

# Serving Time or Wasting Time?

Correctional education programs improve job prospects, reduce recidivism, and save taxpayer dollars.



**In the largest-ever meta-analysis of U.S. correctional educational programs, RAND researchers found compelling evidence that the prison-based programs not only work but also are cost-effective.** Correctional education will likely face near-term budget cuts in many states, but its high return on investment should remain a high priority in future state budgets.

## THE CASES OF INMATES KNOTT AND KEEN

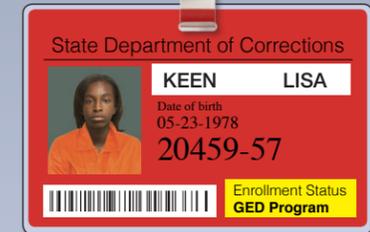
Knott and Keen are hypothetical inmates. How does the use of their time in prison affect their lives after release?



### APPLICATION DENIED

Knott wasn't able to enroll in correctional education of any kind. Had he enrolled in *any* such program (vocational, special, or academic), **his odds of obtaining employment would have increased by 13%.**

13%



### YOU'RE HIRED

Like other ex-offenders who participated specifically in vocational training programs, Keen **increased her odds of getting a job by 28%.**

28%

Inmates who participate in correctional education programs have a 30% chance of recidivating, compared with 43% for those who do not. **That's a 13-percentage-point drop in the risk of recidivism for those who participate.**

### The bad news

Of the more than 700,000 people that U.S. prisons release each year, **40% of those released inmates end up back in prison within three years.**



40%

### Part of the problem

Prisoners say they need education and job training to reintegrate into society. They're right:

**68% of inmates in state prisons lack a high school diploma.**

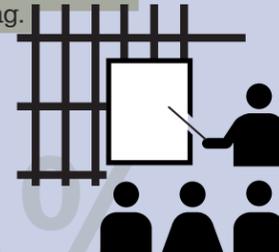


68%

### The encouraging news

Most state correctional institutions offer primary, secondary, vocational, special, or college education programs.

**84% of state correctional institutions offer some type of education or training.**



84%

## What about the money?

The cost of correctional education programs per participant is \$1,400–\$1,744. Nearly a third of participants still recidivate. But the average savings per participant from reduced reincarceration rates is \$8,700–\$9,700 over three years. Even assuming the highest average cost (\$1,744) and the lowest average savings (\$8,700), the three-year return on investment for taxpayers is nearly 400%, or \$5 saved for every \$1 spent.



SOURCE: *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults*, Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, Jeremy N. V. Miles, RR-266-BJA, 2013, [www.rand.org/t/rr266](http://www.rand.org/t/rr266).

IMAGE CREDITS—handcuffs: soleilc1/Fotolia; desk: Michael Loree/The Noun Project; Knott: doglikehorse.com/Fotolia; Keen: © bst2012 z/Fotolia.

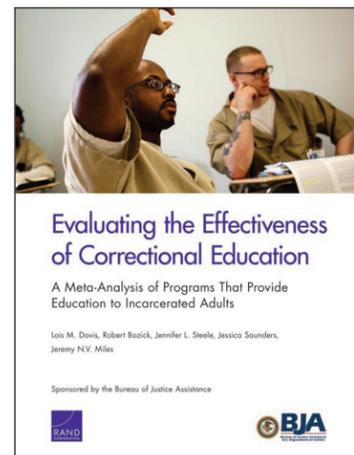


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This infographic is based on findings presented in  
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