

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/gov-christie-announces-expansion-of-prison-education-program>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, in an event yesterday at Mercer County Community College, did more than announce the expansion of one of Veras [Pathways from Prison to Postsecondary Education Project](#) pilot sites, New Jersey STEP. He framed higher education in prisons as a moral imperative that we all share and an opportunity to give incarcerated individuals the tools they need to succeed after their release.

New Jersey STEP Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons is a consortium composed of colleges, universities, the New Jersey Department of Corrections and the New Jersey Parole Board that collaborates to provide higher education in prison and support students pursuing education after release. NJ-STEP is funded by the Sunshine Lady and Ford Foundations. The other Pathways project funders are the Bill & Melinda Gates, Open Society, and W.K. Kellogg Foundations.

Gov. Christies announcement dovetails with an increasing emphasis on higher education in prison by federal, state, and local policymakers. Within the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Career and Technical Education has highlighted reentry education as one of its priorities. Washington State is currently considering legislation, [House Bill 1429](#), which would allow for state funded postsecondary education programs in correctional facilities. On the local level California Attorney General Kamala Harris announced this week the creation of Back on Track LA, a recidivism reduction pilot program in partnership with the Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department (LASD) that will expand the LASDs Education Based Incarceration Program. The program will provide higher education classes, as well as reentry services like employment and life skills training.

Gov. Christies endorsement is an important recognition of New Jersey STEP and the Pathways Program. Although public dollars are not currently being provided in New Jersey, vocal public support of these programs is a crucial component to a successful education model inside of prison and a transition to education on the outside. Gov. Christie also spoke about the need to destigmatize incarceration and to help people reintegrate into society, a key part of the Pathways model with its emphasis on wraparound services and supports as students enroll in college in prison and continue their education after release.

The governors speech highlighted the very real value of postsecondary education in prison, something confirmed by an empirical evidence base. According to a [RAND meta-analysis](#), prisoners who participate in correctional education have 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than those who do not have access to and participate in programs. Programs like Pathways provide a real opportunity for a prison sentence to rehabilitate not just punish resulting in transformed lives, stronger families and strengthened communities.

This endorsement is a promising step towards the integration and normalization of postsecondary education in prison. The next step should involve public funding for such efforts.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.