

TEXAS WORKFORCE INVESTMENT COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR LEARNERS IN CARCERAL INSTITUTIONS



JUNE 2025

The Mission of the Texas Workforce Investment Council

Assisting the Governor and the legislature with strategic planning for and evaluation of the Texas workforce system to promote the development of a well-educated, highly skilled workforce for Texas.

Education and Training for Learners in Carceral Institutions

Texas Workforce Investment Council
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Introduction

As part of its statutory mandate to support a well-educated and highly skilled workforce, the Texas Workforce Investment Council (Council) regularly examines populations that face significant barriers to employment. One such population includes individuals residing in carceral institutions. Incarcerated learners often enter the justice system with limited educational attainment and face substantial obstacles to reentering the workforce upon release. To address these challenges and support positive outcomes, several state agencies administer educational and workforce training programs aimed at improving post-release employment opportunities and reducing recidivism among this underemployed population.

This report provides insight on the education and training services delivered to incarcerated individuals by three of the Council's system partners: the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and its Windham School District (Windham), and the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD). By creating comprehensive profiles for each of these agencies' education and training programs, this report highlights how coordinated efforts across the Texas workforce system contribute to reentry strategies for institutionalized learners.

The Texas Workforce Investment Council

As required in Chapter 2308 of the Texas Government Code, the Council advises the Governor and the Legislature with workforce development, strategic planning, research, and evaluation of the Texas workforce system. State and federal statutes require the Council to promote alignment, integration, and collaboration of programs and services among system partners. The Council serves as the state workforce board as mandated under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The Council is mandated to develop the Texas workforce system strategic plan and to monitor the system, reporting annually to the Governor and the legislature on the degree to which the system partner agencies are effective in achieving workforce system goals and objectives.

State statute also tasks the Council with encouraging, supporting, or developing research and demonstration projects designed to develop new programs and approaches to service delivery. The Council provides research, information, and analysis that facilitates collaboration between system partners and relevant stakeholders, as well as alignment between elements of the Texas workforce system.

Methodology

The research for this report was conducted through a comprehensive review of publicly available data, legislative reports, and agency documents. Primary sources included Sunset review self-evaluation reports, strategic plans, and performance evaluations. Additionally, the Council collaborated with staff from the relevant agencies to gain additional information and confirm the accuracy of education and workforce program data. Data verification and fact-checking were performed internally by Council staff to ensure consistency.

Texas Department of Criminal Justice

History

In 1989, the Texas Legislature consolidated the functions of the Texas Adult Probation Commission and the Texas Board and Department of Corrections into the newly established Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).

Governance and Structure

TDCJ is governed by the nine-member Texas Board of Criminal Justice. The Governor-appointed board is responsible for hiring and supervising TDCJ's executive director, as well as the inspector general, director of the State counsel of Offenders, and the director of Internal Audits. Chief officers from the programs, operations, and financial divisions report to the executive director, who oversees the daily operations. Total staff for TDCJ was over 31,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2023 (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024).

Purpose and Function

According to Chapter 493 of the Texas Government Code, TDCJ's mission is, "to provide public safety, promote positive change in offender behavior, reintegrate offenders into society, and assist victims of crime" (Sec. 493.001). In pursuit of this mission, TDCJ performs the following key functions: incarceration, community supervision, victim services, and release and parole supervision. The goal of reintegrating inmates back into society can involve education and career training. This represents TDCJ's primary role in the workforce system.

Education and Employment Programs and Services

In collaboration with Windham, TDCJ offers postsecondary education and employment services to incarcerated students. Windham also provides secondary education, life skills, English as a second language, and Career and Technical Education (CTE). Through partnerships with community colleges and universities, TDCJ students have opportunities to earn an associate, bachelor's, or master's degree. Additionally, TDCJ provides certain reentry and rehabilitation services focused on improving employment prospects of inmates post-release.

TDCJ Students

For FY 2023, there were more than 530,000 people under TDCJ's supervision. Of this total population, nearly 130,000 were confined inmates (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024). During FY 2022, TDCJ reported 7,338 total students enrolled in educational programs operated by the agency, and 1,536 students served in postsecondary academic and vocational training (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2023). TDCJ considers specific factors for each student in educational programs, such as the student's eligibility for certain certifications based on their criminal background. This individualized approach ensures students are matched with career paths that maximize employment opportunities post-release.

