 and 15 students reported in each of those programs.

Most jails reported meeting demand for adult education programs, and expanding educational programming would require additional funding, space, and staff

Most jails reported being able to meet demand for adult education programs but not CTE and postsecondary education programs. Only nine jails responding to JLARC's survey reported they were unable to expand or establish adult education programs to meet notable unmet demand for these programs; these facilities collectively had an ADP of approximately 3,400 inmates, around 700 of whom were state-responsible inmates. However, 22 jails reported not being able to meet demand for CTE, and 21 reported the same for postsecondary programs.

The most common reasons jails reported for being unable to meet demand for these education programs were constraints on funding, instructional staff, and physical space—barriers which can be costly to address.

- **Funding:** Around half of jails that were unable to meet demand for each of these programs reported funding limitations as a primary constraint. Jails are not allocated funding

specifically for educational programming, but they commonly cover a portion of or all the costs for these programs through other funding. This reportedly limits jails' ability to expand programs, especially when funding would be taken away from other jail operations. Community partners also receive funding to operate these programs at 27 jails, either covering all (at 10 jails) or a portion of the costs (at 17 jails), but jails' lack of control over these funds also hinders their ability to expand programming.

- **Physical space:** Around half of jails unable to meet demand for these programs reported space constraints to be a primary reason. Similar to DOC, jails lack space to establish classrooms needed to provide additional instruction. This challenge is particularly prominent in small local jails that reported not having designated space for their primary functions, including visitation, legal counsel meetings, or operational meetings. Expanding or implementing education programs at these facilities would require costly facility expansions or greater use of multi-use spaces that are already experiencing scheduling conflicts.
- **Instructional staff:** Jails that reported being unable to meet demand for adult education and postsecondary programs reported finding instructional staff for these programs to be another primary constraint.

Relatively short stays among jail inmates and other constraints make comprehensive educational programming less cost-effective than in prisons

Even if resource constraints were overcome, providing comprehensive educational programming in jails is challenging because jail inmates typically spend less time in jail. First, pre-trial inmates, who make up a large proportion of jail populations, are subject to various court proceedings that make it difficult to participate in educational programming. Post-trial inmates, including state-responsible inmates, have short stays, averaging two months. This limits the types of programs they are likely to complete and benefit from.

These circumstances differ substantially from those of inmates placed in DOC facilities, where education programming is more extensive. Inmates in DOC facilities serve an average of four years, which is significantly longer than inmates in local and regional jails. Even if post-trial inmates were placed in DOC facilities, their access to educational programs would not necessarily improve. Less than 10 percent of participants in DOC's adult education, CTE, or college programs had sentence lengths of a year or less.

Additionally, other more pressing needs, like mental health treatment, may take precedence over educational programming in jail settings. Jail superintendents and sheriffs reported that many inmates have urgent mental health needs that must be addressed before inmates can actively participate in education or other types of jail programming. In 2024, 37 percent of jail inmates were assessed to have a mental illness, a proportion that has been growing in recent years. With growing needs, mental health costs increased 62 percent between 2015 and 2024 (adjusted for inflation), according to the Compensation Board. With limited funding, space, and staff, these medical needs may be more critical to prioritize over educational programs during inmates' short stays.

If additional educational opportunities are pursued, some strategies and programs currently used by some Virginia jails could be considered. For example:

- **Tablet programming:** Self-guided adult basic education, CTE, and college programs could be offered through tablets, which would help overcome space and staffing constraints. Eleven jails in Virginia reported offering these types of educational opportunities to their inmates. These facilities contracted with vendors who provide tablets with an inventory of different academic and vocational training courses that inmates can participate in.
- **Targeting short-term CTE:** Many jails provide CTE courses that are short in length and provide inmates with skills and credentials that can be used for various occupations upon release. Examples of these include certification courses—such as OSHA 10, VDOT flagger, ServSafe, and NCCER Core certifications—and stackable occupation-specific courses—such as fundamentals for horticulture and landscaping occupations, food safety knowledge for food handler occupations, and introduction to customer services and customer service management courses. These types of courses should be prioritized over longer-term vocational programs so that inmates have a greater likelihood of completion during their relatively short placements.
- **Prioritize adult basic education and CTE:** Given existing resource constraints, jails should prioritize offering adult basic education and CTE programs over postsecondary academic courses. Jails commonly reported that inmates' placement lengths and academic levels were insufficient to warrant expanding postsecondary, credit-bearing course offerings in their facilities. Forty-seven percent of the jail respondents that did not offer postsecondary credit programs indicated it was because inmates' placements were too short. Some also indicated that many inmates do not have a high school diploma or equivalent, making them ineligible for this additional programming.

