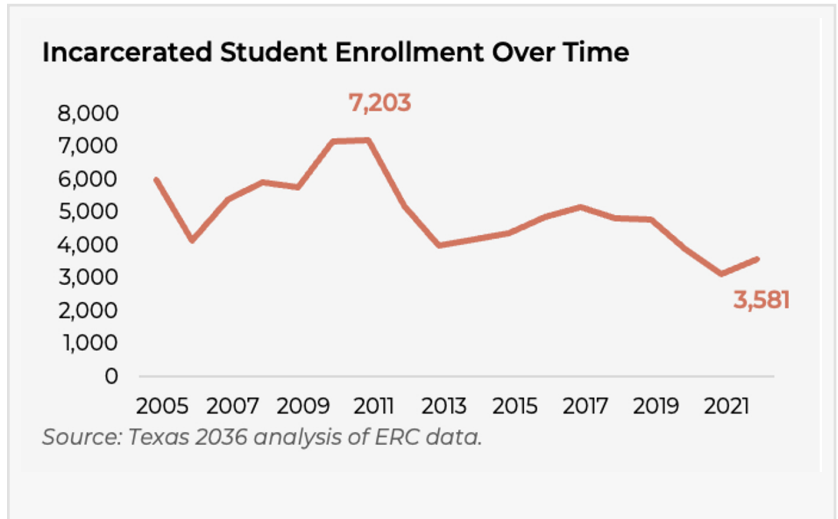


# New Report Reveals 50% Drop in Higher Education Enrollment Among Incarcerated Texans

*Texas has an opportunity to significantly reduce recidivism by expanding college-level programs in Texas prisons*

AUSTIN, TX, UNITED STATES, November 13, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Texas 2036 today unveiled [a report](#) showing a sharp 50% decline in higher education enrollment among individuals incarcerated in Texas since 2011. This drop, from a high-water mark of 7,203 enrollments to 3,581 in 2022, is attributed not to a lack of interest but to a critical gap in the capacity of correctional education programs to meet demand.



Currently, Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) facilities house [over 134,000 individuals](#), with more than 45,000 Texans reentering society annually. Almost half of these individuals face rearrest within three years, and 15-20% return to prison.

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*Luis Soberon*

Expanding higher education opportunities in these facilities could not only curb recidivism but also improve economic outcomes for formerly incarcerated Texans. Research from last year indicated that inmates participating in college-level education programs are [as much as 41.5%](#) less likely to return to prison and that

investments by inmates in their own education return an estimated \$1.61 for every \$1 spent.

In Texas, incarcerated individuals are responsible for paying the costs of their own higher education. There are limited sources of state and federal aid that eligible applicants can draw upon to cover tuition and costs.

Moreover, a 2024 study showed that employers are 42% more likely to consider hiring formerly incarcerated individuals with postsecondary credentials compared to those with only a GED.

“Prison education is a powerful tool not only for improving lives but also for bolstering our workforce and saving taxpayer dollars,” said Luis Soberon, report author and senior policy advisor at Texas 2036. “Expanding these programs will require Texas to strengthen data collection and governance to ensure quality and scalability.”