Partners

TDCJ works with several partners in providing their education, rehabilitation, and reentry services. In addition to the previously mentioned collaborations with Windham and colleges and universities, TDCJ also partners with local workforce development boards to coordinate job training programs, connect employers with former inmates, and provide certain post-release employment support services.

Funding

TDCJ had a total budget of almost \$4 billion in FY 2023, of which more than 90 percent was general revenue funds from the state (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024). The remaining funding came from various sales receipts, contracts, and federal funds. The majority of these funds went toward incarceration efforts. Correctional managed health care, community supervision, and the Board of Pardons and Paroles comprised most of the other expenditure categories (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024).

Legislative Changes

Sunset is the regular assessment of the continuing need for a state agency or program to exist. The Sunset process works by setting an automatic termination (Sunset) date in state law on which an agency will be abolished unless the legislature passes a bill to continue it, typically for another 12 years. Both Windham and TDCJ recently underwent Sunset review, meaning the legislature must pass a bill to continue the agencies, or they would be abolished. Often, an agency's sunset bill will require some changes to the agency's structure or functions (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024). The House Committee Report version of Senate Bill (SB) 2405 by Parker, TDCJ's Sunset bill, makes several such changes.

Regarding education and training, the Sunset bill requires Windham and TDCJ to enter a memorandum of understanding whereby Windham administers postsecondary educational programs through partnerships with postsecondary educational institutions to eligible TDCJ inmates. The bill also requires Windham to establish a postsecondary education advisory board to advise TDCJ regarding postsecondary education programs. The members of this advisory board must include representatives from two of the Council's partner agencies: the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Workforce Commission, as well as the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR), public institutions of higher education, and organizations that represent and advocate for the education of the population served.

Under the bill, TDCJ is also required to publish an inventory of all the active programs offered to inmates at the agency's facilities. TDCJ and Windham are required to jointly develop a strategic plan for the provision of rehabilitation and reentry programs to inmates. The strategic plan must include program objectives and timelines intended to increase program efficiencies, reduce program redundancies, incorporate new evidence-based and evidence-informed program approaches, and incorporate technology-based solutions.

Lastly, SB 2405 requires TDCJ to establish and administer a postsecondary education reimbursement program, under which an inmate participating in the program and enrolled in postsecondary education courses during confinement must reimburse the department for the costs of the tuition and fees paid on the inmate's behalf. The bill has an effective date of September 1, 2025.

Windham School District

History

The Windham School District (Windham) was established in 1969 by the agency that was then known as the Texas Board of Corrections. In 1989, the board was abolished by House Bill 2335, which merged the board's functions with those of the Texas Adult Probation Commission into the newly established Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024). Now, the Texas Board of Criminal Justice serves as Windham's Board of Trustees.

Governance

This board has nine members that are appointed by the Governor. Windham's superintendent, selected by the board, acts as the chief executive officer and has the responsibility to administer, organize, manage and supervise the daily operations. Principals at each of Windham's 100 campuses oversee the daily operations of educational programs. These campuses are located within seven regions: Alamo Star, Bluebonnet, Central Texas, Gulf Coast, East Texas, North Texas, and Panhandle.

Purpose and Function

Windham's mission statement is, "to guide, motivate and empower students through innovative educational pathways." Windham works to improve outcomes for incarcerated students through education and training. According to Texas Education Code § 19.003, Windham is tasked with the following goals:

1. reduce recidivism;
2. reduce the cost of confinement or imprisonment;
3. increase the success of former [students] in obtaining and maintaining employment; and
4. provide an incentive to [students] to behave in positive ways during confinement or imprisonment.

Windham also developed its own strategic goals, which include:

1. provide high-level instruction;
2. recruit, develop and retain highly qualified teachers and staff;
3. improve and promote effective communication;
4. integrate and enhance technology; and
5. facilitate placement of graduates in apprenticeship, employment or postsecondary education programs.

Through these goals, Windham plays a key role in the workforce system by preparing students for employment post-release.

Programs and Services

Windham's programs fall into three categories: academic, career and technical education (CTE), and life skills. The academic programs primarily educate adult students on secondary subjects, including literacy, language, and math. These programs help students to eventually earn a high school diploma or equivalency, of which Windham awarded 3,254 in FY 2023 (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024). The CTE programs offer training and industry-based certification in 40 different occupations. These programs can include apprenticeships and on-the-job training. For school year (SY) 2024, Windham reported a total of 13,888 industry-based certifications and occupational licenses awarded (Windham School District, 2025).