Appendix E: Inventory of education programs in DOC facilities

The correctional education study resolution directed JLARC to inventory the programs available across DOC's correctional facilities. This appendix is intended to address that directive and act as a resource for legislators interested in better understanding the educational programs across these facilities.

Table E-1 presents information on DOC's adult basic education and career and technical education (CTE) programs available at each facility. It also presents the postsecondary programs offered at each DOC facility, which are provided through agreements with community colleges and universities in Virginia.

Table E-1

Inventory of educational programs by DOC facility

DOC facility	Adult Basic Education	DOC CTE programs	Postsecondary programs
Baskerville Correctional Center	✓	• Business Software Applications • Graphic Communications & Print Production • Introduction to Computers • Masonry	• Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies • Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in Business Management • HVAC Level 1 and NCCER^a Core (non-credit)
Beaumont Correctional Center			
Bland Correctional Center	✓	• Business Software Applications • Commercial Foods • Introduction to Computers • Masonry • Small Engine Repair	• CTE certificate (non-credit bearing) in Gas Metal Arc Welding and Precision Measurement
Buckingham Correctional Center	✓	• Commercial Foods • Electrical • Plumbing	• Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies
Caroline Correctional Unit	✓	• Commercial Driver's License	
Central Virginia Correctional Unit	✓	• Business Software Applications • Commercial Foods • Introduction to Computers	
Coffeewood Correctional Center	✓	• Business Software Applications • Floor Covering • Introduction to Computers	• CTE certificate (non-credit bearing) in NCCER Core^a and OSHA 10

DOC facility	Adult Basic Education	DOC CTE programs	Postsecondary programs
		• Small Engine Repair • Welding	
Cold Springs Correctional Unit	✓	• Roofing and Siding	• CTE certificate (non-credit bearing) in Retail Customer Service and Sales
Deerfield Correctional Complex (DCC)	✓	• Barbering • Business Software Applications • Electrical • Horticulture • Introduction to Computers	
Deerfield Men's Work Center		• Welding	
Deerfield Men's Work Center 2	✓		
Dillwyn Correctional Center	✓	• Business Software Applications • Introduction to Computers • Plumbing • Welding	• Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies
Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women	✓	• Building Maintenance & Repair • Business Software Applications • Cosmetology • Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation • Graphic Communications & Print Production • Introduction to Computers • Optical Lens Technology	• Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies
Green Rock Correctional Center	✓	• Construction Surveying ^b • Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation ^b • Electrical ^b • HVAC/Refrigeration ^b	
Greenville Correctional Center	✓	• Barbering • Communication Arts and Design • Computer Systems Technology • Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation • Electrical • Horticulture • HVAC/Refrigeration • Introduction to Computers • Plumbing	
Halifax Correctional Unit	✓		• Electrical Level 1 and OSHA 10 (non-credit)

DOC facility	Adult Basic Education	DOC CTE programs	Postsecondary programs
Haynesville Correctional Center	✓	Barbering	Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies
		Business Software Applications	
		Electrical	Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in Science
		Fiber Optics, Copper & Telecommunications	
		Introduction to Computers	SolarSHINE and SolarSHINE+ (non-credit)
		Masonry	
Indian Creek Correctional Center	✓	- Fiber Optics, Copper & Telecommunications - Small Engine Repair	Associate degree in Liberal Arts
Keen Mountain Correctional Center	✓	- Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation - Electrical	
Lawrenceville Correctional Center	✓	Business Software Applications	
		Cabinet Making	
		Carpentry	
		Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation	
		Electrical	
		Horticulture	
		Introduction to Computers	
		Masonry	
		Plumbing	
		Building Maintenance & Repair	Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies
Lunenburg Correctional Center	✓	Electrical	Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in Business Management
		Floor Covering	
		Horticulture	
		Masonry	
		Upholstery	
Marion Correctional Treatment Center	✓		
Nottoway Correctional Center	✓	Business Software Applications	Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies
		Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation	
		Horticulture	Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in Business Management
		HVAC/Refrigeration	
		Introduction to Computers	
Nottoway Work Center	✓	Commercial Driver's License	
Patrick Henry Correctional Unit	✓	Electrical	
Pocahontas State Correctional Center	✓	Building Maintenance & Repair	
		Drafting/CAD	
		Floor Covering	