**Key Findings:**

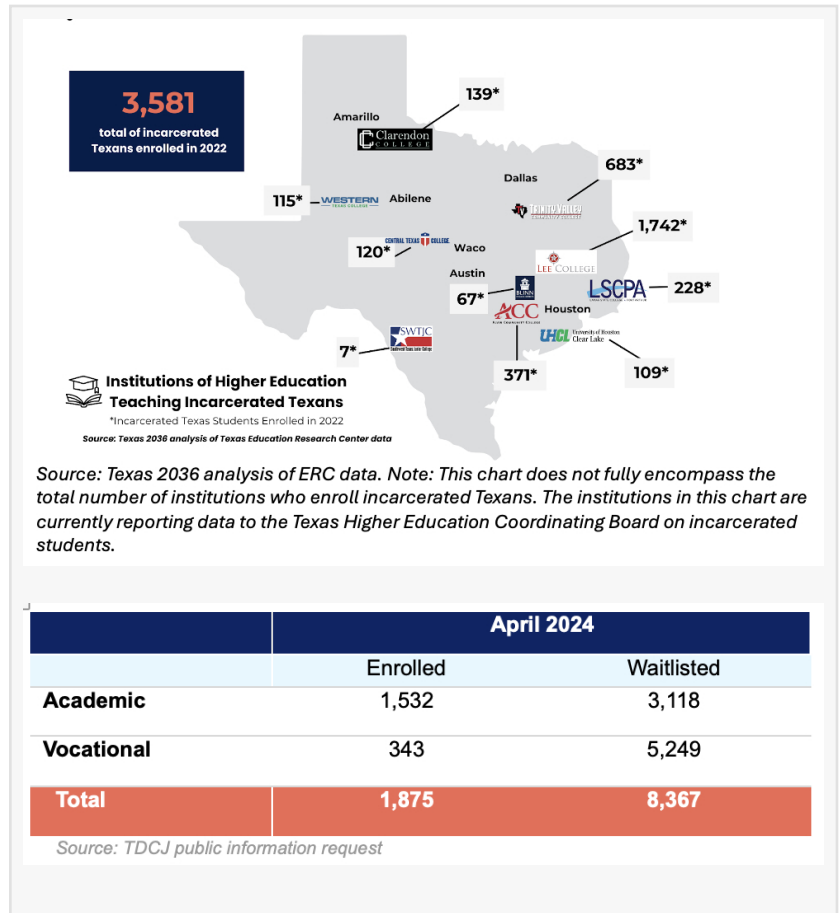
In a first-of-its-kind analysis, Texas 2036 reviewed data from institutions of higher education with students who are incarcerated in a correctional facility.

□ **Unmet Demand:** In a snapshot of TDCJ’s higher-education population, in April 2024, approximately 1,800 incarcerated students were enrolled in postsecondary education programs, while over 8,300 eligible prospective students remained on a waitlist.

□ **Role of Community Colleges:** Community colleges educated over 90% of incarcerated Texans enrolled in higher education programs in federal and state prisons in 2022.

□ **Unique Moment in Texas to Act:** The Sunset Commission’s evaluation of TDCJ coincides with important policy developments affecting higher education in prisons. First, Texas comprehensively overhauled community college finance in House Bill 8 (2023), which creates outcomes bonuses for the attainment of high-demand workforce credentials among economically disadvantaged and adult learners, like those in Texas prisons. Paired with recent federal reforms involving Pell Grants for incarcerated students, Texas is positioned to act to improve postsecondary educational outcomes among incarcerated Texans.

“Higher education has the potential to transform lives and ensure more Texans have the opportunity to contribute to our economy,” said David Leebron, president and CEO of Texas 2036 and former president of Rice University. “This report highlights the expanding role that higher education institutions, such as community colleges, can play for incarcerated Texans.



Educational opportunity for those who are incarcerated equips them with skills that will reduce recidivism and crime and supports their productive reintegration into the workforce.”

#### Recommendations for Policy Change:

This session, the Texas Legislature is set to deliberate Sunset legislation concerning TDCJ and the broader adult corrections system. Texas 2036’s report includes the following policies to consider:

1. **Improve Governance and Coordination:** Enable TDCJ’s main education provider, Windham School District, to administer higher education programming, coordinate among colleges and universities, and help incarcerated Texans navigate career and education options.
2. **Expand Community College Reach:** Enable community colleges to serve incarcerated students outside their standard service areas.
3. **Enhance Data Collection and Sharing:** Improve data quality within TDCJ to evaluate higher education program outcomes effectively.
4. **Integrate Prison Education into Workforce Goals:** Align TDCJ’s education objectives with Texas’ “Building a Talent Strong Texas” workforce strategy, establishing measurable goals for degree attainment pre-release.

Texas 2036’s findings reinforce the bipartisan consensus on the value of correctional education and call for action to support Texans during reentry, enhancing public safety and driving economic growth.

For more information on Texas 2036 and this report, visit [www.texas2036.org/TDCJ](http://www.texas2036.org/TDCJ). For media inquiries or to schedule an interview with Luis Soberon, the report’s author, please contact [media@texas2036.org](mailto:media@texas2036.org).

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#### About Texas 2036

Texas 2036 is a nonprofit public policy organization committed to building long-term, data-driven strategies to ensure Texas’ prosperity up to its bicentennial and beyond. Our solutions are nonpartisan, grounded in thorough research, and focus on critical issues that matter most to all Texans.

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