Windham Students

During SY 2024, Windham provided educational services to 48,486 students (Windham School District, 2025). Nearly 70 percent of individuals released that year had participated in a Windham program while incarcerated. The number of students participating in Windham's programs have increased significantly in recent years. For example, the number of active apprentices in Windham's apprenticeship programs grew by nearly four-fold between SY 2018 and SY 2024 (Hartman, 2024).

Post-Release Employment Outcomes

After release, Windham students demonstrate lower rates of recidivism, better employment outcomes, and improved educational foundations. For students released in the 2019–2020 SY, Windham CTE program completers were 10 percent more likely to retain employment over non-Windham participants. These students also experienced a six percent higher wage increase one year after starting employment. Lastly, 85 percent of these students secured a job related to their training. (Windham School District, 2025).

Funding

Windham receives most of its \$70 million in funding from General Revenue funds through the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Foundation School Fund within Article III of the state budget (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024). The amount of this funding allocated is determined by the number of contact hours Windham administers. TDCJ also provides funding to Windham through contracts for various support programs, such as library services, recreation and wellness, and a student-authored newspaper published in the facilities. Federal funding for Windham comes through grants like the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Carl D. Perkins grant, and the Governor's Emergency Education Relief grant. Of the nearly 1,100 budgeted full time equivalent employees, Windham employed 900 in FY 2023 (Windham School District, 2023).

Partners

As previously mentioned, Windham receives funding from both TEA and TDCJ through partnerships with the agencies. TDCJ supports Windham in other ways as well, such as providing the facilities for classrooms and offices. The Texas Workforce Commission and Windham collaborate on adult education and workforce training programs. Windham has a formal partnership with the Deep East Texas workforce board and collaborates with various other local workforce boards across the state. Windham additionally partners with Lee College and Central Texas College to provide dual credit courses for high school program students. Through a partnership with Windham, TDLR provides training for administrators, campus principals, and student advisors on relevant licensing requirements for students with criminal records. This training ensures a tailored approach to the student's education by ensuring a student obtains professional licenses for which they are legally eligible, considering their particular criminal record.

Legislative Changes

As stated in TDCJ's overview, SB 2405 serves as the sunset bill for both TDCJ and Windham. Per the requirements of the bill, Windham has taken over administration of postsecondary education for TDCJ. Additionally, both agencies must develop a strategic plan regarding rehabilitation and reentry programs, with the intention of increasing efficiencies, reducing redundancies, and incorporating new evidence-based approaches and technology-based solutions (Sunset Advisory Commission, 2024). The bill takes effect on September 1, 2025.

Texas Juvenile Justice Department

History

In 2011, the Texas Legislature established the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) following the abolition of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission and the Texas Youth Commission. TJJD took over the functions of these two agencies, which had suffered significant allegations.

Governance and Structure

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department Board oversees TJJD's agency operations. The board consists of nine Governor-appointed members who appoint and supervise TJJD's executive director, chief inspector general, and internal auditor. The board also considers recommendations and assistance from three advisory bodies: the Advisory Council on Juvenile Services, the Career and Technical Education Advisory Committee, and the Regionalization Task Force. The advisory bodies are comprised of TJJD staff, education providers, relevant professionals and stakeholders, and staff of various other state agencies (*Youth Career*, 2024).

Purpose and Function

According to Chapter 201 of the Human Resources Code, TJJD's mission is to promote public safety by partnering with youth, families, and communities to provide a safe environment where youth in the agency's care and custody receive individualized education, treatment, life skills and employment training, and positive role models to facilitate successful community reintegration.

Statute also lays out TJJD's goals, which include:

1. support the development of a consistent county-based continuum of effective interventions, supports, and services for youth and families that reduce the need for out-of-home placement;
2. increase reliance on alternatives to placement and commitment to secure state facilities, consistent with adequately addressing a youthful offender's treatment needs and protection of the public;
3. locate the facilities as geographically close as possible to necessary workforce and other services while supporting the youths' connection to their families;
4. encourage regional cooperation that enhances county collaboration;
5. enhance the continuity of care throughout the juvenile justice system; and
6. use secure facilities of a size that supports effective youth rehabilitation and public safety.

To these ends, TJJD operates, administers, and oversees several education and employment training programs. On the state level, TJJD operates five secure facilities in which the agency serves students directly in its own school district. On the local level, local juvenile boards, juvenile probation departments, and correctional facilities operate independently of TJJD, though with the agency's funding and support. These local facilities serve the substantial majority of all Texan juveniles in the juvenile justice system.