DOC facility	Adult Basic Education	DOC CTE programs	Postsecondary programs
		• Graphic Communications & Print Production • Masonry • Motorcycle Repair • Plumbing	
Red Onion State Prison	✓	• Business Software Applications • Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation • Introduction to Computers	
River North Correctional Center	✓	• Business Software Applications • Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation • Graphic Communications & Print Production • HVAC/Refrigeration • Introduction to Computers • Masonry	
Rustburg Correctional Unit	✓	• Business Software Applications • Introduction to Computers	• Associate degree in Liberal Arts
St. Brides Correctional Center	✓	• Auto Body • Automotive Technology & Service • Carpentry • Drafting/CAD • Electrical • Graphic Communications & Print Production • HVAC/Refrigeration • Plumbing	
State Farm Correctional Center	✓	• Business Software Applications • Fiber Optics & Copper & Telecom • Horticulture • Plumbing • Welding	• Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies • Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in Business Management
State Farm Enterprise Unit			
State Farm Work Center	✓	• Welding	
Sussex, I State Prison	✓	• Business Software Applications • Drafting/CAD • Communication Arts and Design • Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation • Introduction to Computers • Painting and Drywall	

DOC facility	Adult Basic Education	DOC CTE programs	Postsecondary programs
Virginia Correctional Center for Women	✓	• Business Software Applications • Commercial Foods • Cosmetology • Fiber Optics, Copper & Telecommunications • Horticulture • Introduction to Computers	• Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in General Studies • Associate degree and Uniform Certificate in Business Management
Wallens Ridge State Prison	✓	• Custodial Maintenance/Sanitation	
Wise Correctional Unit	✓		• CTE certificate (non-credit bearing) in NCCER^a Welding

SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC educational programming documentation.

NOTE: Adult basic education program inventory is current as of February 2025. CTE programs are current as of April 2025. Postsecondary is current as of September 2025, though programming is highly variable based on individual facility agreements with higher education partners. ^a NCCER refers to the National Center for Construction Education and Research. ^b DOC partners with Danville Community College to provide college credit for the CTE programs it offers at Green Rock Correctional Center.

Appendix F: Additional information on DOC's CTE programs

This appendix provides a full list of the CTE programs offered through the Department of Corrections (DOC) and expands on the labor market criteria each program meets, as summarized in Chapter 3 of this report. Table F-1 indicates whether each program's target jobs are in high demand in the state and whether those jobs' entry-level and median wages meet self-sufficiency levels. The table also shows if the program targets in-demand certifications for its respective job fields and industries.

Table F-1

Alignment of DOC CTE programs with labor market criteria

CTE program	Number of facilities offering	High-demand jobs targeted	In-demand certifications	Entry-level wages exceed self-sufficiency	Median wages exceed self-sufficiency
Auto Body Repair	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Automotive Technology & Repair	1			✓	✓
Barbering	3	✓	✓		✓
Building Maintenance & Repair	3		✓	✓	✓
Business Software Applications	16	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cabinet Making	1	✓	✓		✓
Carpentry	2	✓	✓	✓	✓
Commercial Driver's License	2	✓	✓	✓	✓
Commercial Foods	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication Arts & Design	2	✓		✓	✓
Computer System Technology	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Construction Surveying	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cosmetology	2	✓	✓		✓
Custodial Maintenance & Sanitation	10	✓	✓		✓
Drafting/CAD	3		✓	✓	✓
Electricity	10		✓	✓	✓
Fiber Optics, Copper, & Telecommunications	4	✓	✓	✓	✓
Floor Covering	3	✓	✓	✓	✓
Graphic Communications & Digital Print Prod.	5		✓	✓	✓
HVAC/Refrigeration	5	✓	✓	✓	✓
Horticulture	7	✓	✓		✓

CTE program	Number of facilities offering	High-demand jobs targeted	In-demand certifications	Entry-level wages exceed self-sufficiency	Median wages exceed self-sufficiency
Introduction To Computers	16	✓	✓	✓	✓
Masonry	7	✓ ^a	✓	✓ ^a	✓
Motorcycle Repairer	1		✓	✓	✓
Optical Lens Technology	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Painting/Drywall	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Plumbing	7	✓	✓	✓	✓
Roofing And Siding	1		✓	✓	✓
Small Engine Repair	3	✓	✓	✓	✓
Upholstery	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Welding	5	✓	✓	✓	✓

SOURCE: JLARC analysis of DOC CTE program documentation and Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE) labor market data (May 2024–April 2025).

