

# FACT SHEET



## Correctional Education Reform

**The problem:** In a state ranked #1 for both Education and Business in 2024, there has been little strategic attention to Virginia’s prison education system, despite the workforce potential of this population and emerging labor force shortages—not to mention the proven public safety benefits and cost efficiencies of reduced recidivism linked to education during incarceration. **Prison education is a matter of both social concern and economic competitiveness.**

Annually, 10,000 individuals enter the Virginia labor force from the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC)—a figure equivalent to the graduating class of George Mason University, Virginia’s largest.

By 2030, 62% of all jobs will require postsecondary education and 42% percent will require bachelor’s degrees. Newly restored federal Pell grant eligibility creates an opportunity to expand college and workforce education cost-effectively to incarcerated Virginians.

**The Solution:** HB2158 calls for an improved prison educational path, from basic literacy and secondary education (Adult Basic Education (ABE) and GED) through post-secondary education to workforce readiness.

In VADOC now, among the roughly 24,000 individuals incarcerated, about 14,000 (62%) have already completed their secondary education, with a high school diploma or GED equivalence. They are academically eligible for college—and most meet the low-income qualifications for Pell grants.

**Literacy Education:** Of those yet to complete high school/secondary education (38%), low literacy (reading) affects about half, and current methods of assessment and instruction in VADOC do not yet

reflect the evidence-based standards recently implemented in K-12 education under the Virginia Literacy Act. **HB2158 requires adoption of the new standards**, supporting those overcoming academic deficits to enter the pathway toward GED attainment and even postsecondary education.

**Evidence for Prison Education:** Stickle & Sprick Schuster (2023) analyzed the effects of ABE, secondary education (GED), vocational, and college education on recidivism, employability, and wages. All four educational programs had beneficial effects. The greatest positive effects were observed for vocational and college programs. They reduced recidivism by 16% and 42% and increased employability by 12% and 21%, respectively. Wage data also trended positively.

Already, four Virginia Community College System (VCCS) colleges offer Pell-funded academic and/or workforce programs in 11 VADOC prisons, but there is room to grow. **HB2158 requires VCCS and VADOC to collaborate** to make college programs available at all 45 prisons. **Virginia Information Technology Agency (VITA)** would also be required to assist VADOC in developing secure educational technology for academic uses.

**A Prison Education Task Force** would be established by HB2158 to coordinate collaboration across pertinent agencies and interested parties.

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