Education and Employment Programs and Services

According to TJJD, "youth committed to TJJD function, on average, four to five years below expected grade level for their ages" (Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2024b). Therefore, juveniles entering TJJD facilities have various educational opportunities available to them. These juveniles can earn credits toward high school graduation or obtain a Texas certificate of high school equivalency. Students can also earn dual credits, explore career options, and earn industry-based certifications. TJJD offers career and

technical education (CTE) programs to prepare the students for employment post-release. The available CTE programs cover 14 career fields, including agriculture, business, construction, manufacturing, and technology (Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2024c).

TJJD Students

“Youth are committed by juvenile courts to the care and custody of the state through [TJJD] so that they may develop the skills needed to reenter their communities safely” (Texas Workforce Investment Council, Pg. 41, 2024). As required by statute, TJJD students are between the ages of 10 and 19. As of FY 2024, there were 50,482 juveniles in the entire juvenile justice system, of which less than one percent were committed to TJJD secure facilities (Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2024a). Accordingly, TJJD had 780 total residents in 2024 (Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2024c).

For those students served in these secure facilities, TJJD reported the following educational outcomes for their students:

- Secondary Academic Education: 121 completions of 479 students served - 25% completion rate
- Secondary Technical Education (CTE): 77 completions of 468 students served – 17% completion rate (Texas Workforce Investment Council, 2024)

Partners

TJJD seeks to provide a tailored approach to education and career training to address the unique backgrounds and needs of juveniles entering TJJD’s facilities. TJJD partners with various agencies and organizations to help juveniles progress in their education, rehabilitation, independent living, and career goals. TJJD’s workforce system partners are:

- Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ)
- Texas Education Agency (TEA)
- Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)
- Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)
- Windham School District (Windham)

An example of these partnerships in action is TJJD’s recently established Career and Technical Education Advisory Committee. This is a partnership between TWC, TEA, TDLR, and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). The committee is tasked with overseeing and coordinating vocational training for youth in state custody, including training provided by community colleges and other local entities. Through this committee, TJJD aims to expand its CTE, high school equivalency, and vocational certification programs (*Youth Career*, 2024). TJJD also works with Texas State Technical College to identify short-term credential opportunities for students (Texas Workforce Investment Council, 2024).

Funding

Through grants, TJJD allocates Texas Legislature appropriated funds to local juvenile boards operating juvenile probation departments, juvenile detention, and correctional facilities. In FY 2024, TJJD allocated almost \$205 million in this form (Texas Juvenile Justice Department, 2024a). Due to recent legislative developments, SB 1728 (89th Regular Legislative Session) would, if passed, make juvenile justice entities eligible for Jobs Education and Training (JET) grants beginning September 1, 2025. TJJD and these juvenile boards and probation departments will soon be eligible for additional grant funding to support their career and technical education programs.

Post-Release Employment and Housing Assistance

Reentry programs aimed at transitioning juveniles back into the community provide support and resources to find employment and housing. For example, TJJD collaborates with DFPS to train and assist TJJD youth on the transition toward independent living. TJJD additionally plans to coordinate with TWC and local workforce centers to identify and connect TJJD youth with training, skill development, and employment assistance opportunities. Further, other organizations support second chance programs to assist youth in making a successful transition back into the community. For example, “CLC, Inc., with support from TJJD and community-based organizations, will provide individualized education and literacy services, work readiness, job training, job development, placement services, medical and behavioral health care, mentoring, legal, family, and other services to acclimate our youth reentry back into their communities” (CLC inc., n.d.).

Conclusion

This research into carceral education supports the Texas Workforce Investment Council’s mission of aligning workforce system partners and promoting initiatives that reduce barriers to employment. As demonstrated through the efforts of TDCJ, TJJD, and Windham, Texas promotes career education and training of incarcerated learners through a variety of programs, including literacy and secondary education, industry-recognized certifications, and college degrees. These programs not only improve the employment prospects of inmates reentering society, but also help address the state’s growing demand for skilled labor. Education and training programs in carceral institutions play a significant role in both individual rehabilitation and the broader Texan workforce.

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Texas Workforce Investment Council

System Partners

Economic Development and Tourism
Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Texas Education Agency
Texas Health and Human Services Commission

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
Texas Juvenile Justice Department
Texas Veterans Commission
Texas Workforce Commission

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