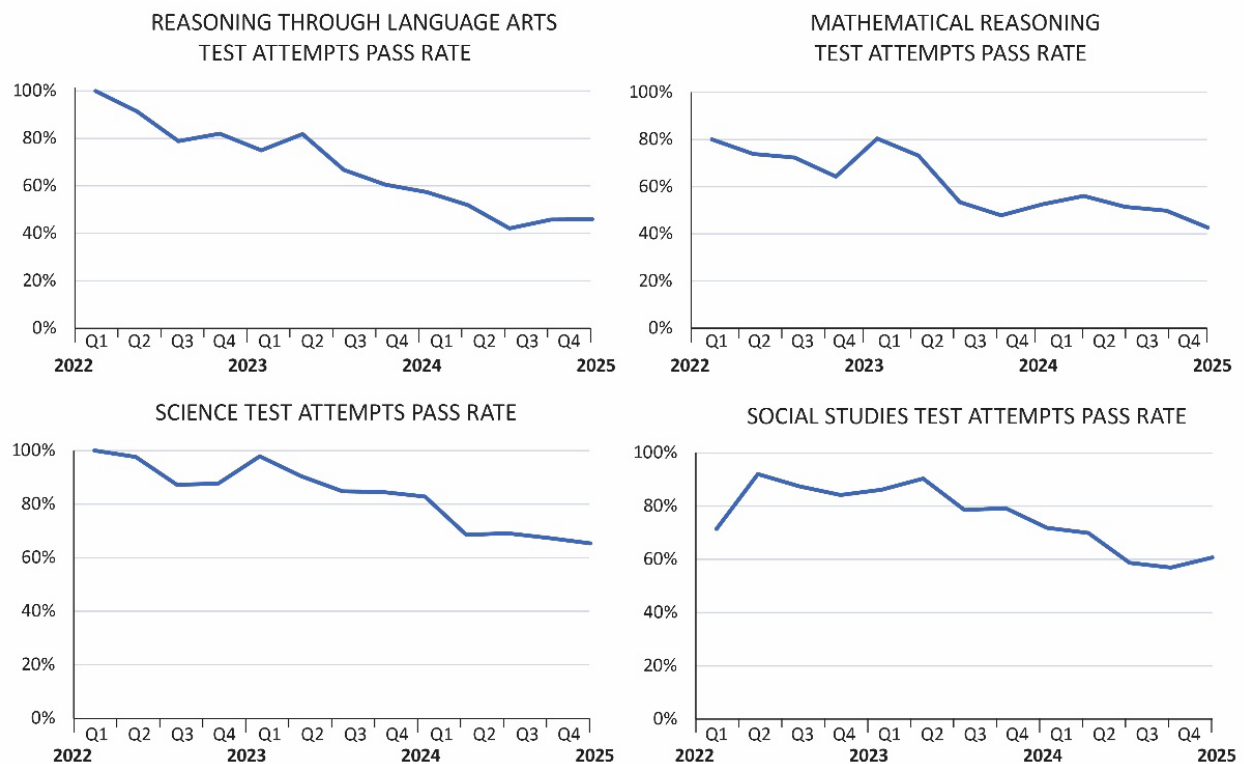
NOTE: The number of facilities offering each program is current as of April 2025. VOEE determines a job title to be in high demand based on set criteria. A job title must (1) have a typically entry-level education range of no formal education to a bachelor's degree, (2) have a minimum of 1 percent projected growth in workforce demand in the next five years, (3) have a minimum of 100 projected statewide openings per year, on average, over the next five years, and have median earnings that are at least 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Alternatively, a job title can be considered high demand if it is an active apprenticeshipable occupation according to the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry.^a Criterion is met only for job titles of the advanced masonry program, which can only be completed after the foundational program.

Appendix G: Recent trends in GED subject test pass rates among DOC inmates

This appendix provides additional information on trends in subject test pass rates among DOC inmates since 2022. The percentage of GED subject tests passed by DOC inmates has decreased in recent years, and this decline has occurred in all four subject tests that individuals are required to pass to earn their GED (Figure G-1).

FIGURE G-1

Declining subject test pass rates extend to all subjects



SOURCE: DOC data on GED tests taken at DOC facilities from January 2022–March 2025.

NOTE: A test taker needs a score of 145 or higher to pass a subject test.



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919 East Main Street Suite 2101 Richmond, VA 23219